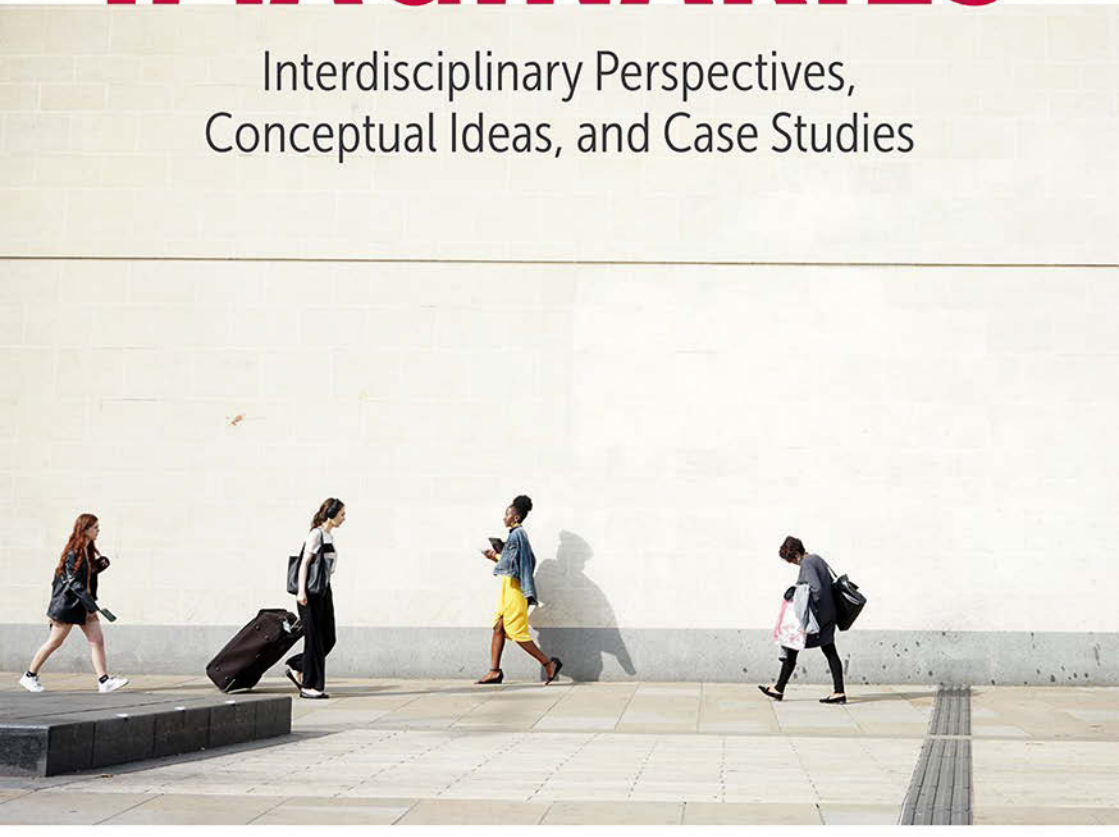
Gustavo Gutierrez Hernandez,
Ulla Stackmann (eds.)

PRACTICING AND PLACING IMAGINARIES

Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Conceptual Ideas, and Case Studies



[transcript] Lettre

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Lettre

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Practicing and Imagining

Tracing an Irreducible Relationship through Fiction Writing

Gustavo Gutierrez Hernandez, Ulla Stackmann

Abstract *The text considers the incommensurable relationship between practicing and imagining in the context of fiction writing. Outlining this relationship, we proceed to explain its conceptual grounding in practice theory and a processual understanding of sociocultural formations. Thereby, we highlight the necessity to look at individual socio-cultural configurations to understand imagining and practicing in specific contexts. In the introduction, we thus exemplify this approach by discerning a case study from our own field, literary studies. Building on these considerations, we first trace the influence of writing and fictional worlds on practices and socio-cultural formations. Then we proceed to turn to the prototypical imaginary of authorship linking it to writing practices and the social affordances this practice prescribes. Subsequently, we connect this perspective to the overall structure of the collection and its contributions.*

Keywords *Fiction Writing; Imaginary; Imagination; Authorship; Practice Theory; Literary Field*

When individuals imagine, their imaginations are shaped by what they know from their own bodily experiences: what they have seen, heard, and sensed. Even if we imagine a world outside our own, we circle back to what and how we materially experience ourselves. For instance, fictional films and novels about life in outer space always contain (if the faintest hint of) a resemblance to lived human experience. Imagination is continuously shaped by bodily and socio-cultural configurations, and actors cannot fully go beyond their own perspectives; they can imagine what is not possible, but this impossibility is still rooted in experience and perception. In our imagination then, aliens have hands, eyes, noses, and even sensibilities like our own. Even if they have abilities that humans do not possess, they are still overwhelmingly imagined as social beings,

possibly with similar needs and intentions as their human counterparts. This example highlights how imagination and practices (i.e., actions and doings) form an incommensurable nexus that shapes perspectives, social interactions, and the medial representations of the world.

This collection tackles this relationship in individual case studies from a variety of fields exploring practices of imagination in different sociocultural and medial contexts. In February 2024, our Research Training Group 2589 "Practicing Place: Socio-Cultural Practices and Epistemic Configurations" hosted the conference "Practices of Imagination – Placings of Imaginaries" that provided a platform to discuss this nexus from an interdisciplinary perspective. The event provided the point of departure for the collection and showed how the question of imagining and practicing productively builds a bridge between the humanities and social sciences. Both imagination and practices need to be placed to become graspable since they are embedded in sociocultural frames that shape them. In our introduction, we would like to exemplify this by drawing on our own field literary studies. Thereby, we outline the foundational considerations that have shaped our collection and the contributions therein.

For instance, both, practices or imaginaries, may have completely different meanings depending on the temporal and spatial constellation in which they are placed. We view practices as routinized, bodily activities in line with what Andreas Reckwitz writes: "A practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described, and the world is understood" (250). It is interconnected to "forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (250). In this outline, the relevance of imagining emerges as part of these interconnected, processual formations that constitute culture and social life. Thus, imagination is not static but interconnected to practices and also in itself an activity co-producing imaginaries, i.e., discourses, representations, practices pertaining to a particular "array of human activity" (Schatzki 11). Our goal in this introduction therefore is not to provide an overarching, universal theory of how imagination and practices work, but to suggest that it is more fruitful to focus on how imagination is practiced and how practices are imagined in diverse contexts. In this sense, we do not give a universalizing account of the contributions here but stress the importance of a processual approach to imagining as a practice. The practice-based stance that underlies this collection helps us outline and exemplify, from a specific perspective, how imaginations and practices can be approached and re-conceptualized. As an exam-

ple, we would like to consider a practice that often takes center stage in our discipline of literary studies: fiction writing.

As literary scholars, we share an interest in the manifold meanings and configurations of writing and how it is imagined. Above all, we consider how writing practices work and relate to imaginaries and believe that by analyzing the epistemological and practice-theoretical potentiality of imaginaries, we can better understand the profound relationship between imagining and writing. For literary studies, contemplating writing is an important endeavor considering the significance this practice holds for the field. Countless scholars have engaged with this topic and conceived various perspectives on writing. These perspectives bore theories underlying the role of writing for our approach to material environments. Reader-response theory, for instance, provides significant insight into the intertwined relationship between imagination and practice. After all, narratives decisively shape how societies and cultures imagine themselves and others.

In this introduction, we also contend that the practice-theoretical approach to writing can complement and extend previous approaches to writing literature. It can contribute a socially- and materially informed view that has been neglected in negotiating writing within literary studies. On the one hand, as we show in the introduction's second part, the reason for this neglect is the complex questions such a view raises; e.g., how to deal with the author that, according to Roland Barthes and the numerous scholars agreeing with him, is dead (Burke 19–20; Stougaard-Nielsen 270).[1] On the other, the relatively limited interest in the socio-practical conditions of writing simply stems from the perspective usually assumed in literary studies; frequently, literary authors focus on the result of a writing process (a text). While this is an interesting object of study that demands a variety of analytical tools and considerations, dealing mostly with the results of writing practices conceals the sociocultural processes and relationships producing these cultural artefacts. This perspective is not unique, as Ines Barner et al. (4–5) note that the humanities and even literary studies are increasingly paying attention to the

1 Although Roland Barthes declared the author dead in his notorious essay 1967, his theory and a general insistence to turn away from their author has never fully prevented a theorization of authorship. "Whether deemed self-contradictory, too reductive, counter-productive, or simply products of their own time, Barthes and Foucault ensured that the question of the author would remain central to literary theory beyond poststructuralism," as for instance Jakob Stougaard Nielsen points out (284).

social relationality of cultural production; there is a trend to look beyond the "black box of authorships" (5; our translation). German literary scholars Carlos Spoerhase and Steffen Martus contend that we need to move from theory to theorizing. This means that writing must be considered a dynamic action requiring material prerequisites and pragmatic ascriptions, that is, readers must identify a particular textual genre to read a given text in a specific way (Geulen et al. 124–5).

In our introduction, we tap into these recent developments and explicate how literary writing can work as an example of how practice-based perspectives provide new angles. Before delving deeper into these observations, we first turn to writing as a practice that reshapes material constellations and inserts new imaginary worlds into discourses. Thereby, fictional narratives are capable of unsettling, deconstructing, and recalibrating the epistemological configurations that inform practices in general. By focusing on literary writing, we account for the embeddedness of practices and their contingencies in relation to material contexts. We explore these contingencies from different perspectives to approach what could be called the "irreducible entanglement" of writing practices and imagination.

Writing and Reading Imaginary Worlds

To begin with, it is helpful to consider how acts of writing work. It is a key part of the habitus of writing to think about, or imagine, the reader that the text is directed towards. Readers are omnipresent figures featuring in writing practices. From personal diaries to scientific journals, all texts have an imagined reader, even if this is only the authors themselves as they write. In other words, in the practice of writing, authors imagine themselves as readers and try to anticipate how this reader might react to the text. When analyzing the role of the ideal reader, Umberto Eco sees that "a text is created so that someone updates it, even when it is not expected (or not wished) for that someone to exist concretely and empirically" (78; our translation). Writing practices cannot be put in motion without imagining. That is, writers constantly imagine on at least two levels; they imagine the text, and at the same time the reader. For Eco, this ideal (imagined) reader is integral to the practice of writing as to "create a text means generating a strategy that takes into account the expectations from the other's reactions" (79; our translation). To write something is to be in constant dialogue between these two nodes, placing oneself in both positions.

Writing is not done in an isolated bubble but is prescribed by the style and conventions that each field demands. For example, academic researchers are in constant dialogue with their peers (through seminars, colloquia and publications) creating a community around the knowledge produced through writing and the practices that surround the socialization of the knowledge produced. The know-how of academic writing comes hand in hand with certain socialization practices that engage the community that is formed around the written text. Beyond the authors and their double role, any writing is always in dialogue with a community of other authors, previous publications, and the readers (imagined or not). This dialogue might greatly vary depending on the discipline, but it is always there. As authors, we are writers and readers of our texts, while simultaneously being readers of a community. This observation highlights that our habitus is constantly shaped by the knowledge written and produced by others. As imagination is an inescapable factor in the writing process, how these communities are affected by said imagination must not be taken lightly. Although imagination and materiality could be read in binary opposition, the two are deeply intertwined. Imagination can become a way to approach reality, for "[h]uman beings are able to create a model of the world in their thoughts, a representation that can have a close resemblance to reality. But imaginary worlds can also alter reality by simplifying it, embellishing it, or even making it frightening" (Es et al. 2). These "imaginary worlds" are a tool to approach specific environments and provide lenses or foci through which we can re-read, relate to, and approach material situations.

A prime example of this phenomenon is found in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), which narrates the life and assassination of the Mirabal sisters during the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. In the postscript, the author declares "I wanted to immerse my readers in an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that I believe can only finally be understood by fiction, only finally be redeemed by the imagination" (386). Since she is writing a historical fiction, Alvarez constantly blurs the borders between fiction and history, exemplifying how fiction can help us understand historical events. Alvarez herself concedes that "what you will find here are the Mirabals of my creation, made up but, I hope, true to the spirit of the real Mirabals" (386). Imagining, writing, and narrating make up a set of practices through which Alvarez brings her reader into the world of the dictatorship writing from the perspective of the Mirabal sisters. Alvarez chooses to depict what she believes (and hopes) is the spirit of the Mirabals, her imagination takes the reader beyond the historical record of the sisters and offers a different path to the hero-

ine narration that has shaped the collective imaginary of the sisters (in, for example, different cultural products such as monuments, museums, films, and other novels). In her search for the "true" and "real" Mirabals, Alvarez finds, in imagining their everyday life, their intimacies, and social relationships, a new lens through which the reader can relate to these figures.

Alvarez's example of the interplay of fiction, historiography, and imagination is complemented by Toni Morrison's neo-salve narrative, *Beloved*. Highly notable in this novel is Morrison's coining of the concept of "rememory" (43). In a conversation with her daughter Denver, Sethe (the protagonist) explains how "[s]omeday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else" (43). Beloved is the ghost of Sethe's child, who Sethe kills for fear of being caught by slave catchers. Most of the narration takes place inside the house that Sethe and Denver (and then Beloved) live in. The novel constantly hints that Beloved might be imagined by the family or might be real. Sethe's house is then the place of rememory for her, her family, and her community, and (in a way) Beloved is the corporality of those rememories. These rememories become part of the community as "[p]laces, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world … even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened" (43). By imagining a place having rememories from somebody else, a rememory that surpasses the individual's existence, Morrison binds together communities, memory, and place; she creates a way to comprehend and problematize how communities relate to historically charged places, for it is not a coincidence that rememory is a key concept in a neo-slave narrative.

Through rememory, Morrison establishes new epistemologies related to place and memory. Because Beloved's story "is not a story to pass on" (324), rememory imagines a new relation to places and the unspoken. As Ashraf Rushdy concedes, rememory

> is a nice addition to the vocabularies of both psychology and narratology-psychology because anamnesis becomes accessible to rediscovery as well as discovery, narratology because the word suggests the process by which narrative worlds are increations as much as re-creations, as much remimesis as mimesis. (303)

What we can see then is how "fiction, for Morrison, compels the reader to reimagine a concealed past as a reparative starting point, which not only summons the ghastly foundations of the Americas but in so doing, initiates conversations surrounding what was lost, established, and still owed" (Perez 190).

Through their imaginations, both Alvarez and Morrison call for us to review, reconsider and (re-)remember places and their stories. Both examples show how the practice of writing should not be understood as an imaginative exercise that has no repercussions on the ways we understand and conceive sociohistorical constellations. Both Alvarez and Morrison are aware of how literature and fiction can be the foundation of new epistemological practices through which we understand the world, and above all, it seems that for both authors, imagination is necessary to understand history.

Written imaginary worlds have many potentialities. Among these potentialities, "fictional texts, liberated from truth valuation, construct sovereign fictional worlds that satisfy the human need for imaginative expanse, emotional excitement, and aesthetic pleasure" (Doležel 42), but as the examples from Alvarez and Morrison have shown, fictional texts help us to problematize what we take for granted, re-think key aspects of our daily life, and read our world with another lens. Literature does not only create possible imaginary worlds but also has the potential to create epistemological frames through which we interpret and feel historical events, inviting the reader to take a new perspective through the foci provided by the imaginary worlds. These possible worlds might delve into the past (as biographies and historical fiction do) or might create alternative worlds and possible futures (like science fiction, and speculative fiction). They can become, then, answers to the questions we often ask about our world, about the way it works, and its dynamics. Their diversity shows the multiple ways in which imagination and reality are indivisible and intertwined.

The relation between the practices of imagination and writing, and material constellations is not a stable path, if anything, it might be better imagined as a whirlpool; imagination influences how we practice our world, but our world also influences our imagination, in an endless cyclical manner. Reading Kathleen Lennon's work on imagination, Es et al. highlight: "That we live in and with the world means that our imagination is conditioned by the communities that surround us and is conditioned by sociocultural contexts." (5) While it is true that "[i]ndividuals learn from the people around them to look at the world in a certain way and to interpret new experiences" (Es et al. 5), in our contempo-

rary globalized media environment, the reach of our contact with others (and their cultural objects) has achieved an unprecedented extent. Es et al. explain that

> it may be argued that the whole fabric of our imagination is shaped by a sociocultural context. It is culture that provides the building blocks for the composition of the fantasies and dreams that populate our inner beings. (8)

Cultural products are a key ingredient in what communities and authors can imagine, they expand our possibilities of imagination and create a circular movement in which imagination is fed by cultural products, and cultural products feed our imaginations. We do live in and with the world, but we also imagine in and with the world, and the possible worlds that literature creates.

Imaging Authors and the Practice of Writing

Departing from the observation that imagination and socio-material practices are irreducibly entangled, we would like to consider the practice of literary writing itself; what it affords, how it is shaped by an implicit knowledge influenced by power relations, and the imaginaries narratives support. While literary scholars focus predominantly on textual analyses, literary authors have traditionally addressed the production conditions of writing more. Naturally, their interest also lies with questions of when and where to write, how to finance it, and what obstacles to overcome. One of the most famous examples of an author tackling these kinds of questions is Virginia Woolf's essay, "A Room of One's Own." She was asked to write about "the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction" (4) and used this opportunity to famously proclaim: "[…] a woman must have money and a room of her own" (4). Woolf effectively highlighted the predicament of female authors in her time. They rarely had access to the money or spaces to afford their writing. Woolf's observation provides an opportunity to address staging and performing authorship, an issue that is widely discussed in literary studies (see also Stougaard-Nielsen). We suggest slightly adapting common perspectives on the topic which tend to view authorship as a performance detached from the material conditions of writing practices. Rather, we want to highlight writing as a practice that needs sociocultural affordances. Describing these affordances uncovers how imaginaries

of prototypical authorship conceal the very sociocultural relationships Woolf describes.

To begin with, Woolf places the practice of writing in a room and a gendered relationship; for her, men mostly write in rooms that cannot be afforded by women. This simple statement is an invitation to embark on a practically informed analysis of literary writing. It highlights the collective quality of practices (cf. Barnes; Gittel). Practice theories, as Reckwitz asserts, "highlight the significance of shared or collective symbolic structures of knowledge in order to grasp both action and social order" (246). In this case, Woolf uses the tacit, shared knowledge of her readers to evoke an image they recognize. This familiarity with the writing situation, be it implicit or explicit, lets Woolf's readers immediately understand why writers need a room. Practical knowledge substantiates the sedimented image of the writer as a secluded person in a room of their own, possibly sitting at a desk. Woolf connects this familiarity with the observation that the possibility to withdraw from others in a room requires money and social privileges. Thereby, Woolf stresses what is usually "unmarked" (Haraway 585) as writers and literary scholars alike rarely thematize the situatedness of the writer, the particular material constitution of their place.

Viewing writing as an embodied practice highlights the social prerequisites that Woolf addresses. A body needs a place to practice writing. This conclusion implies several other practical assumptions. Writing is a solitary, silent practice in a secluded space that affords the concentration necessary to compile a text. Woolf was certainly influenced by her upbringing in Victorian England where, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, writers, artists, and others working from home had fought the noisy disturbances infiltrating their homes from the streets (Picker 428). As John M. Picker writes in his article "The Soundproof Study," these were "silence-seeking professionals whose living and working spaces overlapped" (429). Considering the long cultural history of the connectedness of silence and what is considered intellectual work, the nineteenth century marks an important chapter as it bore the idea of a specialized room, a place dedicated to protecting the work of the author: the soundproof study. This "architectural tactic," as Picker writes, attested to a "drive for middle-class members to escape urban realities and attain a degree of separateness and self-definition within the home" (429–30). Picker's observation shows how domestic sounds were increasingly viewed as part of a property and were sought to be controlled and canalized; a development that was enhanced by the audio technologies in the late nineteenth century (Sterne 161). Drawing on these ob-

servations might seem unrelated to Woolf's statement. However, looking at it more closely, the practical knowledge encapsulated in "a room of one's own" condenses what writers are usually imagined to be (white, middle-class, male) and how this is connected to the cultural history of sound and domestic architecture shaping this practice to be a secluded action separate from the noisiness of everyday routines.

Imagination and practice go hand in hand. They are inseparable, enforce each other, and, when looking closer, blur the lines between themselves. Individuals speculate, imagine, and anticipate what a situation might require. They imagine things because they have a tacit practical knowledge of them. However, this relationship is not as neat as this might imply; it is an inextricably intertwined one, where it is unclear if a study needs to be soundproof because the practice requires it, or if groups imagine that soundproof studies need to be built. Considering the practice of writing should not gloss over the image of the secluded writer as an idealized version of the writing process that also serves political interests. Establishing the silent study as a workplace served authors and others working from home, offering a way to legitimize themselves as professionals (Picker 433). As Picker notes, the insistence on silence and seclusion by authors and others working from home also demonstrated their "unusual difficulty of distinguishing their newfound socioeconomic turf from their homes" (433). Separating the practice of writing thus meant establishing it as a professional activity distinct from other domestic routines. It meant building a "collective identity" (435) for authors, which also entailed prescribing how and where writing should happen.

To recognize how influential this prototypical model of authorship still is, it is valuable to consider writers who have consciously tried to undermine the bourgeois conception of writing. Time and again, authors who have challenged the stereotypical image of the intellectual writer have entered the literary field. Postmodern US author Kathy Acker is a prime example of an author who attempted to undermine the practical imaginary of writing. Being part of the countercultural writing scene of postwar New York, Acker quickly turned against an intellectualized understanding of writing as a bodiless, silent, and secluded activity. She published highly experimental novels and texts that included handwritten passages (reproduced in printed editions), images, and textual collages of excerpts from other authors. Acker is considered a pioneering feminist figure, also due to the way she staged herself as a bodybuilding, post-punk author (Casser and Viegener, "Get Rid of Meaning" 29–30). Like the performative techniques visual artists often employ, Acker

presented a public persona of herself and actively intertwined her bodily performance with her writing. "Kathy Acker appeared on almost all her major American book covers for well over a decade, an audacious and provocative performative gesture," Matias Viegener explains (81). This fact is unusual in itself considering that most avant-garde writers at the time did not appear on their book covers; they remained invisible (81). Acker's tendency to connect her writing practice with her body renders it a form of re-localizing fiction writing to reintegrate writing into the muddiness of life (see also Wark). Similar to Woolf, Acker marked what is usually "unmarked" (Haraway 585). The former insisted on the material affordances of writing, whereas the latter enacted what could be called a radical placing of her writing practice. In this context, placing does not denote an equation between biography and writing, but a conscious and performed marking of the embodied aspects of any writing.

In this regard, a series of images of Acker by photographer Kathy Brew is revealing because it encapsulates how Acker's authorial practice undermined the prototypical image of authorship. The series shows Acker on her motorcycle (Casser and Viegener, *Kathy Acker. Get Rid of Meaning* 116, 118); in its most famous photograph, Acker glances over her muscular, tattooed back into the camera. The motorcycle, tattoos, and muscles undermine the prototypical image of the writer as a white, male, bourgeois bookworm who resides in a secluded, silent study. Whereas nineteenth-century authors had to legitimize themselves by establishing the need to retreat from urban noise, Acker presents viewers with an antithesis to this image by drawing on practices that might be less associated with the middle class and women, such as tattoos, bodybuilding, and motorbikes. Returning to Woolf and her essay, one notices how practices and imaginaries change each other over time and become intertwined in an incommensurable relationship in which it cannot be unambiguously established what was configured by either. Class, race, and gender issues all feed into the image of the prototypical author, enabled through the tacit shared knowledge that defines how writing is practiced. At the same time, this knowledge is always partly rooted in representations of this practice. Thus, practicing and imagining cannot be thought of separately since they are both latently present in each other.

Drawing on the different ways of imagining writers and writing practices shows that practice theory can be a very fruitful approach to building a bridge between social sciences and the humanities. Especially, by contemplating the relationship between imaginary and practice, these disciplines can productively extend and complement each other's work and objects of study. In our

introduction, we have laid out how writing can be either approached by drawing on how literary texts shape imaginaries and thereby practices or by considering the practice of writing and its relationship to the imaginary of the writer. We showed how writing can be viewed from a literary studies standpoint that is informed by practice theory. In the following collection, we have similarly invited authors from various disciplines and backgrounds to consider this relationship in individual case studies that are grounded in their respective fields. Thereby, we account for the necessity to view practices and imaginaries as localized epistemic configurations that are processual and dependent on specific contexts and cultural histories.

The first section circumscribes the **Entanglements between Practices and Imagination** delving into the reciprocal relationship between imagination and practices in social contexts. First, Robert Schmidt analyzes the affordances of academic writing and outlines a practice-theoretical approach to this issue. Helen Hester descibres the interwovenness of social embeddedness and imagination underlining their interdependence. Her paper addresses how the situatedness of individuals shapes their capacity to imagine and go beyond the limiting factors of their social contexts. Above all, she warns against the danger of ignoring the situatedness as this will gloss over differences that are essential to "acting both with and for others." Similarly, Sofia Pedrini contemplates the relationship between imaging and the limits of this activity. In "Thought Experiments: Imagination in Practice," Pedrini analyzes the practice of thought experiments from a philosophical perspective. Anja Heron Lind then continues with a perspective from literary studies on the issue of architecture and gender related struggles. In her analysis of the relationship between the French theorist Luce Irigaray and speculative fiction, she considers space as a practical manifestation of specific imaginaries. She highlights how Arkady Martin's *Teixcalaan duology* exemplifies Irigaray's suggestions about sexual difference and the necessity to rethink space outside of patriarchal structures.

As our collection regards the relationship between practice and imagination, we have also invited a practitioner to give insights into her perspective on this issue. In her essay **"Life as Raw Material,"** German filmmaker Eva Stotz explains her work process and approach to what could be called an authentic mode of documentary narration. The second section **(Re-)Imagining Places and Social Institutions** focuses on the imaginations of larger organizations and their imaginary remaking in several case studies. First, Can Aydin's contribution delves into the imaginative re-shaping of wilderness in Joshua Whitehead's *Jonny Appleseed*. Subsequently, David Kempf's article carves out

the workings of collective imaginations in relation to Clifford Geertz's writings on cockfighting. Finally, two articles from literary studies conclude the collection. Nicole Schneider invites us to re-think the concept of public places through her analysis of Valeria Luiselli's novel *Lost Children Archive* (2019), the icons displayed in Ava DuVernay's 13th (2016), and *Netflix*'s series High on the Hog (2021). Lastly, Seyedeh Zhaleh Abbasi Hosseini analyzes the writings of Iranian novelist Azar Nafisi, focusing on fictional placemaking in relation to Tehran.

All contributions show the importance of a situated approach to imagining and practicing that considers the relevancy of place, be it the situatedness and limits of imagination (Hester, Schmidt, Pedrini), the imagination of architectures and its influence on actions (Lind, Kempf, Schneider), or the re-imagination of specific geographic locations (Aydin, Abbasi Hosseini). The political relevancy of these observations cannot be underestimated since imaginations and practices on the one hand structure social interactions, and on the other work to undermine and re-configure political and social structures. Thereby, re-imagining practices and re-practicing specific imaginaries open spaces in which dissent and protest can be articulated and enacted. Acker provided an example of how a performance countering an established practical imaginary can initiate a process of reflection and reconsideration. Certainly, such attempts do not necessarily mean a complete recalibration of practices and imaginaries. Yet, the question of how to change them remains one of the most interesting and perhaps most pressing issues, since societies are facing the need to adapt to new critical conditions like increasingly influential anti-democratic movements and a progressing climate crisis. Consequently, all the contributions presented here address the question of malleability concerning practices and imaginaries in some way or other; and they also find individual answers to this question. Regardless of the conclusion they draw, they all emphasize and confirm the value of considering the intricate relationship of how we concurrently act and imagine in specific contexts.

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Section I: Placing and Practicing Imagination

Imagining, Theorizing, and Academic Writing

Robert Schmidt

Abstract *The analytical vocabularies known as practice theory, or praxeology, open up new possibilities for deciphering highly specialized (artistic, literary, academic, etc.) activities, focusing on their material, bodily, affective and especially their—simultaneously situated and locating—dimensions and potentials. The paper exemplifies this with reference to academic writing. It is emphasized that 'theorizing' and 'imagining' should be understood as procedural epistemic aspects of actual writing that is only loosely connected to the production of enduring texts.*

Keywords *Practice Theory; Academic Writing; Imagining; Theorizing*

Introduction

In recent decades, the turn to practice has emerged as a new theoretical and analytical direction in (social) philosophy and the social and cultural sciences. The analytical vocabularies known as practice theory, or praxeology, open new possibilities for understanding and describing not only ordinary customs and everyday activities but also highly specialized (artistic, literary, scientific, etc.) activities, focusing on their material, physical, affective and especially their—simultaneously situated and locating—dimensions and potentials.[1] Despite their heterogeneity, these approaches have something in common. In contrast to traditional explanations of action, they do not focus on ideas, values, norms, communication, and sign and symbol systems, but rather on social practices through their situatedness, their material anchoring in

1 Cf. the following publications on the practice theory debate: Schaefer (ed.) 2016; Spaargaren/ Weenik/ Lamers (Eds.) 2016; Hui/ Schatzki/ Shove (Eds.) 2017; Jonas/ Littig/ Wroblewski (Eds.) 2017.

bodies and artifacts, and their dependence on practical skills and implicit knowledge (cf. Schmidt, *Soziologie* 24). In praxeological approaches, social action is not viewed, as in conventional theories of action, as a single isolated individual activity controlled by underlying interests, motives, objectives, values or norms; instead, it is seen as a concatenation of reproducing and continuously self-actualizing "doings and sayings" (Schatzki, *Site of the Social* 77) grounded in material and bodily realities and socially understood through shared tacit knowledge and practical knowing-how (cf. Schmidt, *Culture-Analytical*). Theories of practices thus undermine dualistic juxtapositions of action and structure, actor and institution, individual and society, and, equally important, practice and theory (cf. Bourdieu, *Outline*). They describe social practices as observable regularities produced in meaningful performances that can neither be attributed to an isolated actor nor to institutional entities alone (cf. Reckwitz, *Entwicklung*; Schatzki, *Social Practices, Site of the Soci*al; Schmidt, *Soziologie*).

From a praxeological perspective, location and being located can initially be understood as fundamental characteristics of all practical actions and realities. Practices never happen "atopos, placeless, as Plato said of Socrates, or 'without ties and roots,' as Karl Mannheim, sometimes regarded as one of the founders of the sociology of the intellectual, somewhat glibly claimed" (Bourdieu, *Pascalian* 132). The praxeological project of "analysis situs" (Bourdieu, *Pascalian* 132) aims to work out the topoi, places, and localities, that is, the bodily, material-physical, and at the same time socio-spatial localities and localizations, which are understood both as preconditions and as continuously produced results of practical actions. The critical and essential aim of these efforts is to challenge the intellectualist and universalist self-misunderstandings that are widespread in the scholastic world. Situatedness and locality characterize not only routinized, everyday social practices but also theoretical, scientific, virtual-digital, fictional, literary, and artistic practices. Praxeology provides an approach to their analysis. This means that the latter form of practices can be examined and explored accordingly as "objective activities" (Marx 13).

In the following, I consider the extent to which this locational and praxeological perspective is fruitful for decoding intellectual, imaginative, and supposedly cognitive-mental proceedings. My short, thesis-like remarks are meant to encourage discussion; they refer to examples of academic writing practices and the "theorizing" and "imagining" associated with them. After a brief sketch of the non-individualist and non-mentalistic orientation of the praxeological project (1), I sketch out the negative epistemology that charac-

terizes the practice-theoretical perspective (2) and show how this orientation results in the desideratum of an empirical praxeology of theoretical practices and imaginative procedures (3). I will then contribute observations on academic writing and the widely held ethno-theories that accompany these activities (4). I conclude by characterizing "theorizing" and "imagining" as materially integrated bodily-mental epistemic processes that are inextricably linked to situated, everyday practices of writing (5).

1. Placing *Einbildungskraft*

Praxeology can contribute to reassessing imaginative processes and procedures by exploring and elucidating the situatedness, placedness, and site-specificity of imaginative practices. In doing so, praxeological approaches strive to develop a non-mentalist analysis of Einbildungskraft, to use Kant's German term for "imagination" here, which denotes a force and its effects. Imagining is usually seen as something that individual subjects do on their own and is located in the black box of the individual's mind—secretive and placeless. The practicing-place perspective seeks to address this assumption. It calls for looking at and understanding practices of imagination (e.g., in storytelling, playing, designing, planning, reading, and writing) as shared, emplaced, and public activities (cf. Schmidt and Volbers). Such activities are—as practice-theory's critique of mentalism based on Wittgenstein's late philosophy would have it (cf. Reckwitz, *Entwicklung*; Schatzki, *Social Practices*; Schmidt, *Soziologie*)—always at the same time (routinized) bodily performances and sets of mental activities. Imagining, in this sense, would not be a secretive "inner" process but an overall public, accountable, and therefore observable (social and cultural) activity. Viewed as an ensemble of practices, imagining would have its subjects and not vice versa. "Imagining" would always be placed somewhere specifically rather than anywhere and would relate bodies to things and ideas as well as bodies to other bodies, ideas to other ideas, and things to other things.

2. Praxeology as Negative Epistemology

Widely received and discussed in the cultural and social sciences for some time now, "practice theory" is considered a style of research and cognition that is

critical of intellectualism, subjectivism, and mentalism—it has developed an analytical sensitivity for everyday routines, behaviors, and habits, for implicit knowledge, skills, and knowing how, as well as for the bodily and material aspects of the phenomena studied. Practices are generally described as an interplay of practiced bodies and their routinized modes of skill, concrete artefacts, things, and socio-material infrastructures. Although intellectual activities that are considered predominantly mental or cognitive are rarely considered in such an understanding of practices, the practice turn has nevertheless stimulated studies that investigate the acts of criticism and theorizing (cf. Boltanski) and initiated an empiricization of the theoretical gaze and gesture.

With my first thesis, I would like to emphasize a basic epistemological impulse of the praxeological project, which to me is somewhat lost in the prevailing reception of practice theory and rarely taken up—I refer to this basic impulse as "negative epistemology." By this, I mean—with reference to Pierre Bourdieu—the epistemic-critical investment of praxeology as a critique of scholastic and theoretical reason (cf. Bourdieu, Pascalian): Praxeology refers to the practical occurrences and realizations it seeks to address and investigate, initially in an indirect and negative way. It encounters the—mostly systematic—misrepresentations of practical logics and ongoing practical accomplishments with their typical and defining vagueness, resourcefulness, and creativity in the theoretical models that are designed to dissect, capture, and explain them. Therefore, the logic of practice cannot simply be positively stated and (re-)presented; rather, it is better understood in negative terms. Praxeology is initially a counter concept to the scholastic fallacies of theories that do not reflect their object relations. The distorted representations, and the intellectualistic and universalizing projections provided by theoretical knowledge and scholastic reason, are related to a privileged social position that invites a contemplative relationship with the world and its urgencies and largely exempts its holders from the pressure to take action given practical necessities. Intellectualistic positions can be understood as situated knowledge that knows nothing of the effects and limitations it owes to being advantageously situated in the scholastic world. Donna Haraway's concept of situated knowledges is directed against ideas of disembodied and placeless scientific knowledge and its claims to objectivity and truth. According to Haraway, the "conquering gaze from nowhere" (581) that characterizes such forms of knowledge is to be critically situated and located—especially regarding its cultural and gender-specific particularity and dominance. By doing so, scholastic forms of knowledge are revealed and become understandable, especially self-

disguising and misleading modes of knowing. The illusionary nowhere can thus be (re-) localized, empirically marked, and made visible as a particularly privileged position, a specific somewhere of "the self-satiated eye of the master subject" (586). Such connections between epistemic configurations and specifically located knowledge realities are particularly interesting from the perspective of practice theory.

3. An Empirical Desideratum

Bourdieu and, similarly, Haraway are primarily concerned with the social localization, situatedness and positionality of theoretical relationships to reality and forms of knowledge. They tackle the associated difficulties of analytically grasping the sense pratique (Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*) and the logic of practice. In doing so, Bourdieu—as his former colleague Luc Boltanski criticized—simply constructs practice as the opposite of scholasticism. This juxtaposition of "practice" on the one hand, and "scholastic" or "theoretical" reason on the other leads to a misconception: it follows from this juxtaposition that "theoretical reason" is portrayed as a distorted and projective way of seeing things that misunderstands itself. Theorists are categorized as erroneous holders of a scholastic viewpoint and position, but they are not considered and depicted as practitioners involved in the social world of academia, scholarship and in the practices of theorizing and producing theories. To go beyond this mere dramatization of the difference between theoretical-scholastic reasoning and the logic of practice, the praxeological epistemology would have to be extended to the analysis of the practices, conventions, routines, and habits (or Wittgenstein's *Gepflogenheiten*) of the production of theories and imaginaries themselves. What is still missing is an empirical and praxeological analysis and elucidation of theoretical practices, their situational and situated modes and their "scholastic" relations to the worlds and realities they project, imagine, and shape. My remarks on academic writing and the writing of theory address this desideratum. Regarding Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's historical epistemology, I am concerned with the "scientific real" (*Wissenschaftswirkliche*), that is, with theoretical practices and the forms of appearance of theoretical knowledge in the everyday practices, situations, and places of imagining, theorizing, and theory production.

4. Writing Theory

What happens in the places and the writing processes of social and cultural theory and research? How exactly does writing occur? How is it carried out and accomplished? What can be said about the *sens pratique* (Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*) and the routines and habits of fabricating academic and theoretical knowledge in sociology and the humanities? By asking such questions, the procedures, methods and techniques of "writing theory" are praxeologized, that is, they are viewed and conceptualized as principally observable and, in this sense, publicly-, materially-, and bodily-embedded processes (cf. Schmidt, *Theoretisieren, Methodological Challenges*).

At the same time, this praxeological approach emphasizes that theories should not be considered the result of unobservable and empirically inaccessible inner mental concoctions and imaginative flashes of thought, although academic writing is an epistemic practice that is closely linked to such mentalistic accounts and ethno- or participant-theories. It is interesting in this context to note an observation by Howard S. Becker that perhaps illustrates how such cultural mentalism and mentalist ethnotheories of theorizing are supported by the organization of university teaching. According to Becker, students generally find it difficult to conceive of writing as a concrete activity of concrete people. Even graduate students who are close to their teachers and professors rarely see anyone writing. Writing—the basic activity of all text-based disciplines in the humanities and social sciences—is, strangely enough, systematically concealed, relegated to private spheres, and made unobservable (see also the introduction to this collection). For Becker, this promotes the widespread assumption, idea, and ethno-theory among students that the academic texts they are dealing with have been written in one go from the introduction to the final chapter by theoretically brilliant and exceptional thinkers.

I would like to mention another observation, albeit anecdotal and unsubstantiated, about the social and cultural practices in which the epistemic activity of academic writing generally takes place: albeit linked to individualistic and mentalistic concepts and beliefs, academic writing practices are socially organized. That is, from the perspective of an analytical observer, these practices are always already in effect. Participants are continuously recruited as speakers, lecturers, and discussants but, above all, as readers and writers. They gradually acquire basic and shared practical norms and assessment criteria, and this process of acquiring specific practical competencies in academic writing is long and arduous.

The practices of academic writing are, oddly enough, taking on the character of religious exercises and retreats; they resemble an exercitium that has been enforced for years. Consider that an ever-smaller portion of manuscripts submitted to the most prominent, widely read, and highly ranked journals is published, even though the number of submissions is continuously increasing: attracting readers is apparently not a realistic goal of these writing practices. Writing *en masse* and for many years without any prospect of readership has traits of a commitment that cannot be irritated even by constant rejection. Above all, this commitment is checked in field-specific testing, valuation, and responsibilization procedures, which are carried out in reviews, colloquia, workshops, conferences, etc. Such procedures are techniques of governance that assign responsibility and are aimed at creating prudent and active self-direction in the subjects, directing them to themselves and thus simultaneously mobilizing their strengths and energies. It is about practicing a certain theoretical style, the repeatedly demonstrated ritual recognition of certain theoretical authorities, and the adherence to certain conventions, the observance of which is monitored by a few reviewers and editors. From this perspective, academic writing reveals itself as a conformist practice geared towards the preservation of cultural norms of the academic world and the protracted formation of an academic habitus.

5. Writing Practices and Epistemic Processes

Writing practices occupy the central position between "theoretical thinking and imagining" and theoretical text (ethno-theoretically regarded as the "written fixation" of theoretical and imaginative thinking), which is as self-evident as it is rarely thematized and examined as such. In a praxeological undermining of this subordination of doing and the prioritization of thinking, the aim should now be to not marginalize writing as a mere "writing down" of previous theoretical ideas, but to focus on it as an articulation of theoretical activities that is in principle observable but largely rendered unobservable. Theorizing and imagining are epistemic processes that are involved in situated and situational writing practices and cannot be separated from them. Actual academic and epistemic writing is only loosely connected to the production of enduring texts. The empirical praxeography of theoretical and imaginative knowledge practices, which I characterize in this essay as a desideratum, should therefore focus on the practical processuality and actuality of doing theory. Here, the

conditions for further writing are realized only in the moment of writing. Theoretical practitioners, like Niklas Luhmann in particular, are aware of this practical logic, processuality, situativity, and contingency of theorizing. Luhmann remarks laconically that "[s]cientists have to form sentences if they want to publish" (10; my transl.). He goes further: "In the choice of words necessary for this, however, there is a degree of randomness that is unimaginable for most readers. Even scientists themselves rarely realize this. The majority of texts could have been formulated differently and would have been formulated differently if they had been written the next day."

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Sight Beyond Site

From Knowing Your Place to Placing Your Knowing

Helen Hester

Abstract *This essay considers the relationship between imagination and lived experience, comparing the role that each has played in feminist politics. To do so, it returns to late twentieth-century standpoint theory and ideas about situated knowledge. The imagination is undeniably situated; what we tend to imagine is shaped by our own experiences and social positioning. And yet, the imagination can also operate as a tool of reason and as a means of better understanding that which we cannot experience. At the heart of my argument lies the suggestion that alienation—as a capacity for abstract reasoning—is facilitative of attempts to think the totality, allowing us to broaden our perspectives to identify common patterns and weave together different points of view. While empirical modes of knowing (i.e., those grounded in sensory immediacy) offer vital resources for understanding oppression, non-empirical modes of knowing (i.e., those dependent on an ability to get beyond immediacy) provide insights that are just as valuable. Lived experience can only take us so far. To claim as much is not simply a matter of the theoretical niceties of standpoint, epistemology but crucial for the practice of coalitional politics. After all, if our political commitments were wholly limited to or determined by direct experience, solidarity would be practically impossible.*

Keywords *Solidarity; Alienation; Situated Knowledge; Feminist Standpoint Epistemology; Multiple Consciousness*

Imagination and Experience: Who Knows Best?

In "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," Donna Haraway stresses the influence of one's social position upon one's comprehension of the world. She argues that feminist

approaches to knowledge must tread a path between relativism on one side and "totalization and single vision" on the other, and orient themselves via the webbing together of "partial, locatable, critical knowledges" (584). Her argument suggests that our perspective depends on our position; *sight* (our vision and capacity to envision) is tied to *site* (our location and social emplacement). Haraway's essay is a particularly influential contribution to standpoint epistemology—a theoretical tradition committed to accounting for "the social positioning of the social agent" (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 315). These approaches have gained significant traction within feminism and have been taken up by thinkers across various disciplines, but it seems to me that the role of *imagination* in situatedness (or of situatedness in imagination) is comparatively under-theorized. While, as Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis note, "we sometimes find the terminology of 'imagination,' 'imaginings' and 'the imaginary' being thrown in casually," these ideas typically go uninterrogated (316).

Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis set out to address this "conceptual lacuna and to present 'situated imagination' as a crucial component of feminist standpoint theory" (316). For them, "fantasy as much as memory carries traces of the social situatedness" of thought (324), and "our imaginary horizons are affected by the positioning of our gaze" (327). At the same time, "it is our imagination that gives our experiences their particular meanings, their categories of reference. Whether it is 'borders,' 'home,' 'oppression' or 'liberation,' the particular meanings we hold of these concepts are embedded in our situated imaginations" (327). There is much to agree with in such an account of the process of knowing and imagining—"that it begins from a given situation, that it must begin from some location, from some body or entity" (Reed, "Freedom and Fiction"). But feminist standpoint epistemology has *not* gone unchallenged, and has been subject to debates and controversies. These affect not only its philosophical validity but (crucially) its feminist utility as well.

Building on the notion of the situated imagination, this essay considers how imagination functions in relation to situated knowledge, and stresses that it is not just *factual knowledge* (for want of a better term) that is situated—that is, the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information—but other forms of knowing as well. How can we understand the relationship between lived experience, abstract reasoning, and the situated imagination, and what are the implications of this for standpoint theory? Who can most readily practice sight *beyond* site (as an exercise in the rational imagination) and how does this in-

form feminist activist praxis and concrete attempts at solidarity building? And, when it comes to imagining better worlds, *who knows best*?

There are two broad responses to this question of *who knows best*. The first is that nobody necessarily knows best; no particular situation automatically ensures forms of understanding superior to any other. Hence, for Haraway, "there is no immediate vision from the standpoints of the subjugated" (586). These standpoints are "not 'innocent' positions", and should not be fetishized, romanticized, or exempted from scrutiny (584). On the contrary, they are "preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge" (584). In short, the standpoints of the subjugated are better placed to resist the "god-trick" of unlocatable knowledge claims (581). Foregrounding such standpoints remains crucial, not because they are in themselves less partial, but because they problematize the hegemony of seemingly unmarked positions and act as a corrective to the overrepresentation of such positions within what counts as knowledge. We find similar ideas expressed in the solo work of Yuval-Davis. By her account, standpoint feminism "recognises that from each positioning the world is seen differently, and thus that any knowledge based on just one positioning is 'unfinished'—which is not the same thing as saying it is 'invalid.' In this epistemology, the only way to approach 'the truth' is by a dialogue between people of differential positionings" ("What is transversal politics?" 94–5).

Rather than claim that "a specific social situatedness (which in itself has been constructed in several different ways) endows the subject with a privileged access to truth," these accounts understand "the process of approximating the truth as part of a dialogical relationship among subjects who are differentially situated" (Yuval-Davis, "Dialogical epistemology" 47). If many different forms of situated knowledge can generate plausible accounts of the world, then we are likely to know the world better if we (like Haraway) attempt to weave perspectives together. As several critics have noted, however, this approach does not necessarily address the power dynamics at stake in knowledge and knowing. Millicent Churcher argues that "members of dominant social groups persistently fail to treat members of marginalized social communities … as 'trusted informants,'" and may not view them "as having valuable knowledge bases from which they might learn and benefit." As such, the perspectives of the marginalized tend to be neglected in the weaving together of knowledges.

Not making an active effort to center certain standpoints can result in such standpoints being routinely overlooked. Hence, the second response to this

issue asserts that some of us *do indeed* know better than others and that some perspectives should be differentially weighted in our assessment of the social world. Frederic Jameson describes the central tenets of standpoint theory thusly:

> [O]wing to its structural situation in the social order and to the specific forms of oppression and exploitation unique to that situation, each group lives the world in a phenomenologically specific way that allows it to see, or better still, that makes it unavoidable for that group to see and to know, features of the world that remain obscure, invisible, or merely occasional and secondary for other groups. (65)

Nancy Hartsock, meanwhile, argues that "the experience of domination may provide the possibility of important new understandings of social life" (240); that is to say, the lived experience of having power exercised over one's existence by other people or by institutions can provide important insights into how societies are currently organized. For some feminist epistemologists, then, certain standpoints enjoy a particularly clear view of the world as it stands, and, as a result, we should seek to privilege these positions if we are looking to pursue emancipatory aims.

The implications of this for movement building are profound, as Churcher makes clear. She claims that "an oppressed subject will typically have an epistemic advantage when it comes to knowledge of their own oppression and the oppression suffered by the group to which they belong." This leads her to favor what she calls "epistemic apprenticeship," a reparative approach based on "seeking out and engaging with unjustly marginalized epistemes." Such apprenticeship would involve more than simply giving "marginalized epistemic actors a 'seat at the table,' and endowing them with equal epistemic authority vis a vis their socially privileged counterparts," rather, it would be "geared towards positioning marginalized actors as epistemic authorities, and endowing them with the power to set the terms of engagement within institutional settings." While Churcher acknowledges that marginalized viewpoints are not automatically more correct than others, she nevertheless stresses the necessity of such approaches to ensure that those closest to the hegemonic center forfeit any outsized institutional influence.

The underlying political commitments of this approach are certainly admirable—but, as Olúfémi O. Táíwò suggests, such a perspective may bring drawbacks of its own. The expectation of *epistemic deference*—that is, the idea

that the mic should always and only be passed to those who are most marginalized or most affected by whatever issue is under discussion—can, while being based on sensible theoretical foundations, end up providing "social cover for the abdication of responsibility" ("Being-in-the-room privilege"). These norms shift "the accountability that is all of ours to bear onto select people," Táíwò argues, "and, more often than not, a hyper-sanitized and thoroughly fictional caricature of them" ("Being-in-the-room privilege"). Thus, the "very strength of standpoint epistemology—its recognition of the importance of perspective—becomes its weakness when combined with deferential practical norms," which focus us "on the interaction of the rooms we occupy, rather than calling us to account for the interactions we don't experience" ("Being-in-the-room privilege"). This framework results in certain social actors lacking the requisite authority to intervene in the political world beyond their lived experience.

There is thus a risk that static understandings of situatedness can be used to "not only reinforce existing frames of reference, but participate in the perception of their immutability" (Reed, "Freedom and Fiction"). Rather than enabling a politics that goes beyond immediate self-interest, discourses that read *emplaced* knowledge as *entrenched* knowledge allow people to sidestep issues that do not directly concern them. Critics have long been aware of these potentially problematic implications. Patricia Reed, for example, wonders if "boundedness to a 'site'" might not end up "reinforcing habits or customs of seeing. Patterns of seeing that today tend to obscure nested, planetary relationality" ("What Is Care at Planetary Dimensions?"). She stresses the need to foreground the mobility of knowledge if "situatedness is not to fall into the static trap of equating immediate, given experience with knowledge; of monumentalizing the site as permanent" ("What Is Care at Planetary Dimensions?"). Sylvia Walby, meanwhile, argues that, following Haraway, "[d]ifferences of social location have been taken to mean that we can aspire merely to … a series of incommensurable knowledges, of forms of knowledge fundamentally separated from each other" (189). When the differences of perspective implied by the idea of situated knowledges are seen as static and entrenched in this way, they can be positioned as generating obstacles to solidarity.

Jodi Dean makes this point while engaging with Haraway's legacy, she declaring herself "convinced that a major barrier to women's working together has been our inability to conceive of connecting with each other through and across our differences" (5). With differences thus understood as barriers, feminists have "understood relationships as premised on agreement. This has kept

us from working together when consensus is not possible" (5). Within such conceptions, one's location is taken to be fixed; one can neither see nor imagine otherwise. This inability to shift positions means that one cannot work for and from other perspectives. Despite claims about the webbing and connectedness of knowledges, then, theories of situated knowledge are sometimes read as arguing for the *impossibility* of truly appreciating the other's point of view. It is lived experience—as a directly empirical form of knowing—that supposedly enables us to know better, and we cannot hope to fully understand that which sits beyond it.

The idea that Haraway's version of situated knowledge wants to enshrine unmediated knowing or to "give up on routine knowledge development through theory and data" is a misreading (Walby 193). Howsoever her ideas have been interpreted and used, Haraway remains at heart a scientist. She writes on behalf of those who would "still like to talk about *reality*" and is scathing about postmodern feminism's willingness to reject the notion of truth (577, emphasis in original). She notes wryly that "[w]e unmasked the doctrines of objectivity because they threatened … our 'embodied' accounts of the truth, and we ended up with one more excuse for not learning any post-Newtonian physics and one more reason to drop the old feminist self-help practices of repairing our own cars" (578). Despite some elements of her reputation, then, Haraway is committed to a knowable reality beyond lived experience; situated knowledge is a route towards, rather than away from, this destination. If anything, it is a misunderstanding of situated knowledge as entrenched knowledge which generates the kinds of deleterious political effects sometimes attributed to it.

While *who knows best?* remains an open question—and one to which we shall return towards the end of this essay—I am of the view that the undeniable situatedness of knowledge does not determine in advance our possibilities for understanding. While all thought does indeed originate from somewhere, it is not necessarily confined to the parochial. As Reed notes, "Humans are historical creatures—temporal beings not only invested in our immediate, present situations, but infused by the past and able to imagine and care about the future—that is, creatures with the capacity to cognize the condition of worlds that do not yet concretely exist, and that we have never experienced" ("The valuation of necessity" 134). These debates are another way in which to approach the issue of the situated imagination; not just in the sense that they foreground the connection between our embodied social emplacement and the ways in which we both know and imagine, but in the sense that they speak to the role of imag-

ination in *non-empirical* knowledge. While situated knowledge stresses the importance of lived experience in terms of what and how we know, we must not foreground it at the expense of recognizing *alienated* forms of knowing.

Thinking Together: Alienation and Solidarity

As Reed puts it, "[d]espite the term having been locked down in a negative register, signaling social anomie or dehumanization and positioned as something to be overcome, on a perspectival front, alienation is a necessary force of estrangement from *what is*" ("Xenophily", emphasis in original). Alienation is thus positioned as a *capacity*. It is understood not simply as epistemic severance from one's role or contribution to the wider social totality (as in Marxist conceptions of alienation), but rather as the *inverse* of this: the ability to understand complex or otherwise slippery phenomena that cannot be grasped in their immediacy. After all, the "totality is not given to you in experience" (Fisher 118). While we are subject to its influence and feel its effects, it is nevertheless a realm of abstraction, and inconceivable via empirical means of knowing alone. In the words of Mark Fisher, one cannot grasp "any bit of a system without understanding the whole system, and the whole system is not a thing—it's a set of relations. This is why immediacy is such a problem. Immediacy is inherently ideological, and ideologically mystifying. Because the totality is not given in immediacy" (117).

Perhaps the clearest way to think about this form of productive alienation is in terms of the difference between our sentience and our sapience. Sentience, as Robert Brandom puts it, is "the capacity to be *aware* in the sense of being *awake*"; sapience, on the other hand, "concerns *understanding* or intelligence rather than irritability or arousal" (157, emphasis in original). Brandom characterizes the sapient being as one that can responsively classify stimuli as falling under concepts; for example, the ability to understand 'red' as an idea, and not just the ability to sort red things from non-red things. In his words, "[m]erely reliably responding differentially to red things is not yet being *aware* of them *as* red. Discrimination by producing repeatable responses (as a machine or a pigeon might do) sorts the eliciting stimuli, and in that sense classifies them. But it is not yet *conceptual* classification" (17, emphasis in original). It is sapience, then, which allows us to use concepts as tools and as a means to understand and act upon the world, whereas sentience is simply the awareness of being *in* a world. For the artist and philosopher Diann Bauer, as soon as our species

could reason beyond its biological needs, it was *alienated*. In this sense, the sapience/sentience spectrum ranges from immediate embodied experience—feeling the forces, conditions and chemistry of being in a body—to the ability to not only *experience* this condition but also to reflect upon it collectively and individually.

Reason grants us some (albeit limited) critical distance from the vicissitudes of instinct and affect, which in turn facilitates a capacity for self-reflection. With this in mind, we can see that (partial and contingent) alienation from raw sensory data constitutes a productive force. Again, it is not simply a burden or a loss of some prelapsarian cohesion, but the foundation for various *capabilities*, allowing our species to undertake and achieve distinctive things which would otherwise be impossible. It is also a rejoinder to any tendency to over-emphasize the knowledge gained through lived experience and direct sensory encounters. Such knowledge is vital and has, historically, been too often overlooked; but it is not necessarily superior to or disconnected from what we might understand as alienated forms of knowing. Collective endeavor depends in part upon our abilities to think, and to think about thinking, as a group. Without alienation, action "is reduced to meaning 'just do something,' collectivity can never be methodological or expressed in terms of a synthesis of different abilities to envision and achieve a common task, and making commitments through linking action and understanding is untenable" (Negarestani). It is thus unhelpful to frame less mediated forms of experience as the best or primary route to trustworthy knowledge, as this framing risks underplaying the contributions to understanding that can be arrived at through abstract reasoning.

To summarize: Feminist epistemology reinforces the message that knowledge is situated. For some, this idea of situatedness suggests an incapacity to understand other points of view, situated knowledge comes to be understood as *entrenched* knowledge, and norms of epistemic deference emerge. But knowledge is never truly entrenched given that we can know more than we directly experience, thanks to the operations of alienated reason. It *is* possible to achieve sight beyond site. For many of us, these points may seem straightforward or commonsensical, but there are nevertheless real political stakes involved. Remember, critiques of standpoint epistemology have argued that the idea of unavoidable emplacement risks becoming a barrier to coalitional feminisms, while the navigation of difference has long been seen as a stumbling block for inter-group solidarity. While the claim that we can know more than we experience is still widely accepted (even within the counter-intuitive

realm of feminist critical theory!), an assertion of the potential validity of our opinions on matters beyond our lived experiences remains rather more contentious. This is a matter not simply of knowing or reasoning, but of perceived authority and the politics of legitimacy.

The work of bell hooks addresses this theme while advancing a forceful case for the possibility and necessity of what refer to as sight beyond site. hooks denounces what she knowingly calls "[s]pecial-interest groups," who "lead women to believe that only socialist-feminists should be concerned about class; that only lesbian feminists should be concerned about the oppression of lesbian and gay men; that only black women or other women of color should be concerned about racism," and so on (*Feminist Theory* 64). Her view (much like Táíwò's) is that:

> [e]very woman can stand in political opposition to sexist, racist, heterosexist, and classist oppression…. Women must learn to accept responsibility for fighting oppressions that may not directly affect us as individuals. Feminist movement, like other radical movements in our society, suffers when individual concerns and priorities are the only reason for participation. When we show our concern for the collective, we strengthen our solidarity. (*Feminist Theory* 64)

It is worth pausing to consider what 'solidarity' means here. How does it relate to the idea of the standpoint or the webbing together of knowledges?

Solidarity is an important concept for our purposes, given that it involves the interplay of identity and difference, and distance, identity and proximity, and mutuality distinctiveness and interdependence. On the one hand, it presupposes a certain amount of common ground, given that coalitional politics must be based on (at least loosely) based on compatible values that "cut across differences in positionings and identity" (Yuval-Davis, "What is transversal politics?" 96). As Jeremy Gilbert notes, "[r]elations of solidarity are always expressions of shared interests"; such expressions can go beyond "defending an existing state of affairs (a wage level, a hospital, etc.). They can also mean the expression of a shared sense of possibility, a shared desire for a different possible world". It is necessary to retain core values and perspectives when building coalitions, that is, to retain identity even as one seeks to be maximally responsive, respectful, and receptive to difference. But, of course, common ground does not automatically equal solidarity. What may, in some

ways, appear to represent a shared situation does not always result in a shared point of view.

Akwugo Emejulu offers a concrete example of this in her account of the 2017 Women's March in London: "In seeking to organise an 'inclusive' demonstration that crossed party political lines, the organisers initially invited representatives from all the major parties", including those pushing anti-immigrant sentiment and advocating for harsh austerity policies (270). Furthermore, "when these critiques were levelled at the organisers, the defensive responses and the branding of critics as 'divisive' seemed to bring into sharp relief the limits of feminist solidarity" (270). As Emejulu puts it, a "global call for sisterhood is not enough—it assumes a unity and shared purpose amongst women that does not exist. Feminist solidarity between women cannot be presumed—it must be fought for and made real through individual and collective action" (272). Such comments bring home the fact that, firstly, solidarity cannot be read out from identity, but rather requires assembly based on beliefs, commitments, and worldviews; and secondly, that the universal, in the form of an insufficiently qualified call for unity, can operate as a barrier to the operations of solidarity.

Situation may not function as an effective shorthand for beliefs, but when it comes to political organizing, claiming to be unsituated—to offer a position inclusive of literally all perspectives—is unsustainable (not to mention undesirable). Other feminist thinkers have raised similar points about so-called sisterhood. hooks, for instance, is quick to note that shared gender does not necessarily equate to mean shared interests; rather, an emphasis on sisterhood can serve as "the emotional appeal masking the opportunism of manipulative bourgeois white women" and as a "cover-up hiding the fact that many women exploit and oppress other women" (*Feminist Theory* 44). Rather than abandoning sisterhood, however, she calls for its re-engineering. "In recent years Sisterhood as slogan, motto, rallying cry no longer evokes the spirit of power in unity," hooks argues (44). "Some feminists now seem to feel that unity between women is impossible given our differences. Abandoning the idea of Sisterhood as an expression of political solidarity weakens and diminishes feminist movement. Solidarity strengthens resistance struggle" (44). What is required is collaboration without amalgamation, coalition without subsumption—the construction of a "we" provisional and capacious enough to hold all who need to be held.

In hooks' words, women need to "come together in situations where there will be ideological disagreement and work to change that interaction, so com-

munication occurs. This means that when women come together, rather than pretend union, we would acknowledge that we are divided and must develop strategies to overcome fears, prejudices, resentments, competitiveness" (65). While hooks continues to believe in the possibility of women coming together, then, she is clear that this happens through, with, and across difference. It is not the case that, by virtue of a shared gender alone, difference is transcended or rendered irrelevant, or that a single element of shared "social identity location" immediately and unproblematically equates to unity (Ferguson 249). It is quite possible to have a certain degree of sameness without any accompanying solidarity. And just as sameness fails to automatically generate solidarity, so too must the *absence* of a shared identity be seen as something other than an impenetrable barrier.

Just as one can experience sameness without solidarity, so too can one have solidarity without sameness: "the collective subject cannot be premised by principles of likeness, by principles of familiarity. It demands, rather, a mode of solidarity without homophily, without sameness" (Reed, "Solidarity without Sameness"). Of course, the very idea of collaboration presupposes difference. Solidarity is *necessarily* directed toward the other to some extent; it would be rather jarring to claim to be in solidarity with oneself! The very idea of collaboration presupposes difference. Hence for Gilbert, "[r]elations of solidarity are never based on the assumption of a shared or unitary identity. They work across differences without trying to suppress them, and they make those differences productive". This involves going beyond the kinds of selfish parochialism that have masqueraded as solidarity in the past.

In the concrete—that is to say, at the level of lived practice on which solidarity functions—solidarity demands starting from connections between struggles, and establishing a form of collaborative politics oriented toward assembly. We're talking about, in Verónica Gago's words, something like:

> a feminism of the masses, rooted in concrete struggles of popular economy workers, migrants, cooperative workers, women defending their territories, precarious workers, new generations of sexual dissidences, housewives who refuse enclosure, those fighting for the right to abortion involved in a broad struggle for bodily autonomy, mobilized students, women denouncing agrotoxins, and sex workers.

In this sense, Gago argues, the contemporary feminist movement "constructs proximity between very different struggles"—even as those struggles might

share protagonists; (sex workers, migrants, students, those who support reproductive justice, and so on can of course be overlapping constituencies, and a single person could belong to any or all of these groups simultaneously). Some battles might be directly one's own, but others will represent a different front in the same shared and integrated struggle.

A relevant example from the UK can be found in the ongoing Palestine Solidarity Campaign, which works to bring people "from all walks of life together to campaign for Palestinian rights and freedom," and which has successfully mobilized several constituencies in mass protests against genocide. Marches in London regularly include a feminist bloc, a climate justice bloc, a health care workers bloc, a Jewish bloc, a Black liberation bloc, a trade union bloc, and so on. Here again, we find the interplay of distance and proximity, identity and difference, anchored in a common cause. Solidarity might be productively characterized as the principle of acting both with and for the other. As such, it depends on the ability to think within and beyond our own circumstances, experiences, and immediate position. Meaningful political coalition is tied to the necessity of reasoning from and beyond one's standpoint, to attempts to "see together without claiming to be another" (Haraway 586), and to the process and possibility of assembling a collective political subject; to what we might call *situated solidarities*, in other words. Conversely, situated solidarities—in which we think both from and beyond our specific social locations and bounded phenomenological conditions—are reliant upon alienation as the underpinning of non-empirical knowing.

It is important to note, in concluding this strand of our discussion, that solidarity should be understood as a starting point rather than an achievement in itself—a platform that "opens the way for informed affiliation on the basis of shared social desires and identifications, affiliations that have to be forged" (Lugones 79). And yet, this focus on grassroots activism and political praxis reminds us that seemingly rarified discussions of standpoint epistemologies have real political stakes. The idea of situated knowledge is at play in many of the norms and conventions shaping feminist politics, and as such we need to pay close attention to what our (often implicit) organizational logics assume we can know, and what they indicate we should be able to do with that knowledge. So, what is the role of the imagination here?

The Rational Imagination: Situation, Speculation, Solidarity

Alienated reason grants us a capacity to understand something of the world beyond direct lived experience, and this capacity is vital to the process of solidarity building—to recognizing the importance of struggles that are not immediately our own, and to understanding that causes or mobilizations which may, on the surface, appear disparate can in fact form part of the same integrated struggle. The language I have been using to articulate this idea leans heavily on philosophical terms associated with sapience—reason, rationality, and (more idiosyncratically) alienation. But equally important for our purposes is *the imagination*. Rationality is sometimes set against imagination; there remains a kind of crude binary shorthand in English, in which concepts such as mind, logic, universality and reason lie opposed to those of body, emotion, particularity, and imagination, with one set of coordinates enjoying perceived epistemic priority over the other. Such (highly gendered) distinctions do not hold. Reason demands to be seen as an imaginative faculty, while imagination is (by my account) implicated in all processes of non-empirical knowing. Imagination, minimally defined, is the capacity to envision (or the process of envisioning) that which is not and has never been fully or directly present to the senses—of representing, in the form of mental images or otherwise, that which we know not to be the case. It is a modelling faculty that involves an element of "mentally combining previous experience and knowledge" (Gabora 5) to envision things not fully encountered in actuality.

Imagination is thus characterized by the awareness of non-occurrence or non-presence. This is what distinguishes it from related processes of memory, perception, and hallucination, in which the requisite degree of self-consciousness or meta-reflection implied by the "what if" and the "as if" is missing. It is also what positions imagination alongside rationalism, in that it is set against a framework of the purely empirical. To hypothesize, to conceive of something of which we have no direct lived experience, depends upon the operations of the imagination. Ruth M. J. Byrne is among those who have made this point, gesturing to the practical connections between rationality and the imagination and noting that "to be able to reason well, people need to be able to imagine alternative possibilities" (347). In her analysis, "reasoning depends on cognitive processes that support the imagination of alternatives, and imagination depends on cognitive processes that are based on the same core processes" (339). Hence, we can agree with Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis when they claim that, while it may be analytically expedient to "distinguish between knowledge

and imagining, intellect and imagination, these terms do not refer to clearly separate faculties or 'spheres,' but merely to dialogical moments in a multidimensional mental process" (326). How, then, does imagination (as a faculty folded into situation-spanning reason) help us to understand—or better yet, to *build*—solidarity on a practical level?

There has been some interesting work on this, particularly by scholars researching cross-community campaigns for peace,—many of whom have also directly engaged with standpoint feminism. Yuval-Davis draws on the work of Italian activists in developing the concept of transversal politics (a concept she links to standpoint epistemology). The work of these activists involves engaging people in a form of dialogue organized around what they call "rooting" and "shifting." According to this framework, each participant in a political conversation "would bring with them the reflexive knowledge of their own positioning and identity. This is the 'rooting.' At the same time, they should also try to 'shift'—to put themselves in the situation of those with whom they are in dialogue and who are different" (Yuval-Davis 95). Transversal politics in general, and this notion of rooting and shifting in particular, seems to have struck a chord with the feminist left, particularly those with an interest in organizing at the grassroots level. For Cynthia Cockburn and Lynette Hunter, for example, transversality:

> answers to a need to conceptualise a democratic practice of a particular kind, a process [that] can on the one hand look for commonalities without being arrogantly universalist, and on the other affirm difference without being transfixed by it. Transversal politics is the practice of creatively crossing (and re-drawing) the borders that mark significant politicised differences. It means empathy without sameness, shifting without tearing up your roots. (88–89)

This process of "seriously trying to imagine what it takes to inhabit the situated perspective of [one's] interlocutors, but without pretending that different positionings can be collapsed and power differentials erased" is the activity of the situated imagination (Lykke 198). That is to say, it is a process of mobilizing alienated reason to decenter the self, while acknowledging that any such spatialized maneuver will inevitably start from a specific somewhere.

This is easier said than done, of course. In practice, it is not so easy to decenter the self, even in the case of good faith actors who are fully committed to solidarity building. 'Shifting' is not an infallible approach to navigating differ-

ence. As Liane Gabora notes, following Piaget, there are at least two approaches to dealing with unfamiliar ideas or concepts: assimilation and accommodation. "Assimilation involves fitting new information into one's existing web of understandings, whereas accommodation is the complementary process of restructuring one's existing web of understandings to make sense of the new information" (2). Attempts to think beyond one's own standpoint could feasibly involve either. Thus, even when we aim to genuinely expand our understanding and imagine the world differently, we may end up fitting others' perspectives into our existing frameworks—reshaping their views to align with our established models. While it is essential to believe that accommodation between perspectives is possible, and that situated knowledges are not inherently incompatible, assimilation remains a pervasive possibility. Imagination, rather than operating as an untamed cognitive wilderness of radical possibility, can also serve the function of habituation; one can imagine one's way out of epistemic trouble (such as when confronted by unsettling new ideas) by pulling new data into existing frameworks, and by forcibly recontextualizing novelty in terms of the familiar. Alienation does not automatically equate to pathways to reliable empathetic understanding, then. Our reasoning can serve our own interests, and the rational imagination can be a mechanism of self-deception.

As Keith Tilford puts it, "pseudorational behaviour represents a meta-constraint to preserve stabilized intelligibilities in the world via a systematic distortion of understanding that manipulates the self-model into benefiting from its own illusions of rationality" (150). Here, he is gesturing toward the idea that we might (advertently or inadvertently) disarm perceived threats to our self-understanding,—that we may to some extent bend the operations of reason toward assimilation rather than accommodation. Such (perhaps unconscious) maneuvers help us avoid the partial self-transcendence that alienation affords in favor of buttressing a parochial perspective. This could be seen as something of a retreat toward entrenched knowledge—a concession to the idea that, in the end, where we are *does* determine how and what we know (the beliefs and commitments that we cannot away, however much we want to). I come at this claim from a different angle, however. We can flip the difficulty of so-called shifting on its head to recognize that it is not only the *other* that remains non-transparent to our thinking, but the self as well. This is, after all, why the process of reflecting on one's rootedness is just as crucial to transversal dialogue as any process of accommodating otherwise overlooked perspectives. As Tilford's analysis suggests, we are not always or necessarily the most trustworthy

witnesses to our own experiences, or the people best placed to develop political strategies based on them.

Such a position has significant ramifications for understanding standpoint epistemology and the forms of activist praxis associated with it, such as feminist consciousness raising (or CR) practices. CR arrived at the Women's Liberation Movement via the grassroots organizing of the American civil rights movement, and communist organizing techniques from Cuba and China. It involved women meeting to engage in structured discussion about their own lived experiences, to tease out what commonality in such experiences might reveal about the abstract social totality. This is the famous perspective of 'the personal is political,' where our everyday encounters can illuminate something important about our world. For much of the second half of the twentieth century, CR was "the major technique of analysis, structure of organizations, method of practice, and theory of social change of the women's movement" (MacKinnon 519). What standpoint epistemology tells us at the level of theory, CR demonstrates at the level of practice—namely, that "material life structures consciousness" (Hartsock 110). Where we are and what we do shapes our understanding, and our social identity location gives us access to a particular view from somewhere—site governs sight.

The approach of drawing on life as the basis for understanding social systems may seem to position the self as a repository of inherently reliable knowledge—to privilege the kinds of immediate, embodied encounters and lived experiences so central to much feminist thinking. And yet, the very recognition of the *need* for CR stresses that it can sometimes be very difficult to assess one's own position from where one stands. Táíwò makes a similar claim about trauma: "Suffering is partial, shortsighted, and self-absorbed. We shouldn't have a politics that expects different. Oppression is not a prep school" (*Elite Capture* 120). Indeed, the fact that consciousness must be *raised* at all suggests that knowledge of our situation is submerged or blocked in some way. This is one problem with deferring to experience; we are only imperfectly capable of knowing ourselves *via* experience. One's worldview—one's "way of *seeing* the world and *being in* the world that emerges as a result of the structure of one's web of understandings, beliefs, and attitudes" (Gabora 1–2)—can never be assumed on the basis of social identity location alone. The idea of a consciousness matrix, in which situation begets worldview begets class consciousness and so on, must be problematized at every turn.

Alienation is crucial here, given that "epistemology grows in a complex and contradictory way from material life" and our situatedness permits "a medi-

ated rather than immediate understanding" (Hartsock 108). CR involves actively crafting a standpoint that would not be available without a certain degree of epistemic estrangement. As one call to reignite a grassroots CR tradition puts it,

> […] we do not believe that any of us—even the most intersectionally-oppressed, even the most well-read—can simply look inwards and draw out sufficiently correct and powerful theory […] Consciousness-raising does not involve holding up individual experience as the truth, but collectively connecting experience to the world and transforming it into action. Experience is the raw material—but collective discussion and thought is the tool which will transform it into something capable of raising our consciousness. (WEAREPLANC).

This is the weaving and webbing that Haraway emphasizes in her account of situated knowledge—the idea that better ways of knowing come from efforts to map and synthesize multiple viewpoints. But it is at this point that we return to the debates with which we began this essay; to the question of whether—within and beyond CR practices—all such viewpoints are equally valuable, or if they should be differentially weighted in some way. *Who knows best, and who's to judge*?

Situated Imagination and Multiple Consciousness: Who Imagines What?

While "the standpoint that is expected to emerge from a specific positioning" has often been assumed to produce "merely different insights," it has sometimes "been expected to provide a privileged access to liberating insight"—as suggested by practical norms of epistemic deference (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 318–319). As Sandra Harding puts it:

> although all knowledge claims are determinately situated, not all such social situations are equally good ones from which to be able to see how the social order works. Dominant groups have more interests than do those they dominate in not formulating and in excluding questions about how social relations and nature "really work."… In social relations organized by domination, exploitation, and oppression, the "conceptual practices of power" will construct institutions that make seem natural and normal those relations of domination, exploitation, and oppression. (385)

Churcher offers a similar argument, suggesting that "underprivileged persons will typically have a robust understanding of the knowledge systems of those in positions of privilege, whereas the same is not true of privileged actors vis a vis the knowledge bases of the underprivileged." By her account, understanding of "characteristic ways of knowing and being that have developed within particular social and cultural communities tends to be unequally shared and unevenly distributed across group lines." I have already outlined some of the ideas and controversies emerging around these sorts of claims—the suggestion that they tie our capacity to know to our social identity location, that they undermine coalition building and encourage the formation of political 'special interest groups,' that they unhelpfully delegitimize attempts to act in solidarity with others, and so on.

But the question of *who knows best* might yield more productive responses if we reframe it as *who imagines what*. In turning to the operations of the rational imagination, we have a slightly different route into the exploration of situatedness and relationality,—one which nudges us toward the idea that positions on the margins can create conditions facilitative of more expansive vistas. Epistemologists, sociologists, and political philosophers of various stripes have long commented on the influence of hegemonic knowledge upon other ways of seeing the world. The dominated, Hartsock tells us, "live in a world structured by others for their purposes—purposes that at the very least are not our own and that are in various degrees inimical to our development and even existence" (229). We are *all* trained in hegemonic epistemic traditions, regardless of our actual social identity locations, and it is only through learning to question, challenge, and refuse these traditions that our class consciousness is raised. It is not simply the case that "subjugated knowledge" is suppressed, however (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 269). Rather, it enters an uneasy co-existence with its dominant counterparts. This co-existence is manifested, at the level of self-experience and self-perception, as "the doubled or multiple consciousness of oppressed groups" (Hartsock 234).

This idea is expressed most famously in W. E. B. Du Bois's analysis of Blackness in post-emancipation America. Du Bois talks about a "double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (8). Dominant knowledges are partially internalized, such comments suggest, and run alongside those generated from alternative standpoints, affecting both one's sense of self and one's understanding of the wider world. Double-consciousness also had a notable presence in much of the feminist ac-

tivism and literature of the 1970s, which similarly centered upon 'splitness,' though in a rather different form. Second-wave texts stressed the complexities of seeing oneself through the eyes of the other, particularly in terms of sexuality. One thinks immediately here of John Berger's comments on the female nude: "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves…Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (47).

It is little wonder that, as second-wave CR discovered, "feelings of dividedness… make the women who experience them doubt their own perception" (Hogeland 32). It is not simply a matter of the truth of one's identity, circumstances, perspective, and so on being obscured. Rather, these things are *constituted* in large part by the dominant discourses in and with which they are formed. As the idea of the (hailed and heterosexual) self-watching woman suggests, we are not dealing with something merely false or fake that can be easily stripped away, but rather with the "*creation* of women's *reality* by male epistemology" (MacKinnon 539, note 56, emphasis in original). In MacKinnon's words, "[c]ombining, like any form of power, legitimation with force, male power extends beneath the representation of reality to its construction: it makes women (as it were) and so verifies (makes true) who women 'are' in its view, simultaneously confirming its way of being and its vision of truth" (539). To my mind, this idea of multiple consciousness speaks immediately to the notion of the rooting and shifting—to the fact that how we variously identify, imagine, envision, and so on not only emerges from where we are, but is complicated (and enriched) by our projections concerning the inner lives of others. This is crucial for understanding the situated imagination.

In a recent essay, Frankie Huang points to the relationship between media consumption and multiple consciousness. "Many minoritized people of color (POC) don't know what it's like to consume a steady diet of popular media entirely populated by people who look like us," she writes, "so it becomes second nature to actively establish parallels between experiences we see in stories and our own. POCs are hardly given a choice to develop this skill, given the selection of popular art we have to consume." People of color are thus expected to "tailor narratives we consume to be able to relate to them, and do so by looking past superficial specificities to access the universal, human stories at their core." White critics, having never been placed in this position, tend to view the work of people of color as not *for them*—as excluded from the possibility of speaking to the universal—and therefore either ignore it or subject it to superficial

analysis. They need not do the work of multiple consciousness that, for most other audiences, is unavoidable. This is not an inevitable outcome of a particular social identity location, but a question of quotidian practices of situated imagining. As Huang puts it, being able to "resonate with stories from cultural contexts beyond our own is a mental muscle that gets developed through vigorous exercise. This trait is something POCs who are used to consuming art made mostly for the white audience are adept at." hooks makes a similar point about engagement with media and culture (including theory) when she argues that "diverse pleasures can be experienced, enjoyed even, because one transgresses, moves 'out of one's place.' For many of us, that movement requires pushing against oppressive boundaries set by race, sex, and class domination" ("Choosing the Margin" 15). There are interesting connections with transversal dialog here.

As Briana Toole suggests, in line with ideas about alienation as an agential capacity, we can build out from the knowledge of ourselves "to 'imaginatively grasp' the first-personal perspective of another epistemic agent" (59). It is therefore possible to cultivate sight beyond site—to "know what those agents know" (59)—by imagining what it is like to be another. The capacity for self-decentering allows us to meaningfully understand things outside of our bounded phenomenological conditions. This is no small feat, and the greater the difference between the individuals involved, the harder this process is to realize. To quote Toole, "this 'imaginative capacity' is more difficult the greater the social distance between epistemic agents" (59). Such a perspective helpfully balances the possibilities of alienated reason and the rational imagination with the forces of social situatedness. Because we are "better able to 'imaginatively grasp' the perspectives of those who are most like us, … some epistemic agents are better placed than others to know certain propositions" (60). It may be that those outside the epistemic center have a leg up in this process. After all, as Huang's analysis suggests, positions of epistemic subjugation teach people to adopt multifaceted worldviews through everyday practices of imaginative identification across differences.

The tendency toward internal multiplicity characteristic of particular social identity locations may therefore, under certain conditions, prime the subject to be receptive to heterogeneous ways of knowing. This cognitive groundwork, when combined with "both analysis and political struggle" (Hartsock 105), can be cultivated into a standpoint—an alienated achievement, which is secured at some personal expense, and enables distinctive kinds of purchase on elements of the social totality. Experiences of multiple-consciousness work to de-

velop one's imaginative capacity. This does not mean that knowledge is ever any less situated, but that some positions typically involve the more regular and intense practice of a particular identificatory skill. The resulting standpoints, necessarily stereoscopic as they are, both build and build upon our species' capacity for alienation. Through an internal (and often painful) multiplicity, they cultivate an awareness of the formation of power relations and of one's position within these. Of course, there is always a lively, contentious, and sometimes violent conversation occurring between different worldviews and epistemic frameworks; multiplicity is the everyday condition of social existence. But while all social discourses exist in heteroglossic cacophony, the uneven distribution of power ensures that they are differentially amplified. Some voices sound more loudly than others, and the dialogical quality of social existence is perhaps more conspicuous, on an individual level, when contentious dialogue is itself internalized.

Conclusion

I share Haraway's view that subjugated knowledges are no less partial than dominant knowledges; the margin is a situation just as much as the center. However, what I have been exploring in this essay is the argument that those subjected to quotidian experiences of multiple consciousness may be more prone to possessing distinctive insights. This is due to the need to more frequently and knowingly confront their condition as situated knowers and to understand the complexities of hegemonic discourses in order to better contest them. This issue of political contestation is a crucial one. Given standpoint theory's roots in Marxist approaches to class consciousness, any discussion of situated knowledge misses something crucial if it reduces the stakes to truthfulness alone.

Because one (particularly influential) strain of feminist standpoint epistemology emerged specifically in relation to debates around the nature of scientific knowledge, there has been a tendency to overlook the fact that it does not simply strive to offer a more objective account of the world. As Patricia Hill Collins remarks, such an approach risks "decontextualizing standpoint theory from its initial moorings in a knowledge/power framework while simultaneously recontextualizing it in an apolitical discussion of feminist truth and method" ("Comment on Hekman" 375). In reminding ourselves of standpoint epistemology's role as the theoretical wing of consciousness-raising praxis, we

foreground the fact that the "amount of privilege granted to a particular standpoint lies less in its internal criteria in being truthful, … and more in the power of a group in making its standpoint prevail over other equally plausible perspectives" ("Comment on Hekman" 380). The questions of *who knows best* and of *who imagines what* come with high political stakes.

Let me conclude by summarizing three key ideas regarding the situated imagination:

1. What we tend to imagine is shaped by our social emplacement (*rooting*);
2. Going beyond immediate lived experience to think with the other is a process dependent upon the operations of the rational imagination (*shifting*);
3. Some of us have greater experience of rooting and shifting because of the demands for identification across difference that stem from engagement with hegemonic discourses from a non-hegemonic position. This includes, but is not limited to, our imaginative engagement with creative media.

Point Idea 2 means that point idea 3 is not absolute—we can imagine and appreciate the world beyond our situations—but point idea 3 helps to explain why visions of a better world so often emerge from positions beyond the social center.

My position throughout this essay has been that reason and imagination are related processes of alienated cognition, both of which are implicated in navigating identity and difference. I have paid particular attention to their role in the cultivation of transversal dialogue, noting that non-empirical knowledge, crucial for building political solidarity, is necessarily a result of alienation, in the sense of the capacity for abstract reasoning beyond raw sensory data that sapience affords. The ability to think beyond immediacy and personal circumstances, makes it possible (though not easy) to escape from a fixed position. Indeed, it is through the labor of attempting to see otherwise that new perspectives, new selves, and new sites might be generated. The self is remade in the seeing.

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Thought Experiments
Imagination in Practice

Sofia Pedrini

> The scientist must lack prejudice to a degree where he can look at the most "self-evident" facts or concepts without necessarily accepting them, and, conversely, allow his imagination to play with the most unlikely possibilities.
> *Selye, qtd in Kuhn 226*

Abstract *This paper proposes that thought experiments (TEs) should be understood as imaginative practices based on narrative construction. I consider them practices because they require active collaboration between the author and an engaged reader—essential to the TE's execution and success. These practices are also imaginative since the reader, guided by the author's narrative, constructs an imaginary scenario that brings the author's theoretical perspective into view. The purpose of this scenario is to prompt the reader to realize or intuit something crucial about the author's theoretical position. Rather than merely presenting a perspective, a TE supports a thesis or claim through this imaginatively shared theoretical perspective. Additionally, I describe the reader's participation as a form of immersion within the TE's imagined scenario. Finally, by drawing an analogy with real-world experiments, I argue that TEs function as a social imaginative practice, fostering discussion and dialectical exchange within specific scientific communities.*

Keywords *Thought Experiments; Imagination; Immersion; Scientific Practices; Social Practices; Epistemology; Phenomenology*

1. Introduction

The notion of thought experiment refers to a particular kind of experiment performed "in the mind." Philosophers and scientists have used thought experiments (hereafter TEs) in their writings to support their theories, strengthen their arguments, or make a case for a particular claim (see e.g. Williamson). Some of the most famous TEs in philosophy are Plato's *Gyges' Ring*, Descartes's *Evil Genius*, Locke's *The Prince and the Cobbler*, Nozick's *Experience Machine*, Putnam's *Twin Earth*, Jackson's *Knowledge Argument*, Thomson's *Ailing Violinist*, and Chalmers's *Zombies*. Some influential scientific TEs include Galilei's *Falling Bodies*, Stevinus's *Inclined Plane*, Einstein's *Moving Trains* (*and Elevators*), Maxwell's *Demon*, and Newton's *Bucket*.[1] Besides philosophy and the physical sciences, TEs have been employed in various fields, from politics and economics to the fine arts (e.g. Frappier, Meynell and Brown; Brown and Fehige). Despite this variety, TEs are easily recognizable as a representation of a counterfactual or fictional situation that the authors insert alongside, and in support of, their arguments.

In this paper, I propose that TEs ought to be understood as imaginative practices based on narrative construction. I first present the structure of TEs and argue that the imaginary scenario is constructed to prompt the reader to realize or intuit something crucial about the author's theoretical perspective. In my view, the imaginary scenario is necessary to bring the author's theoretical perspective into the thought experimenter's view, and yet, I argue, the TE does not merely show us a particular theoretical perspective, but aims at supporting a thesis or claim using that perspective.

Moreover, I analyze the dynamic between the author and the reader of a TE. As in our usual engagement with fiction, this dimension can be characterized as a specific norm-governed dynamic between the author and the reader: there are some "rules" that the author of a TE implicitly communicates through the narrative on how the reader must construct the imaginative scenario to properly engage in that TE. After constructing and immersing in the imaginary scenario, the reader must reason it out: to be performed, the TE requires the reader *to do something*. The idea is that, while reading the TE and reasoning on the imaginary scenario, the reader is performing or recreating the thought experiment—i.e., they are the thought experimenter.

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1 See Gendler, Thought Experiment chap. 1.

Finally, I propose that TEs can be considered a broader social practice, as they promote discussion and dialectical exchange within a specific scientific community. Just as we wouldn't consider an experimental research finished or complete when we gain data, as the data must be interpreted, discussed, and where possible replicated, we should not consider a TE-based research finished or complete when we (as readers) gain an intuition, for we still must interpret the intuition, discuss our interpretations, and replicate the TE where possible.

I proceed in the following way. In §2, I examine the structure of TEs through Gendler's perspective and those of Binini, Huemer, and Molinari, using Jackson's *Knowledge Argument* as a case study. I choose these views as they best illustrate the connection between imaginary scenarios, argumentation, and reasoning. In §3, I argue that "imaginary" in TEs refers not to the impossibility of the scenarios but to the fact that they are created and reasoned through imagination, as demonstrated by Galilei's *Falling Bodies* TE. In §4, I analyze the different types of imagination and argue that imaginative immersion is crucial for TEs. This leads to an exploration of the author-reader dynamic in TEs in §5.[2] Finally, in §6, I argue that TEs are practices embedded within scientific communities and conclude that they are also *social* practices, thereby shedding light on the role of TEs—and, consequently, imagination—in scientific and philosophical debates.

2. The Structure of Thought Experiments

To illustrate how the imaginary scenario of a TE is necessary to bring the author's theoretical perspective into the thought experimenter's view, I analyze one of the most influential TEs in contemporary philosophy, Frank Jackson's *Knowledge Argument*, through the lens of Gendler's tripartite structure of TE narrative. According to Gendler, in a TE:

> (1) An imaginary scenario is described. (2) An argument is offered that attempts to establish the correct evaluation of the scenario. (3) This evalua-

2 The standard way of engaging with a TE is through reading. One might argue, however, that my points should not be limited to this way, as a TE could also be presented orally to an audience. For ease of exposition, I will focus on the author-reader dynamic in the following discussion, though I believe my account extends to an 'author-audience' dynamic as well.

> tion of the imagined scenario is then taken to reveal something about cases beyond the scenario (*Thought Experiment* 21).[3]

In his 1982 paper "Epiphenomenal Qualia," Jackson writes:

> Mary is a brilliant scientist who is, for whatever reason, forced to investigate the world from a black and white room via a black and white television monitor. She specializes in the neurophysiology of vision and acquires, let us suppose, all the physical information there is to obtain about what goes on when we see ripe tomatoes, or the sky, and use terms like 'red', 'blue', and so on. […] What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a color television monitor? Will she learn anything or not? It seems just obvious that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it. (130)

Jackson is here building an argument against physicalism, that is, a metaphysical reductionist position according to which everything that exists is fundamentally constituted by physical entities. Jackson's argument aims to show that there are phenomenal facts, i.e., first-person experiential facts—such as the experience of seeing a color—and these facts are not reducible to physical facts, i.e., third-person, impersonal facts. To do so, the author describes the imaginary scenario of Mary who has spent her life in a black-and-white room, while knowing all the physical facts about colors; at one point, Mary leaves the room and sees colors for the first time, e.g., red.[4] This imaginary scenario conveys to the reader the following intuition: Mary learns something new when she first sees the color red. Even with an exhaustive knowledge of physical facts about colors, Mary in the black-and-white room would still lack knowledge of the phenomenal fact of "seeing red." The tripartite structure of this TE is the following: (1) Mary's scenario is described; (2) The evaluation of the scenario is offered: Mary learns something new when she sees colors for the first time; (3) This evaluation is taken to reveal that (a) phenomenal facts are not deducible

3 See also Wiltsche's analysis of the 3 stages of a TE.

4 For a proper analysis of the relevance of each single TE, it must be contextualized in the philosophical or scientific debate their author was engaging in; in Jackson's case, the Knowledge Argument against Physicalism. For the purposes of this paper, I gloss over more specific conclusions drawn from this TE and the theoretical and philosophical debates this argument is involved with, to rather focus on how it works. See also Chalmers 103–104.

from or implied by physical facts, or phenomenal facts are not physical facts, ergo (b) physicalism is false (not everything is reducible to physical facts).

Similarly, another interesting view proposes that TEs are "games" of theoretical perspective-taking (Binini et al. 1). In this view, TEs are "particularly apt to express a specific theoretical perspective through the use of imagination" (1), as they "invite the readers to engage in 'games of perspectives'" (7). Binini et al. draw on Walton's theory of fiction, particularly his central notion of make-believe games, which suggests that imagination is not merely a private experience but can also be conceived as "an activity that can be shared with others and involves a *normative dimension*" (4, emphasis mine)—as seen in children's pretend play or actors embodying a role. From this view, TEs can be understood as specific forms of make-believe games. Mary's TE is a make-believe game in which we, as readers, adopt Jackson's theoretical perspective on phenomenal facts. This imaginative practice leads us to take Mary's scenario as supporting Jackson's claim, ultimately serving as a counterexample to physicalism.

TE is not merely a question of showing the author's perspective through an imaginary scenario, but necessarily involves a "process of reasoning carried out [by the thought experimenter] within the context of a well-articulated imaginary scenario to answer a specific question about a non-imaginary situation" (Gendler, *Thought Experiment X*). A good TE thus is one that effectively presents the author's theoretical perspective, making it compelling to the reader using imagination and the intuition drawn from the imagined scenario. Through Mary's scenario, we can adopt Jackson's theoretical perspective. Yet, the TE does not merely show us a particular theoretical perspective but aims to support the author's thesis or claim.

3. The Scenario is *Imaginary*

An interesting and controversial aspect of TEs is the nature of the scenarios described by authors to support their theories or claims: they are imaginary. It is important to clarify that "imaginary" does not imply that these scenarios are always impossible.[5] Although TEs often concern cases that presumably cannot

5 The notions of possibility and impossibility can be categorized into three dimensions: nomologically (i.e., physically, biologically, chemically, etc.) possible and impossible, logically (or conceptually) possible and impossible and metaphysically possible and

occur in our world, they can also describe scenarios that could have occurred, i.e., counterfactual scenarios.

An example of a TE that addresses a potentially real-world case is Galileo Galilei's *Falling Bodies* TE, which aimed to disprove a specific prediction of Aristotelian physics regarding the laws of motion for falling bodies. This TE aims at making a case against Aristotelian physics according to which heavy bodies would fall faster than lighter ones, thereby supporting Galilei's view that bodies of different weights fall with the same acceleration in vacuo (see De Angelis xvii). In a central passage of his 1638 "Two New Sciences", through the character of Salviati, Galilei states that:

> [E]ven without further experiment, it is possible to prove clearly, by means of a short and conclusive argument, that a heavier body does not move more rapidly than a lighter one provided both bodies are of the same material and in short such as those mentioned by Aristotle. (De Angelis 44)[6]

Further on, to support his view, Galilei describes an imaginary scenario as follows: imagine standing atop the Tower of Pisa, dropping two stones of different sizes, and then imagining them joined together by a rope as they fall.

> If then we take two bodies whose natural speeds are different, it is clear that on uniting the two, the more rapid one will be partly retarded by the slower, and the slower will be fastened by the swifter […]. But if this is true, and if a large stone moves with a speed of, say, eight grades, while a smaller one moves with a speed of four, then when they are united, the system will move with a speed less than eight; but the two stones when tied together make a stone larger than that which before moved with a speed of eight. Hence the heavier body moves with less speed than the lighter; an effect which is contrary to your supposition. Thus, you see, it can't be true that the heavier mobile moves faster than the lightest. (De Angelis 44)

Through this TE, Galileo shows that, if we assume Aristotle's physics, we arrive at a contradiction, and the way out is to "infer therefore that large and small

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impossible (see Gendler and Hawthorne). In a TE, the imaginary scenario does not need to be impossible in any of these respects.

6 The following quotations are taken from De Angelis' translation of Galileo Galilei's Two New Sciences for Modern Readers. For simplicity I will refer to the pages in this translation.

bodies move with the same speed provided they have the same specific weight" (45).[7] What interests us is that in this TE, the imaginary scenario could have been realized in a real experiment; Galileo "could have performed the experiment" (Brown, "Thought Experiments Since" 3). However, he chose to conduct it "in the mind," arguably for the sake of simplicity and practicality. The strength of the TE lies in the argumentation that arises from reasoning about the imaginary scenario under consideration. Here, "imaginary" refers to the creation of the scenario "in our mind," with the reasoning process conducted in imagination, which serves as "the medium in which TEs are performed" (Wiltsche 345). Thus, the role of imagination in a TE warrants further exploration.

4. Thought Experiments as *Imaginative* Practices

Imagination is a widely discussed concept in contemporary philosophical debates, yet it is challenging to define, with philosophers disagreeing on its phenomenology—specifically, what precisely happens when one imagines something (see Kind). Nevertheless, there is general agreement that imagination comes in different types or kinds (see Dokic and Arcangeli). What we usually refer to when considering imagination is what philosophers call sensory imagination, which involves mental imagery. When I imagine a red apple, I form a mental image of a red apple. Mental imagery can be multimodal, that is, it occurs in different sensory modalities beyond vision. I can imagine seeing an

7 Gendler reconstructs the TE as follows: "Imagine that a heavy and a light body are strapped together and dropped from a significant height. What would the Aristotelian expect to be the natural speed of their combination? On the one hand, the lighter body should slow down the heavier one while the heavier body speeds up the lighter one, so their combination should fall with a speed that lies between the natural speeds of its components. (That is, if the heavy body falls at a rate of 8, and the light body at a rate of 4, then their combination should fall at a rate between the two (cf. Galilei 1638/1989: 107).) On the other hand, since the weight of the two bodies combined is greater than the weight of the heavy body alone, their combination should fall with a natural speed greater than that of the heavy body. (That is, if the heavy body falls at a rate of 8 and the light body at a rate of 4, their combination should fall at a rate greater than 8.) But then the combined body is predicted to fall both more quickly, and more slowly, than the heavy body alone (cf. Galilei 1638/1989: 107–8). The way out of this paradox is to assume that the natural speed with which a body falls is independent of its weight: 'both great and small bodies … are moved with like speeds' (Galilei 1638/1989: 109)" (Intuition, Imagination 27–28).

apple, but I can also imagine (or form a mental image of) the sound of a piano sonata, the smell of a flower, the punch of a friend, or the taste of melon. These are all cases of *sensory* imagination (see Nanay). This type of imagination does not appear to be necessary for every kind of TE, or at least, it seems that it does not significantly affect the results of a TE if one vividly visualizes the Tower of Pisa and the two stones. It seems that the power of a TE derives from something beyond this.

There's another kind of imagination discussed in contemporary debates, *propositional* imagination, that need not involve mental imagery. Some examples are imagining that all wars on earth cease or imagining that my next paper will be extremely influential. This kind of imagination involves "merely imaginatively representing that something is the case, similar to merely entertaining or assuming a proposition" (Myers 3252). Yet, in TE we are doing more than merely entertaining some propositions. As we saw in the previous section, we are engaged and actively participate in a TE. Binini et al. draw on the notion of games of make-believe to describe this active engagement, noting that "players tend to actively participate in the game of make-believe" (Binini et al. 5) by employing first-person imaginative engagement. To clarify the nature of this imaginative experience, it is necessary to analyze this specific mode of engagement. According to Binini et al., this engagement can take two forms:

> [O]ne can [1] imagine oneself in the shoes of others and identify with (one of) the characters, or [2] imagine to observe the scenarios described from another (e.g., the narrator's) point of view. (Binini et al. 5)

The first form of first-person imaginative engagement [1] corresponds to *empathic* imagination which is the form of imagination we employ when we imagine being another person (see Smith). More precisely, it is imagining being the other person "from the inside" or from a first-person perspective. Interestingly, one may claim that some kind of empathic imagination is fundamental for performing a TE. Indeed, many TE narratives—mainly the philosophical ones—seem to be constructed to make the reader empathically imagine being, i.e., take the first-person perspective of the main character. In Mary's case, it seems like Jackson wants us to take Mary's perspective, to imagine being in her shoes, to understand *what it is like* to be in those circumstances described by the

imaginative scenario.[8] Is it necessary, though, to take the perspective of a character to perform a TE? The reply is negative: it is not necessary to empathically imagine being a fictional character of a TE in order to perform it, as it does not happen in Galileo's TE and many other TEs.

What, then, is the distinctive imaginative experience involved in all TEs? The answer lies in what Binini et al. identify as the second form of first-person imaginative engagement [2]: imagining oneself as observing the scenario from the narrator's perspective, thereby adopting the thought experimenter's stance. This form of engagement is best understood as *imaginative immersion*. According to Wiltsche, immersion "consists in the active bracketing and/or modification of certain parts of our background knowledge" (354), enabling us to pretend that the imaginary scenario is actually the case. In TEs, we immerse ourselves in the scenarios described by the author, going beyond merely entertaining a proposition. We engage with these scenarios *as if* they were real, reasoning about their appropriate descriptions, consequences, and effects. By following the trajectory outlined in the narrative, we explore the implications of the imaginary scenario as though it was real.[9]

Immersing oneself in a TE does not necessarily involve sensory imagination nor empathic imagination with a character of the TE and it seems to mean more than just propositionally imagining the scenario. Immersing oneself in the imaginary scenario means taking it as if *it were the case* (see Chasid). Moreover, through the narrative, the reader is "called" to take or adhere to—even only momentarily—the author's theoretical view on the scenario.

The presence of an imaginary scenario and our necessary immersion in it highlight how reductionist accounts, such as those of Norton and Williamson—who argue that the cognitive value of a TE lies solely in its argument, reducing TEs to mere arguments while dismissing the rest as mere ornamentation, especially regarding imagination as a non-essential embellishment—fail to capture the essential scope of a TE. The next section

8 There are some TEs, notably Nozick's Experience Machine and Thomson's Ailing Violinist, where the author wants us to reflect on what we would do or how we would act if we were in those circumstances, that is, those TEs where the reader's sense of agency and their decision-making, with all its implications and consequences, are relevant for the TE itself.

9 This form of immersion is comparable to engaging with a book, movie, or theatrical performance, where we imagine the world, facts, characters, stories, and consequences. For a discussion of immersion in fiction, see Sartre's account, which argues that such immersion does not necessarily require the creation of mental images.

aims to better understand this scope by analyzing the dynamics between the author and the reader in a TE, which mirror the engagement we have with narratives—another distinct form of imaginative immersion. If we consider imaginative immersion as a form of imaginative experience, it becomes clear that imagination is central to TEs, challenging reductionist views.

5. The Dynamics Between Author and Reader

My analysis of the dynamics between the author and the reader of a TE rests on two elements, which help clarify the structure of TEs and allow me to argue that TE is a *practice* where the thought experimenter achieves conclusions. The two elements of the TE reader-author dynamics are:

A. The strategic directions of the author of the TE for constructing the imaginary scenario;
B. The engagement or active participation of the reader.

Let's start with the strategic directions the author gives to construct the imaginary scenario (A). The ability of the TE's author lies in the construction of a particular narrative that can make their own theoretical perspective available to the reader by making a case for their theory. How does this happen? As in our engagement with narratives, when we engage in a TE, our imagination does not freely wander but follows the narrator's instruction on what to imagine. The narratives guide the reader in a particular way, as Wiltsche explains:

> [B]y following my instruction to imagine [e.g.] Bart Simpson, you immersed yourself in the quasi-world of *The Simpsons* and thus accepted certain limitations to your imagining. The concept "Bart Simpson" contains what has become known to you and your epistemic community about the kind of object in question. (Wiltsche 352)

When we follow instructions on what to imagine, we "choose to immerse ourselves in a quasi-world by staying within the boundaries that are prescribed by the concepts" (353) and are "encapsulated" (356) in the TE narrative. We could decide to imagine something which is incompatible with the concept "Bart Simpson," or we could "inadvertently fail to stay within the boundaries of what

the concept prescribes" (352). In such cases, we fail to immerse ourselves into the "quasi-world" of *The Simpsons*.

Binini et al. also stress the importance of the rules that "guide the readers' imagination" for properly constructing the imaginative scenario, "if one would refuse to imagine the given scenario, one would not play the game in an authorized way" (5).[10] Following the TE narrative, we implicitly agree on following the author's direction to "fairly" play the game of theoretical perspective-taking. These directions on what to imagine are not different from what happens when we normally engage in narratives: the author describes the characters, events, or scenes we must imagine while reading fiction, a history book, or any other book.[11] What is peculiar about the particular kind of narrative of the TE is the *aim* of the practice itself, that is "[…] to bolster or test our theories or concepts" (Wilkes 10). According to Wilkes, the "purpose in hand" is crucial for understanding what counts as relevant or not in our imaginative scenario (10). The success of a TE lies then in the construction of a particular narrative which can make *relevant* parts of the author's theoretical perspective available to the reader. In TE's case, the narrative drives us to *properly* establish the phenomenon (Brown, "Thought experiments since" 4) under analysis in imagination.[12]

We can now analyze the second element (B) of the author-reader dynamic: the interesting feature of TEs is a particular engagement or constructive participation of its reader (Gendler, *Thought Experiment* XIII). This element is adequately captured by the notion of "game" used by Binini et al. to refer to TEs:

> These games require active engagement from the reader, who has to accept the author's invitation—as well as the rules of the game—and cognitively immerse themselves into the fictional scenario, which allows them to critically assess it and to partake in the dialectical exchange of perspectives. (7–8)

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10 As Wiltsche claims, TE narratives instruct us about what we are supposed to imagine, but they "also give us information about what we are not supposed to imagine (Cf. Davies 35). In part this is done through the target-thesis that automatically narrows our focus to certain aspects and leaves out others. But it is also done through the determination of the quasi-world in which the TE must be embedded" (Wiltsche 358).

11 More must be said about the relation between our usual engagement with narratives and TEs than I can do here.

12 Wilkes stresses the importance of properly establishing a phenomenon in imagination for the reliability of TEs.

The reader is called to *follow* the TE narratives, to accept their rules to properly construct the imaginary scenario and reason or reflect on it. As Gooding suggests, the reader's "personal participation is essential: it is what makes a thought experiment an *experiment* rather than another form of argumentation" (281).

To sum up, TEs can be considered a practice as (1) they essentially involve a particular dimension between author and reader (in the next section, we will see that this "minimal" dimension becomes a full social dimension of TEs), and (2) the reader is called in and asked to actively engage in the TE. We can now fully understand why I consider TEs *imaginative* practices: they essentially require immersion in an imaginary scenario, i.e. they do not involve merely entertaining an imaginary situation, but they require an effort to take on some beliefs and suspend others, with the goal of testing, challenging or (simply) confirming our theories, beliefs, and opinions. We've seen so far that TEs require collaboration between author and reader, and a particular engagement from the part of the reader; next we explore how TEs aim at the "intuitive grasp" of the author's theoretical claim built on the imaginative scenario. However, in the following paragraph, I argue that a TE does not end with intuition, but that this practice is embedded in larger social practices and open to public discussion of the results, precisely as non-imaginative experiments—those performed in the lab—are.

6. A *Social* Imaginative Practice: Interpretation, Discussion, and Variants

TEs can be considered imaginative practices where the reader comes to realize something about the relevant claim of the author's theoretical perspective, by immersing in and reasoning out the imaginary scenario. The results of a TE have been famously described by Daniel Dennett's definition of TEs as "intuition pumps" (*Elbow Room* 12, 17–18): TEs aim at pumping the relevant intuition in the reader. The analogy with actual experiments allows me to consider the *intuition* of a TE as analogous to the *data* of an actual experiment: actual experiments aim at gaining data, analogously TEs aim at gaining or "pumping" intuitions.[13]

13 The analogy with actual experiment is widely discussed in contemporary philosophical debates on the topic, and is already found in Mach.

> Intuition is neither a doxastic attitude, such as a belief or judgement, nor a mere tendency to form such an attitude, but rather a presentation: a conscious state or event that, like perceptual experience, directly and immediately presents the world as being a certain way (Bengson 708).[14]

When we have an intuition, it *seems* to us that things are the way we intuit them.[15] The intuition we gain in Mary's TE, for example, is that it seems to us that Mary learns something new when she goes out of the black-and-white room and sees the colors for the first time. This is the result we gain from Mary's TE.

We can understand how the main components of a TE, i.e., imagination and intuition, are related to each other in the following way: through the construction of the TE imaginative scenario, the author aims at making the relevant intuition compelling to the reader who must actively engage in the TE. The author can give proper instructions (through the narrative) to pump the relevant intuition into the reader. Intuition can thus be considered the 'data' of TEs, subject to discussion in order to work out its implications. This aspect of TEs is derivable from the analogy with non-imaginative scientific experiments (see Brown and Fehige) and is central to my understanding of TEs as a social practice: just as we would not consider experimental research concluded when we get the data, similarly, we should not consider a TE-based research concluded when we (as readers) get the relevant intuition. As Nersessian writes, "a thought experimental outcome, just as a real-world experimental outcome, needs to be interpreted and usually investigated further" (310).

Considering Mary's case again, Dennett is not convinced by Jackson's interpretation of the TE's result/intuition and proposes a "counter thought experiment" (see Brown, "Counter Thought Experiments") to disprove Jackson's TE. Dennett writes:

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14 Intuition is a problematic notion as it is claimed to be culturally and socially determined. In this paper, I set aside the epistemological problem of intuition, i.e., whether intuitions can be reliable, and how they lead to knowledge, if they even can. Even though it's a central issue especially in meta-philosophy (the philosophical investigation on the methodology of philosophy itself), I'm interested here in understanding what intuition is, what kind of mental state it is—what happens when we have an intuition. See also Chudnoff for an analysis of intuition, and Hopp on the role of intuitions in a TE.

15 Like perception, intuition is fallible: our intuitions can be mistaken.

> And so, one day, Mary's captors decided it was time for her to see colors. As a trick, they prepared a bright blue banana to present as her first color experience ever. Mary took one look at it and said, "Hey! You tried to trick me! Bananas are yellow, but this one is blue!" Her captors were dumfounded. How did she do it? "Simple," she replied. "You have to remember that I know everything—absolutely everything—that could ever be known about the physical causes and effects of color vision. So of course before you brought the banana in, I had already written down, in exquisite detail, exactly what physical impression a yellow object or a blue object (or a green object, etc.) would make on my nervous system. So I already knew exactly what thoughts I would have (because, after all, the 'mere disposition' to think about this or that is not one of your famous qualia, is it?). I was not in the slightest surprised by my experience of blue (what surprised me was that you would try such a second-rate trick on me). I realize it is *hard for you to imagine* that I could know so much about my reactive dispositions that the way blue affected me came as no surprise. Of course it's hard for you to imagine. It's hard for anyone to imagine the consequences of someone knowing absolutely everything physical about anything! (*Consciousness Explained* 399–400)

Dennett's point is that if Mary knows all the physical facts, she would also know what a yellow banana looks like because, if she is omniscient about colors, she must be able to know a banana looks like (i.e., we cannot accept Jackson's conclusion, and should instead conclude that Jackson assumed phenomenal facts cannot be derived from physical facts). To prove his point, Dennett proposes this variant of the TE where the resulting intuition no longer concerns the relationship between phenomenal and physical facts. Instead, it shifts to Mary's response to her surprised captors: "It is *hard for you to imagine*" being omniscient about colors (and about anything). If we can't fully imagine what that would entail, we can't have a reliable intuition about what Mary feels when she steps out of her room—meaning Jackson's conclusion is not reliable.

This Jackson-Dennett exchange illustrates how TEs serve as arenas for discussion. As Brown and Fehige note, TEs can be "rethought" (9), opening space for proposing variants.[16] When we gain an intuition, we must interpret

16 "A thought experiment proposed by one scholar invites others to explore a certain fictional scenario to arrive at a clear-cut conclusion—which might nevertheless run against the interlocutor's or the reader's intuitions. When participating in the game, these interlocutors will likely propose variations, be it because they fill in the blanks with details that run against the author's intentions, or because they vary the scenario by revising some of the principles of generation. In this way, they can critically adapt

it, discuss those interpretations, and propose alternative ones. This reveals that, much like a non-imaginative experiment, the practice of TEs is embedded within the relevant scientific community. As such, TEs are a *social* practice with the specific function of fostering dialectical exchange within a scientific or philosophical community (cf. Binini et al. 20).

7. Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that TEs should be understood as imaginative practices grounded in narrative construction. The narrative of a TE describes an imaginary scenario in which the reader must immerse themselves and reason to arrive at the relevant intuition that sheds light on the author's theoretical perspective. My analysis has highlighted the central role of imaginative immersion in the execution and success of TEs, thus emphasizing the role of imagination in epistemic practices—particularly in engaging with philosophical ideas and generating deeper insights into the theories of scientists and philosophers.

Furthermore, I have argued that TEs are social practices, as they foster discussion and dialectical exchange within scientific communities. They serve as arenas where intuitions can be discussed, revisited, and rejected. TEs are also critical spaces where we can test the powers and constraints of our imagination. To what extent can we rely on the intuitions we derive from imagination? What scenarios are imaginable, and which are too difficult to imagine? How much immersion is necessary to reach a reliable conclusion? How can we better facilitate discussions of the results and criticisms of the premises?

Many questions remain open, and much work is needed to fully understand the implications and applications of TEs across various fields, including economics and politics. For instance, one pressing question is whether imagination—and TEs—hold social power in promoting alternative models of society, economics, or relations between states.

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the scenario to their own theoretical needs and dialectical purposes" (Binini et al. 6). See Molinari for an analysis of the role of the imagination in scientific practice, where "clashes between imaginers" play a crucial role in the dialectic exchange between scientists or philosophers. Following the analogy of the actual experiment, one could argue that variants of TEs correspond to replications of the experiment.

By revealing the intrinsic connection between imagination and intuition in TEs, my analysis aims to pave the way for further research into the relationship between theoretical understanding and the practical uses of imagination. Moreover, through the analogy with non-imaginative experiments, I argue that, although our imaginative scenarios and the intuitions they elicit are imperfect, we can strive for a better understanding through ongoing discussion. This makes TEs, like any scientific experiment, a social enterprise that aims to expand our collective understanding.

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Unfolding the Architecture of the Imago-Machine

Spatializing Sexual Difference through Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* Duology

Anja H. Lind

Abstract *Luce Irigaray's project of sexual difference is an essentially speculative endeavor—a feminist worldbuilding directed toward an "impossible" future. As such, it lends itself to analysis and development through the shared mode of speculative fiction, a conjunction seldom subject to critical attention. This paper reads sexual difference through Arkady Martine's* Teixcalaan *duology in order to spatialize it, probing the architectures, urbanity, and spatiotemporality of the phallus and Irigaray's two lips. Where the Teixcalaanli Empire exemplifies phallogocentrism, with a rationally ordered panoptic City of spear-pointed architecture, the residents of the independent and peripheral Lsel Station pose an ostensible sexual difference—alongside linguistic and imperial distinction—in corporeally manifesting an Irigarayan* Sex Which Is Not One*, expressed in a consequently heterogeneous architecture: vernacular, impermanent, fluvial and tactile. Moreover, the negotiation of this difference, enabled by the negative space of an irrevocably Other alien, manifests a stirring posthuman testing grounds for Irigaray's triple dialectic, pushing sexual difference into unfamiliar (outer) space.*

Keywords *Luce Irigaray;* A Memory Called Empire*;* A Desolation Called Peace*; SF; Science Fiction; Speculative Fiction; Feminist Architecture; Space Opera*

The Time of Sexual Difference: Reading Irigaray with Speculative Fiction

The future, for Luce Irigaray, has always been at stake from the outset. A philosopher, feminist, psychoanalyst and linguist, her life's work—the philosophy of sexual difference—has a favored tense: the future anterior, "the

only tense that openly addresses the question of the future without … pre-empting it" (Grosz, *Architecture* 147). Writing from the perspective of a future looking backwards is one of the many linguistic strategies Irigaray employs in pursuit of a sexuate philosophy, theory, and writing. This attempt at *écriture féminine*—a writing speculatively bespeaking female sexual specificity—builds upon an insistent and pressing challenge to *phallogocentrism*: contesting man as the sole historical and continued subject in every domain, his phallus the signifier suturing language to rationality, which woman may only ever reflect, an imperfect, empty copy. For woman to have a positive space, and place—an imaginary of authentic, heterogenous difference, linguistic, theoretical, morphological; a new culture, a new ethics, a new society, which accounts for (at least) two subjects—a revolution is required of "the whole problematic of space and time" (*Ethics* 7). The future anterior works as a grammatic parallel to the syntactic-semantic escape from phallogocentrism that her project attempts, Irigaray describing herself as a "political militant for the impossible," demanding "what is yet to be as the only possibility of a future" (*I Love* 10). Sexual difference is both literally and figuratively penned in a future tense: speculatively casting forth an imagination of woman, heterogenous; while grammatically casting back as if this speculation, this future state, has been met, in adroit critique of our present.

Irigaray's revolutionary project, thus, is dual: a critical diagnosis of the storied and unceasing elision of the Other, in philosophies both ancient and contemporary, and a productive projection of this difference forward in time. What would it mean if woman's lips, rather than man's phallus, served as the morphological basis for thought and philosophy, privileging fluidity, plurality and touch as opposed to solidity, singularity and visuality? If a placental economy of relationality and interdependence took the place of a patriarchal economy of ownership? If the maternal relation—as font of all life, all difference—were privileged, rather than repressed? (Not as a hierarchical *replacement*, but as a *complement* such that sexual *difference*—not crude similitude—may be appropriately preserved?) And how, this paper inquires, might these shifts change how we think about space, place and architecture?

While Irigaray's criticism has become a mainstay of feminist critique, her speculative, sexuate ontology was dismissed as mere biological essentialism upon its reception to the Anglophone academy in 1985, social constructivism suspicious of her central recourse to the body. With the recent New Materialist return to ontology, alongside the broader ontological and elemental turns in the last two decades, however, this side of her work is beginning to see seri-

ous reappraisal within feminist scholarship and beyond; particularly with respect to embodiment, her scholarship remains one of the few serious and indispensable theorizations of the vulva. Her contemporaries were nevertheless quick to point out that the critical work ostensibly precluded these latter more experimental speculations—"If specular logic dominates all Western theoretical discourse," Toril Moi inquires, neatly summarizing the bind, "how can Luce Irigaray's doctoral thesis escape its pernicious influence?" (138). Her proponents—those who seek to maintain not only the criticism but the productive speculation too—have taken this bind seriously. Drucilla Cornell suggests that it is "feminine writing" and "language"—*écriture féminine*—and critically the *literary* that may allow a movement beyond phallocracy, "in its power to evoke, and indeed to challenge, the very conventions of intelligibility which make us 'see' the world from the viewpoint of the masculine" (185). Yanbing Er accords: it is "the unknown futurity inaugurated by the trajectories of sexual difference"—its speculative aspect—which "demands a dimension of inquiry that is inevitably aesthetic" (369). Literature, in other words, has the potential to *estrange* and *defamiliarize* our present—to imagine bodies, and cultures, and rationality, otherwise, organized around a different metaphysics; absent of, or in fantastical competition with, the phallic contemporary. Fiction offers a place for this impossibility; *speculative* fiction grants the future tense from which to look back, anterior.

It is remarkable, then, that precisely speculative fiction—not only the privileged genre of critical theory *per se* (Freedman), but the very literature of (cognitive) estrangement (Suvin)—appears in neither Cornell nor Er's account, and is almost absent altogether from scholarship on Irigaray. It is not that the two areas never meet: her theories make for fruitful interlocution with all speculative fiction imagining "female sexuality and female bodies in altogether different terms" (James 35), as in Laurel Bollinger's considerations of the placental economy in Octavia Butler's work. There has, however, been an astonishingly slow uptake of the *reverse*: reading Irigaray and sexual difference with and through such speculative fictions. This is presently the almost sole purview of Anna Bunting-Branch's superb doctoral thesis, where she astutely argues for the use of speculative fiction as a methodological approach to Irigaray's oeuvre, both as it "allows the speculative question of sexual difference to unfold in spacetimes other than those already subjected to dominant logic" (24), and because speculative fiction is a mode poignantly consonant with Irigaray's project:

> From her evocation of future horizons and alternative realities, to her interrogation of the relation between subject and world, and the shifting scales from microcosmic to the macrocosmic, the rhetoric of Luce Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference has deep resonance with the epic scope of the science fictional imagination. (201)

Tracing these resonances—thinking sexual difference *with* speculative fiction—allows us to highlight and interrogate imaginative repositories which may yet prove critical for the real implementation of sexual difference in our time. It is not enough to demand the impossible, nor to theorize that sole point of impossibility at a distant remove from the present; one must also be able to imagine its enactment, to identify the possible praxes such imagination demands.

Treading in Bunting-Branch's methodological footsteps, this paper turns to Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* duology as a prime site for Irigarayan intervention due to its central focus on *difference*—colonial, corporeal, species, and, I will argue, sexual too. A tale of imperialism at galactic proportions, the first novel navigates politicking in the City at the heart of Empire, while the second ventures to its outermost peripheries to negotiate with an existential alien threat. An Irigarayan lens is fruitful to analyze the novels—protagonist Mahit's struggle to imagine language and indeed existence beyond complete Imperial infiltration profoundly mirrors Irigaray's own struggle in imagining language and subjecthood beyond the male. Reading backwards, employing the novels as lens to analyze sexual difference, is even more productive: the Teixcalaanli Empire and Mahit's diminutive peripheral republic, Lsel Station, appear to profoundly instantiate both a phallocratic and an Irigarayan, labial logic respectively, with corporeal and, I suggest, spatiotemporal distinction in tow, allowing a poignant glimpse into how a woman's culture, in Irigaray's figuration, could function. Moreover, the duology's posthuman elements push sexual difference beyond the biological, which has traditionally been a site of friction for the full embrace of trans subjectivities and the extension to other realms of difference. Here, then, the practice of speculative *fiction*—free to imagine impossible corporealities and cultures—may critically inform Irigaray's practice of speculative *nonfiction*, imagining a sexuate culture perhaps similarly impossible, and yet, in her mind, the only possibility moving forward.

This paper proceeds by practicing Irigaray's sexuate imaginary in order to multiply emplace it: firstly, within feminist architectural studies, unpicking the spatial ramifications of the two lips; secondly, within the figurative, literary

space of Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* duology, examining how the speculative corporealities of sexual difference may be literalized; thirdly, within the literal space of these novels, reflecting these bodies and their metaphysics; and finally, in the negative, third space of the triple dialectic, Martine offering a model for relating in difference on the body of a literal (alien) negative. By placing sexual difference into this space (opera), I argue, we may derive critical insight into the precise workings of this impossible space-time that we must militantly pursue.

The Space of Sexual Difference: Emplacing the Two Lips

As the sole subject, man is naturally, metaphysically privileged, the teleological arrow of progress, *time*—active, forceful, rational—in dualistic tension with *space*, denigrated accordingly as the dark chaos of abject irrationality, a passive territory in need of penetrative exploration, domination, and order, woman's grand lot. "Over and over again," Doreen Massey writes, unpicking this intertwining of sex and space, "time is defined by such things as change, movement, history, dynamism; while space, rather lamely by comparison, is simply the absence of these things" (257). Space, at least prior to the spatial turn, occupies the same position as woman: only referentially, oppositionally defined, it "morphologically reproduces the passive attributes of femininity" (Grosz, *Architecture* 159). This is the backdrop for Irigaray's revolutionary call:

> The transition to a new age requires a change in our perception and conception of *space-time*, the *inhabiting of places*, and of *containers*, or *envelopes of identity*. It assumes and entails an evolution or a transformation of forms, of the relations of *matter* and *form* and of the interval *between*: the trilogy of the constitution of place. (*Ethics* 7–8)[1]

The future is what is centrally at stake here; space, time, and place must be rethought and reconfigured in order to recognize and produce woman's sexuate difference, to cultivate a new culture of respectful heterogeneity. Work in feminist architecture—the discipline taking Irigaray's spatial concerns most seriously—has done much to evidence the mutually implicated fates of woman and space: how "space is produced by and productive of gender relations" (Rendell 102), and how accordingly, the (literal) "man-made environments which

1 All emphases in original unless otherwise noted.

surround us reinforce conventional patriarchal definitions of women's role in society and spatially imprint those sexist messages on our daughters and sons" (Weisman 6). *Sexuate* emancipation thus requires *spatial*, *architectural* emancipation, both physically—Le Corbusier famously designed for the privilege of a dashing, six-foot-tall British policeman—but also metaphysically: "Western architecture is, by its very nature, a phallocentric discourse: containing, ordering, and representing through firmness, commodity and beauty" (Bloomer 13).

That architecture, and its attendant space, has been organized around those masculine properties inhering in the phallus—"Production, property (proprieté), order, form, unity, visibility, erection" (Irigaray, *Subject of Science* 77; see Bullock); the apotheosis of this economy of presence and (re)presentation in the skyscraper—is thus no surprise, not least in recalling Moi's contention that phallogocentrism inescapably conditions every aspect of our existence, be it philosophical *or* spatial. Mary McLeod works this bind in conversation with Irigaray: "[C]an you create different games—new forms and spaces—if your very existence is denied?" (186). So that woman might be afforded difference spatially, she requires an elaboration of difference *at all*, McLeod indicating that this may emerge through practicing Irigaray's imagination—Irigaray's project is, after all, fundamentally an attempt at emplacement, "to (re)discover a possible space for the feminine imaginary" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 165). As Cornell before me, I suggest that it is Irigaray's 1977 prose-poem "When Our Lips Speak Together" that might most powerfully perform and cultivate this heterogenous, female sexual difference, the morphological qualities of these two lips in turn tentatively informing speculations on sexuate spatiality in the work of her architectural proponents.

Playful, amorous—in a distinctly lesbian mode, unusual for her acutely heterosexed corpus—"Lips" is perhaps the most enduring passage of Irigaray's writing, a speculative and lyrical attempt to speak (as) woman, touching upon a myriad of her foundational ideas. Forwarding the lips as an alternative linguistic resource to the phallus—the two pairs of vulval labia serving for sexuate specificity,[2] while the pair of facial lips makes clear the tether to language—the poem structurally performs its metaphysical intervention. A dialogue at once between a woman and herself in self-affection, and between two sapphic lovers, floundering beneath the discourse of phallogocentrism

2 It is a deep irony that this very specificity is frequently erased by an anatomical misunderstanding of the vulval lips as "vaginal," in Carolyn Burke's original 1980 translation most egregiously (see Irigaray, "Lips" 72), but persisting in contemporary scholarship.

that leaves no space for her/their body, it melds the plural and the singular, never coalescing around one or the other, fluid, elusive and emergent, openly rejecting, indeed, any attempt at pinpointing a singular truth: "Why only one song, one speech, one text at a time?" Irigaray demands (of herself, her lover, the (male) audience)—"To seduce, to satisfy, to fill one of my 'holes'? With you, I don't have any. We are not lacks, voids awaiting sustenance, plenitude, fulfillment from the other. By our lips we are women" (*This Sex* 209–210), by our lips more than mere empty space, than Freudian *unheimlich*.[3] Taking the morphology of the lips—strictly: neither one nor two; always in (erogenous, tactile) contact; one always moving with the other—Irigaray experimentally unfolds a metaphysic in conscious abjection to the phallic. Where the phallus models a clear singularity, visually imposing ("castration anxiety" is a specular fiction, the gaze always at stake), the lips model multiplicity, plurality, multiple pairs in simultaneous contact; where man requires "an instrument to touch himself with: a hand, a woman, or some substitute" (*Speculum* 232), the lips are autoerotic; where the phallus sharply distinguishes between the self and the Other, the subject and the object, a stable either/or, the lips are always fluidly in contact with another, a subject rippling against and with another subject, both/and:

> We—you/I—are neither open nor closed … Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth. One is never separable from the other. You/I: we are always several at once. And how could one dominate the other? impose her voice, her tone, her meaning? One cannot be distinguished from the other; which does not mean that they are indistinct. (*This Sex* 209)

The lips are not the *opposite* of the phallus (hence, indeed, their absence in Freud, to whom, in an implacable logic of the Same, woman's castration precludes vulval differentiation). Nor are they the phallic complement—her sheathe to his sword; her weakness to his strength; her space to his time—it is not the *vagina* which is at stake, nor the womb, those spaces to be filled, in which man may reach his climax, may (re)produce himself. They are, rather, what is most *abject*, or most *impossible*: a relation between two *subjects*, without domination, sublation, or foreclosure; a *plurality*, contained within one body, one sex, that is yet *not* one, nor simply two, but multiplicitous; and a *fluidity*,

3 That is, than mere uncannily castrated men, a horrifying reminder of this threat.

in constant becoming, without teleology—"[t]hese rivers flow into no single, definitive sea. These streams are without fixed banks, this body without fixed boundaries. This unceasing mobility"; a "flux, never congealing or solidifying" (215).

Meaning is different, here. Woman's fluvial current "is multiple, devoid of causes, meanings, simple qualities" (215)—the transcendental is no longer to be found in erection, intellection, the rational solar aspect greeting man's emergence from Plato's cave. "Stretching upward, reaching higher, you pull yourself away from the limitless realm of your body," Irigaray insists, pleading: "Don't make yourself erect, you'll leave us. The sky isn't up there: it's between us" (213). Meaning becomes not a private, solitary pursuit, but an embodied exchange, ontology itself defined by relationality; Irigaray pushes us to look not solely at what separates us (from the animal, from the Other, from our body), what distinguishes us, what esteems us—immaterially; rationally—but to recognize, instead, that *we* are always and ever a product of *you/I*. This is clear in a more linear sense through the mother, and birth, but such relationality inheres in a more dynamic sense within the movement of the two lips; always touching, indistinguishable, and yet not indistinct, the lips act as a model for the inextricably interlinked plurality of any being, presaging the posthuman turn in which humans are now recognized not as neatly singular and strictly bordered subjects, but as more-than-human assemblages, the cells of our bodies numbering more bacterial than human. We are, as the lips, "not one. Especially not one. Let's leave *one* to them: their oneness, with its prerogatives, its domination, its solipsism: like the sun's" (207). Woman is not the darkness, for Irigaray, where she sees Plato in the light—she is not man's *opposite*, plainly irrational and chaotic—it is simply that her luminosity "is not violent. Not deadly. For us the sun does not simply rise or set. Day and night are mingled in our gazes. Our gestures. Our bodies" (217). The sun isn't up there, a steep and rugged ascent, it's between us; a sensuous, "solar flesh …, [f]lowing between—the two" (*Elemental* 44). In Irigaray's figuration, there is space for a *sensible* transcendental—the womb, always anterior to illumination; lips always touching, out of sight.

Tethering this speculative, metaphysical imagination back to our central focus upon place and physical praxis, the spatial ramifications of "Lips" are abundant. To stay with Plato a moment longer, Irigaray questions whether his failure to emplace form and numbers—and Aristotle's failure to properly address the same—manifests a "duality of place, on the one hand, and ideas and numbers, on the other," symptomatic of the "divorce between masculine and feminine[:] In order to overcome the attraction for the first and unique place,

does man, at his best, practice with ideas and numbers as independent from place?" (*Ethics* 39). Linking man's erasure of his maternal origins to a valorization of rationality on one hand and a forgetting of place on the other may seem convoluted (even if Irigaray is wont to forward womb-as-dwelling, e.g. *Elemental* 49), but it becomes profound in the parallel one may make to "that process of annihilation of space through time that has always lain at the center of capitalism's dynamic" (Harvey 293), of the neoliberal city, understood as a *phallocratic* move. This manifests in the construction of cities from a god's-eye view, servicing the spectacle, privileging sight against all other senses; the proliferation of non-places and abstract space, de-individuating (or: *objectivizing*) urban dwellers; built after fixed, military geometry, symmetry, an architecture of rationality, not of humane differentiation; and of a temporal mode "through history rather than through duration, as that to be preserved, as that which somehow or provisionally overcomes time by transcending or freezing it" (Grosz, *Architecture* 111), monumentalizing. The reciprocal urban imbrication with sexual difference *per se*, "the condition and milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually, and discursively produced" (Grosz, *Space* 104)—bodies and architecture "mutually defining" (108)—is provocatively opened by "Lips:" the possibility for *new* forms, and *new* spaces.

Writing in critical conversation with Irigaray, Grosz probes such an architecture beyond phallogocentrism—an architecture precisely of *duration* and not *history*, of "dynamism and movement rather than stasis or the sedentary," in service of "becomings of all kinds" (*Architecture* 71). Not fixed or unitary, Grosz's conception of architecture is *processual*, conceiving space as "open to whatever use it may be put to in an indeterminate future, not as a container of solids but as a facilitator of flows" (165). The labia are evident in this fluidity, this challenge to fixity; the dwelling, as the body, without fixed borders, without teleology; not wholly open or closed, but in a process of becoming foreclosing neither from the outset, imposing no singular, selfsame spatial truth; not a monument to time, to gaze upon, empty and evacuated of all spatial texture, but one that recursively and sensuously develops the bodies within, a subject unto itself. Each of these facets resonates with the most powerful architectural image in "Lips": "Between us the house has no wall, the clearing no enclosure, language no circularity …—we are never finished. If our pleasure consists in moving, being moved, endlessly. Always in motion: openness is never spent nor sated" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 210). An irony here is the astonishingly contradictory spatial imaginary Irigaray develops in her own, single disciplinarily architectural essay, "How Can We Live Together in

a Lasting Way?", which Peg Rawes (*Sexuate Architectures* 302) astutely critiques not only for its failure to meaningfully build upon feminist architectural criticism but because its central "proposition of dividing the home into two separate spaces"—one for him (with technical, angular, metallic accents) and one for her (sentimental, warm and rounded)—is "a troubling continuation of a binary spatiotemporal logic," fixed and bordered, contravening the revolutionary morphology of the lips and mundanely (hetero)sexist (a criticism justly levelled at much of Irigaray's wider oeuvre; one glimpses here why). While her intention is laudable—protecting (particularly woman's) sexual specificity against foreclosure and sublation through guaranteeing each sex a space of their own—it is evident that the move from the metaphysical to the physical, from speculative spatiotemporal *imagination* to its actual architectural *practice*, is not straightforward. Rawes (*Sexuate Architectures*) and Andrea Wheeler offer respectively compelling concrete examples but do so only in brief; the need for deeper interventions, such as this paper, is thus clear. Rawes's 2007 *Irigaray for Architects*, the core architectural treatise on Irigaray's thought, remains solely theoretical: keenly foregrounding the need to move beyond "quantitative intellectual representations of boundaries and volumes, insides and outsides" (55), and to attend rather to "movement, time, fluidity, flow and the actual material transformation of space" (39). Critical here is her emphasis that with the dynamism, debordering, and fluid, subject-subject relations one may learn from the lips, a different kind of architecture might not only be sculpted but *practiced*, too, dehierarchizing this structurally phallocentric profession.

"Lips," then, takes up the clarion call of *écriture féminine*—that woman must write herself, from and through her body—to produce a new discourse, which in turn might produce a new architecture, a new way of doing architecture, spatially and temporally suited to female sexual difference. It does this wise to the phallogocentric bind. Towards the end, in an aside that is a paragraph all its own, Irigaray entreats her/self not to weep: "Don't cry. One day we'll manage to say ourselves," she insists, "[a]nd what we say will be even lovelier than our tears. Wholly fluent" (*This Sex* 216). Here the speculative, the corporeal, and the lingual coalesce: sexual difference, in Irigaray's writing, is an embodied, future language. Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* duology, then—a future governed by the leitmotifs of corporeality and language, with a lesbian relationship at its center—ought to be a poignant means through which to further expand and negotiate this philosophy.

Sexual Difference in Speculative Space-time: Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* Duology

In the Teixcalaanli language, "the word for 'world' and the word for 'the City' were the same, as was the word for 'empire'" (*Memory* 22). Language and (urban) space are married from the outset of Arkady's Martine's *A Memory Called Empire* (City; World) and *A Desolation Called Peace*, not least eponymously, reflecting the author's career in city planning and Byzantinism. The former novel takes place in the metropole, following Mahit Dzmare, the new ambassador for Lsel Station, whose first glimpse of the City (World; Empire) stages Teixcalaan in what we may describe as *(meta)physical phallocracy*: as she journeys from the skyport to the palatial Inmost Province by groundcar—"more of a city-within-a-city than a palace" (*Memory* 29)—the urbanity outside presents "a blur of steel and pale stone, neon lights crawling up and down the glass walls of its skyscrapers" (29). This spatial imagery is framed by the recitation of a "seventeen-thousand-line poem which described the City's architecture" (29), titled simply *The Buildings*, and elocuted by Mahit's cultural liaison, and later lover, Three Seagrass ("Reed" for short).

There is much to unpack in this opening scene. Starting in reverse, with imperial onomastics, personal naming convention requires a numeric portion appended to "an inanimate object or a piece of architecture" (51). This number, we learn, is often chosen with a classically philosophical and spiritual view of geometry: "Threes are supposed to be stable and innovative, like a triangle" (51), a number and symbol historically tethered to divinity and the male subject, from ancient Greece on (see Dörhöfer). A dehumanizing naming practice, constructing a rationally orderable similitude at the cost of individuation and difference, it evidences an implacable logic of the masculine Same, resurrecting the Platonic and Aristotelean divorce of the numeric (as male intellection) from place (abject female chaos). An embodiment of the Empire's (City's) broader fetishization of geometry and mathematics, language use is inflected in tow; *The Buildings* is not merely an epic, canonical poem, but one doubtless constructed in the precise metrical scheme suited to the genre of narrative poetry, inordinately (if not prohibitively) complex—a far cry from the fluid prosaic verse of "Lips." Poetry serves imperialism in the duology: culturally ubiquitous, politically powerful, and interpersonally prestigious, it is a forum for politician and citizen alike, and one never too far from violence, even at its most playful; at a banquet to the Emperor Six Direction, Mahit, witnessing informal poetic play, comes to the description not of "a poetry *contest* but a battle of wits"

(182). That it is precisely this context in which she feels most alienated, most *alien*—*Teixcalaan* considers only its own citizens as people, denigrating all others as "barbarians"—is unsurprising, rooted in that very first scene of poetry in motion through the window of the groundcar: the City (Empire) "a collapse between narrative and perception" (30), or, one might suggest, between poetry and spectacle; a convergence of history, time, intellect, and the gaze most appropriately understood as *phallogocentric*. *The Buildings* is (and are) phallocratic; Mahit finds herself *discursively* excluded, a "destitution in language"—in space, culture, *logos*, we might add—"that connotes her as castrated, especially as castrated of words" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 143, 142), defective and subjectively incomplete in a way acutely comprehensible through an Irigarayan lens.

A reading of Teixcalaan as phallocratic is simple enough to evidence: take the emperor, Six Direction, whose name alone configures him in genealogy with time's teleological arrow. For the Empire (City), however, this symbolism manifests in the adjacent—and psychoanalytically richer—obsession with *spears* ("*anyone* could understand how *spear* could be interpreted in a multitude of ways" (*Memory* 445)): the sun-spear throne; "vast spearpoint ships" (*Desolation* 389); "tall oppressive spears of buildings" (*Memory* 331); the spear is indelible, inescapable, obvious. The Emperor's last words, before sacrificing himself to guarantee prudent political succession—the custodianship of Nineteen Adze—are a verse Mahit and Reed co-wrote: "*Released, I am a spear in the hands of the sun*" (438). Not merely phallic, it is this incessant fusion of the morphological with the metaphysical that we may identify as phallogocentrism: the *sun* spear, the full violence of Plato's solar; the Empire (City) suturing the phallus to the rationality of the sun to numbers to mathematically obtuse poetry to the economy of presence in skyscrapers, thrones, spaceships, everything in Teixcalaan a (re)presentation of *man*, a monumentalization, a *canonization*, of his sole subjective *direction*, geometrically precise. This same logic perforates every scale: the mathematical meets the corporeal in the Six Outreaching Palms, Teixcalaan's military establishment, "fingers stretched out in every direction to grasp the known universe and reach its farthest edge" (97), an evident logic of spearpoints, of direction, 'grasping' the known universe with rational imperial mind as much as fist. Scale further down: the Sunlit, the City's (Empire's) police, gleam in identical facelessness and voice to occlude all differentiation, controlled by the AI that is the City (Empire), seeing not with human eyes but camera eyes. The Sunlit are enrobed in the phallic specular economy, onomastically, literally; draped in shimmering gold, they service the gaze twice over. Their plurality—an 'individual' uses 'we,' not 'I'—might

suggest a metaphysical rupture (a plausible threat, that is, to phallic singularity), but their objectivization and complete lack of differentiation fix them firmly in a phallocratic logos, a unity of *objects*, not a multiplicity of speaking *subjects*—only two, that is to say, *never* one (though their existence does, in *Desolation*, proffer the speculation of metaphysical difference in the alien). Further still, to the individual scale: Teixcalaan's patently phallocratic logic becomes a literal logic of the Same in the nigh ubiquity of cloning, the complete repression of the maternal; we see here sexual difference utterly foreclosed in that most defining loss, the central phallic urge of (re)presentation literalized. Here we circle back to the top: the emperor's intended successor, in wait to take the throne from Nineteen Adze's stewardship, is his 90% clone, the male Eight Antidote.

It is worth noting here that Six Direction and Eight Antidote are two of the only male characters of relevance, and that, with sparse exceptions, those that matter invariably die, or lose their self (Yskandr, Six Direction, Twelve Azalea, Twenty Cicada). The novels, one ought to make clear, are not *sexist* in a traditionally misogynistic sense (nor cissexist, home to apparently a plurality of genders), indeed cloning liberates women from the labor of reproduction, helping them populate practically every position of power, including Emperor under Nineteen Adze. The predomination of women across the duology, however, should not be mistaken as a signifier of heterogenous, sexual *difference*. Teixcalaanli women are sexually *in*different to the men: the language of politics, poetry, geometry, imperialism, space, the reproduction, is the same. Teixcalaan, rather, maintains what we might call a profound *metaphysical* inequality, even where physical aspects are ostensibly mitigated—the phallogocentrism of empire occludes difference *per se* in its dominating logic of the Same; the ubiquitous sun-spear directed toward rational violence, nary a trace of solar flesh. What is at stake, then—for Mahit, and crucially for Irigaray too—is the *possibility* of difference: "spaces of language that let a person like her imagine Teixcalaan and still be a Stationer. The idea that there might be something other than Teixcalaan, when one said the word for *world*" (*Desolation* 409). Spaces of language that let a person like her imagine philosophy and still be a woman. The idea that there might be something other than man, when one said the word for *subject*.

Back to *The Buildings* speeding past, erect, canonized. While Reed improvises where some few have changed, it is evident that Teixcalaan is dominated by the twin phallogocentric temporalities of the "acceleration of time" (57) and time as *history*, architecturally and otherwise, refusing "to let anything

rot—people or ideas or … or *bad poetry* … Teixcalaan is all about emulating what should already be dead" (*Memory* 293). Each building becomes a literal monument to the gaze, space determined by a centrally specular economy—the City (Empire) is designed for an "Emperor's-eye view" (433), coherent only to he who is removed from it, insensate, and looks upon it. The result is an urbanity designed to contain dissent: provinces fan out in Parisian fashion from the fortified center, with undesirables sequestered far out, so they may be locked down at safe palatial remove. Spectacle above and border below, any relationality, any spatial fluency, is eradicated by the skyscrapers' loom, "tall oppressive spears of buildings, swarming with identical windows," a veritable "spear-garden" (*Memory* 331), in tow with the glassen walls, "irising open and shut" (308–309) for whom the City (Empire) deems visually and algorithmically acceptable, always watching. That the City (Empire) is designed for the privilege of *only* that one, most phallic of senses—sight—and in direct contravention of the abject other, most labial sense—touch—becomes literalized at a point of crisis, Reed warning Mahit: "Don't touch the City [Empire, World]" (92). Its transparent walls, crawling with "gold poetry and blue shimmering light" (92), are electrified. This fuses, again, the sun, language, violence, the gaze, a profoundly phallogocentric opposition to the centrally Irigarayan impulse of *touching the world* (or city). A spearpoint of buildings, a spatiality of stark division, arranged militarily, and appealing and engrossed entirely in the gaze, Teixcalaan answers Irigaray's earlier query on numbers and place: overcoming the primordial place of the womb in cloning, the Empire (City) does not cultivate a place *distinct* from ideas and numbers, but in fact *evacuates* place of all sensuous texture *through* these ideas, these numbers. Space, in the Teixcalaanli apotheosis of phallogocentrism, only serves the (military) spectacle—"the strategy table which was the City and the palace" (312)—the now non-space of the womb mirroring the homogenizing, predominating non-place of its urbanity.

Let us now move to our contrast, Lsel Station, a republic at the edge of Teixcalaan's knowing grasp and Mahit's home, populated by a different kind of human, and embodying, in its brief sketches, an ostensibly different kind of spatiality. A miniscule space station only a few miles around and with but thirty thousand or so residents, the Stationers developed the 'imago-machine' such that they might continue to survive independently. The imago-machine allows the uploading and implanting of recordings of individuals, their consciousness, with all their knowledge and skills. One must be closely matched in aptitudes, in tow with lengthy psychological training (sexed difference is no param-

eter for exclusion, with Mahit matching her male predecessor, Yskandr), but in essence, a line of professions is created: a budding pilot matches with a fitting imago of a previous generation of pilot, everyone ending up with many generations of consciousness within them, integrated into them. Yskandr's imago is both many years out of date and tampered with by the Heritage Councilor, allowing Mahit only incomplete access to an inexperienced predecessor, in tow with recurring neuropathic pain. Driven by a profound desire "to be whole" (*Memory* 305), she salvages the imago-machine from Yskandr's corpse—nothing left to rot in the City (Empire)—and finds a back-alley surgeon in the outskirts of the City to implant it into her, amidst that spear-garden. Only then does she begin to experience the intended "doubling" (*Desolation* 316) of imago life, "integrated … into a single continuous self" (22), "the space between them hardly a space, thought and action fractionally separated" (59). One is never implanted with two imagos of the same person, and this feels immediately like a threat as Mahit struggles to adjust, worrying that "she/they are going to break apart right along the fault line where the other two are too much alike and she is … not" (*Memory* 342). When it functions, however, she describes it with great, fluvial positivity: the "composite of Yskandr's memories and her own" feeling like a "warm tide" (394).

The Stationers, in other words, are plural, at the same time as they are singular: "[W]ithin herself," Mahit "is already two—but not divisible into one(s)—that caress each other" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 24), becomes three not divisible into one(s)—even where two are instantiations of the same!—a "whole" that "touches itself …, in(de)finitely transformed without closing" (*Speculum* 233). This plurality, this multiplicity, finds concurrent expression in the spatiality of Lsel Station, "a sort of city, if one thought of cities as animate machines, organisms made of interlocking parts and people, too close-packed to be any *other* form of life" (*Desolation* 21). Not agentive in the threatening, surveilling sense of the City (Empire), it becomes apparent that Lsel Station is rather animated through *sociality*: through the interlocking and intermingling of space and people, the mutually constitutive (subject-subject) relationships between architecture and living bodies. As a space station, there are natural constraints—the external walls that separate the interior from the vacuum of space are necessarily unchangeable, which concurrently limits the total area and number of inhabitants, infeasible to expand further outwards into space. As a result, the living quarters assume the homogeneity of small pods, identically curved forms from the outside, Mahit's own adorned with "curved couches inside to match" (123), a (banal) indication of feminine space,

at least for Irigaray (*How Can We Live Together*). Internally, however, the station is clearly defined by change—upon Mahit's return, Yskandr (his elder imago—fifteen years away from Lsel) finds that he "didn't know the geography of the Station any longer"; all "interior, nonstructural walls" were capable of being "moved around, the decks were repurposed, little shops opened and shut" (*Desolation* 22). Even Mahit finds the exact locational geography different, despite only being gone a few months, surprised that she remembers where some things are at all. The Station, we see, models a different space-time: the in(de)finity of *duration*, in flux through constant social animation. The space is amorphous, ever-becoming, malleable to the whims of the population, interstitial kiosks run by teenagers popping up to vend hand-drawn comics to be replaced by something new the next day. Lsel Station thrums with life, vernacular; architecture without architects, space—perhaps—without objects. It is this thrumming, this *life*, that is immediately recognizable to Mahit (and/or Yskandr(s))—"the shape and rhythm of the station, alive and full of people" (23). Lsel Station, then, is utterly heterogeneous, imperially abject even in its architecture; a "dull metal toroid" (*Memory* 449) on the outside, unlike the resplendent steel and glass of the City, the marble and gold, manicured to optical perfection. It is *alive*, not an embalmed corpse: a rhythm and feel of living bodies endlessly reconfiguring the spatiality of the station, in a constant, labial *becoming*, reflexively, with its residents; an always indeterminate future. No single, definitive sun commands Lsel, welcoming instead four sunrises, four sunsets; day and night mingle. This opposes the specular—where the City (Empire) may never be touched, only gazed upon, the tight quarters of the Station mean that its residents "didn't make much eye contact …; they slipped out of each other's way even in the more-crowded parts of the corridors with practiced ease" (*Desolation* 135), an ease, one might suggest, borne of a metaphysical privileging of the lips: tactility and fluidity, rather than visibility and solidity.

This metaphysical shift is, of course, borne of physical technics. Fluidity and multiplicity are engendered by "a tiny irregularity: the unfolded architecture of the imago-machine, a firmness as familiar as the skull bones themselves" (*Memory* 63). In unfolding the space and the architecture that this imago-machine in turn births, it would be an error to ignore this originary firmness, alongside the Stationers' exclusive use of artificial wombs. Regarded as a survival necessity akin to the imagos themselves, Mahit is aghast at discovering the perverse risk some Teixcalaanlitzlim take in choosing pregnancy. While a heterogenous, labial corporeality and spatiality are evident on Lsel,

then, paralleling Teixcalaan's phallocracy, it would be wrong to think either culture *entirely* sexually indifferent. The birth of Lsel's Irigarayan *Sex Which Is Not One* takes place first artificially (in these external wombs), and then technically (through the imago-machine), equally erasing the maternal debt; while Teixcalaan—if only on occasion—has the means with which to revive this primordial, relational dwelling. This is without speaking of the intense politicking of the Lsel Council, surely configurable within a *logos* of domination and insensate rationality; and the vernacular renegotiation of Teixcalaan's undifferentiated onomastics ("Reed," not "Three Seagrass"), surely illustrative of the kind of linguistic transgressions Irigaray herself attempts. It is notable, then, that even in Martine's speculative space-time, the subordination of a clear phallogocentrism to an ostensible labial tendency takes place *through* this originary 'firmness' of the imago; even here, in other words, the phallic appears as default to negotiate. The existence of contrasting sexuate tendencies is—at least for our present—naturally necessary. Without this primal difference, there could be no other difference; Irigaray's philosophy is, in the last analysis, precisely an attempt to communicate *across* difference, by first *establishing* difference. Having done the latter, we may now address Martine's navigation of the former, in approach of a conclusion.

Communicating (Across) Difference: The Alien and the Triple Dialectic

The "basic Teixcalaanli horror"—that which is most abject, the Imperial (urban) *unheimlich*—is any tampering of the mind, that organ most sacred for its rationality, constituting a "fundamental corruption of the self" (*Desolation* 444). It is not solely imperial xenophobia and Lsel Station's political precarity which threaten the relations between the two, relations Yskandr and Mahit are centrally tasked with maintaining, but the very imago-machines that define the Station presenting a *(meta)physical* boundary—a contorted castration anxiety—which critically confounds a relating in difference. The promise of the imago prompts Yskandr's assassination, in turn centrally dividing Reed and Mahit; more than just the gulf of language, or 'civilization,' it is the incomprehensibility of the Other that is *not one*. Reed struggles, in a rationality of fixity and either/or form, to pin down the "real" Mahit—where she begins, and where Yskandr takes over. Their relationship, already defined by suspicion from the outset—whether Mahit could trust Reed as 'liaison' and not surreptitious *han-*

dler; Reed's acquisitive desire to know Mahit's motivations, politically and personally—reaches peak precarity when suspicion courts Mahit's very personhood. Neither are party to the other's rationality; Reed understands neither who (or what) Mahit precisely is, nor, to Mahit's great injury, sees her unavoidable sublation into the Empire (City), her *actual* loss of self not in corporeal collectivity, but in embrace of Teixcalaanli cultural fixity; both willing and unwilling, in adoration and in compulsion, always navigating a metaphysic abject to her body. Mahit is unsure whether Reed is even "capable of comprehending" (222; emphasis removed) the phallogocentric bind, and our glimpse into Reed's consciousness supports this, her wondering only that "Mahit might forgive her, a little, if she kept positioning them both as absolute equals" (259), an implacable phallocratic logic of the Same, pursuing a fiction of similitude and not able (or willing) to recognize positive *difference*.

This gulf appears irreconcilable. How can different forms, different spacetimes, coexist? How can Mahit and Reed remain subjects in their love, remain distinct, without a unilateral domination of voice, tone, meaning? Especially where one has learnt the other not as *subject* at all, but *barbarian*, twice beyond the pale of human, a denigration Mahit feels acutely: "*the bleeding lips of this injury*" (239); the labial ripped asunder by that metaphysical sun-spear. For Irigaray, it is not enough for the Other to establish her own sexual difference, culture, and ethics, and from there to meet the One—they would invariably fuse toward a singular, sublating transcendent Absolute, or talk past one another (Mahit contorted, bleeding, to the Imperial (urban) Same, or else neither her nor Reed understanding each other). Instead, each must respectfully recognize the *limit* that the other represents to their subjectivity; they must produce a third dialectic, a third *space*: "the negative …, a space between them, which belongs neither to the one nor to the other, and which allows them to meet together" (*Key Writings* 3), without appropriation.

Here, we find Martine's speculative fiction, again, offering a manner of literalization, in the alien. With a language physically nauseating to human ears; a spatiality that defies specularity entirely, winking "in and out of the void, there and then not-there, secret and revealed" (*Desolation* 295); and a sole plurality—a hivemind—the alien models a tertiary dialectic. *Opposite* to the phallic, it is the real *unheimlich* of castration, made visceral in its mucosal devouring of the spearpoint ships, a *vagina dentata*, enveloping. It is not, however, the sparse details we glean of the alien itself, its contradictory dialectic and spatiality, that I wish to discuss; it is rather its role as this literal *negative*—that third place of the *void*—which allows it to function as the basis for the dialectic between two:

between the Empire (City) and the Station; between Reed and Mahit. It is in learning to communicate to the unknowable, the utterly abject, in granting it, too, personhood, that sexual difference is both appropriately contextualized (a difference in *kind*, and not in *species*), and which trains them in the recognition of limits *per se*—subjective, linguistic, metaphysical, sexual. On a desert planet, scaldingly hostile to alien and human alike, a third space for their interspecies communication, Mahit and Reed sing an alien tongue together, "a strange intimacy to it that she hadn't expected. They had to breathe together" (277), a breath "permitting us to listen to the other, a breath making possible and sustaining a love that is desired, free, and reciprocal" (Irigaray, *New Culture* 21). A non-appropriative relation between two is, through this third posthuman dialectic, through their breath, inaugurated; Mahit and Reed given the space to come together, figuratively, literally. It is not, however, concluded—being-two is left to the speculative even in Martine's speculative fiction. Their relation mends, but Reed cannot see Mahit as just one, and Mahit, in turn, knows that their love would require the sublation of that difference, knows that she would be consumed in Reed's rapacious gaze, reduced in that logic of oneness; she jests it, in their final moments together, when Reed calls her "enough people already": "'I'm just Mahit Dzmare,' Mahit said, wry. 'Imago and all. Just one person'" (*Desolation* 476). Not the plural of the hivemind, but also one, at the same time as she is three, at the same time as she is two. Difference, Martine foregrounds in this conclusion, retains irreducibility, but not complete irreconcilability; a new, peaceful coexistence, between humanity and the alien, between Lsel and the Empire (City), is speculatively begun, a necessary foundation for a being-two to one day become, even if it ultimately came at the cost of Twenty Cicada losing *his* difference to join the hivemind.

Placing Irigaray's imaginary—labial, sexual, elemental—within the alien space-time of Arkady Martine's *Teixcalaan* duology, to conclude, allows for more than simply unpicking a narrative of difference and its negotiation. In manifesting a recognizable *Sex Which Is Not One* in the labial Stationers, we can glimpse what sexually different architectures, spaces and forms might look like, inspiration for urban design in making space for more than just men; in the contrasting phallic (re)presentation in cloning, we see too the apotheosis of phallocratic logic that we must ward against—a panoptic City (Empire) of sun-spear pointed domination. More than this, the double emplacement of sexual difference may point toward ways in which we ought to practice this philosophy, too, differently. In modelling a *lesbian* relationship that is simultaneously *sexually different*—principally in rationality, though also

corporeally, in the architecture of the imago-machine—the tethers to biological essentialism, and heterosexism (the two leading criticisms of Irigaray's oeuvre) are unraveled. The body is not irrelevant, far from it, but it is also not determinate: phallogocentrism may find its apogee in the grasp of female emperors; the triple dialectic may develop in the alien space between two female-bodied lovers; and *écriture féminine*, one might concurrently wonder, may one day come to fruition at the lips of nonbinary or trans women. Sexual difference, as read through the *Teixcalaan* duology, is flexible enough to move beyond these cissexist, heterosexist trappings, crucial for understanding the lesbian relationship of the no-longer-quite cis Mahit. It is, in the last analysis, evidently flexible enough to move beyond the human too—where the alien models a literal third kind of space, a void, upon which Mahit and Reed learn to communicate (across) difference, we are also offered a glimpse of a Kauraanian kitten, "void-black" (377), and the failed parallel attempt between Nine Hibiscus and Twenty Cicada to dialogue across the black. Perhaps, I might offer in closing, it is animals, too, pets, that could engender a similar recognition of limits, a similar respect for difference; a feline void to fill the fictional place of the alien one. Sexual difference must, in any case, reckon with the family, as much as sex, being extended beyond the biological and the (heterosexual) pair, to the queer, chosen and interspecies too, if it is to remain analytically meaningful—the *Teixcalaan* duology shows one poignant addition those extensions might make, and how this might proceed.

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Interlude: Life as Raw Material

Eva Stotz

Abstract *Eva Stotz describes in her text her own practice as filmmaker and how she deals with her own position and biography. She draws on her own works and the approach she took towards her creative practice. Examining the challenges of selecting and curating images in her documentaries, she considers the dilemma of the real and problematic claims to accurate representations of people and places. Thereby, she highlights the situatedness of documentary works that are born out of specific historical contexts and moments.*

Keywords *Filmmaking; Eva Stotz; Directing; Tempelhof/They Are Flying Planes; Sollbruchstelle/Devil; Hides in Doubt; Global Home; One Million Steps*

My Background

"Practices of Imagination – Placings of Imaginaries," the theme of the conference at the University of Eichstätt in February 2024, touched upon an essential issue for me as a filmmaker: How does the world show itself to me? What shapes my imagination? After all, it is a cocktail of factors that makes each person interpret the world differently. In my case, this cocktail is white, Central European, cis woman, mother, middle-class parents, general university entrance qualification, atheist, grew up in the analogue age with books and cinema, and traveled a lot. How do I make a documentary film when this cocktail gives me so many perspectives? With what justification can I represent mine?

I found great justification in my female perspective. Even as a child, I realized that most of the films I saw were narrated by men. Women must tell stories about the world and convey their wisdom and approach to life. The female voice is still too often missing. But wouldn't it be more important to explore perspectives that do not originate in the white mainstream society? Unfortu-

nately, the film industry still makes too little effort to ensure that non-white filmmakers have the opportunity to tell their stories. Yet we need these different perspectives to face the complexity of our times. At times, feelings of privilege and "white guilt" almost made me give up the profession, but I continued making films because of a sincere interest in understanding people and our human condition. With a great desire to raise awareness within myself and my community. To build bridges with stories. With an access and privilege that I should use to support marginalized voices. But the most important fuel was my love for stories, and the exhilarating feeling when life co-writes the script.

About the Dilemma of the "Real"

In documentary film, the distinction between documentary and interpretation/fiction is not clear-cut. It is a question of degree. In the filmmaking process, countless decisions are made that are not immediately noticeable to the audience; on visual language, music, and editing, and others for purely technical, aesthetic, or political reasons. My mere presence with the film equipment and team affects the reality in front of the camera. So, it is impossible to make a documentary film without manipulating the pure information. I see life as raw material, carrying hundreds of different narratives in every moment. From this, I mold what comes close to my idea of the world and, by making a film, I put it up for discussion. If I misrepresent a topic or people, there is no authority to consult. I alone am responsible for my decisions.

Stop, Immerse, Let Go

As a documentary filmmaker, I see my task as stopping the information acceleration of our time and working my way into the subject. Talking, asking, listening, reading, getting lost for a moment in the jungle of possibilities. With camera and sound devices, marveling at the indescribability of how and what people say. And realizing again and again that life itself is the most exciting film set and the most creative screenwriter. When deciding on the focus of a film, I follow my "emotional motor," a driving force that comes from within. It helps to ask honest questions to gain clarity. It is the nucleus where it hurts, and from where the search for images, voices, and places in the outside world begins. And it gives me the perseverance necessary for creating a film. This work

teaches you to change your mind about so many topics. It teaches you how to embrace the process, even when nothing goes according to plan. Eventually, you find a way to retell this expedition as a story and emerge on the other side of the metaphorical jungle canyon.

In my essay, I will use four of my films to illustrate the lessons I have learned from this work.[1] All are independent productions, which means I was able to work freely as a filmmaker without any specifications regarding the format or target group. In these projects, I could (and had to) negotiate everything in terms of content with myself whilst considering the protagonists. But a film is also about teamwork, and, on this journey, I was accompanied by creative masterminds. When I use "we" in this article, I am thinking of, and thanking, my companions who helped me give birth to these film babies—editors, camerapeople, producers, sound-, light-, music experts, and many other creative souls.

Tempelhof/They Are Flying Planes, 2005, 16 min.

For a seminar at film school, we had to shoot a film on a "wasteland." There were still a lot of them in Berlin at the turn of the millennium; places in the city characterized by a certain wildness. I was drawn to the area located on the flight path to Tempelhof Airport. Here the airplanes landed right in the middle of the residential area over the St. Thomas cemetery—a special kind of "God's acre." Most of the graves on this side were to be cleared; only a few were still intact. The juxtaposition of dog owners, mourners, and residents provided some interesting moments.

However, something completely different was captured in the film. Further ahead, by the taxiway fence, people, mostly strangers, came every day to watch airplanes take off and land. What went through their minds as they watched these airplanes between long periods of standing around in silence? I often wished myself far away from the city limits of Berlin, and there was a natural interest in finding out what it was like for others. I also saw fences as an interesting psychological and narrative element, as applied urban territoriality. A fence divides people into different groups; here, a thin wire mesh fence separates people into travelers and non-travelers. I decided to shift my focus to the surreal wasteland, to this blank space by the fence. The fence, as a kind

1 All films can be viewed on my website, http://www.evastotz.com.

of antagonist, could help me learn something about people's dreams, a fence that guards the desires and keeps the dreams safe.

Telling Authentic Stories

And yet, how do I get the people who stand there to give me their trust and show me what goes on within their minds? A simple way to slowly put yourself into another person's shoes is to literally take the same point of view. Doing what the person does, which in this case meant a lot of silence, waiting, and watching. At some point, I stopped being an observer of others: My sound engineer and I became a part of the place. The rhythm of the time there, the regularities, influenced us, and in this synchronization, I was able to empathize with the people. Time spent together builds trust, which is the key factor in documentary films. Trust allows me to show myself vulnerable and share personal things, which in turn makes it easier for the other person to open up. At Tempelhof, I realized that most people are happy to talk when they get honest attention. And suddenly there seems to be an unwritten agreement that I can ask about anything.

Search or Find

We all have helpful concepts according to which we read the world. Understandably, the "searching gaze" does not find as much because it constantly compares itself with the inner image, categorizing everything as "useful" and "not useful." I often receive the greatest gifts in the moments when I relinquish control over what I am about to encounter. At Tempelhof, a man in an old pink anorak speaks in a strong Berlin dialect:

> It's all so uncertain. You don't dare go in. I'm not going in there. Nope. I'll go on the train. But not on a plane. I'm just scared. Because I've never flown on an airplane before. That's the thing. Like other people, they go in there, just like that. And some, they're scared. A lot of people are scared. Believe me. Many.

And indeed, I found out that many of the people on the fence were afraid of flying. They readily told me that they would never board a plane, never be part

of the world of travelers on the other side of the fence. A discovery that I hadn't even anticipated, something I found without looking for it. I made relinquishing control a personal mission in the next film that I use to illustrate my lessons learnt. Here, the subject spread out far in front of me, too difficult to grasp; I invited "Chance" to help write the script.

Sollbruchstelle/Devil Hides in Doubt, 2008, 63 min.

The idea for the film Sollbruchstelle / Devil Hides in Doubt (2008) emerged when I returned to Germany following three months in East Africa. It is easier to question your class and culture after having travelled long enough for "normal" to become something else. I came back and realized how present and pervasive and present the topics of "work" and "jobs" had become in Germany, along with associated fears; of losing a job, of not finding the right job, of unsupportive colleagues and superiors, or negative developments in the job market. During this time, I kept seeing the same mental image: A man goes to work at his company every day, but all he does is sit in his office. He has nothing to do and is not allowed to talk to anyone, just as no one is allowed to talk to him. His only task is to endure the loneliness and degradation. Order is imposed from above, and he complies. I realized I knew this man—it was my father, Franz.

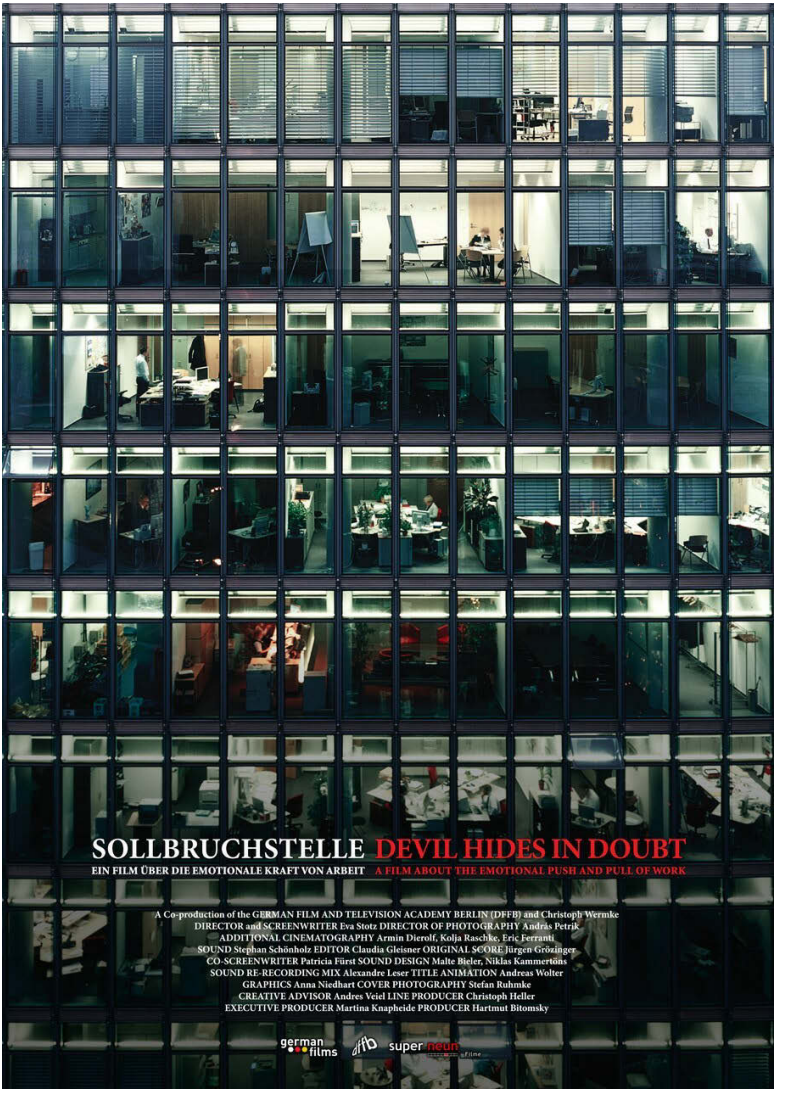
The process of creating this film travelled from the inside out. It started with my father's personal and traumatic experience that, because of family closeness, became mine to some extent. To summarize the story, Franz had worked for thirty years for the same automotive company and was on the verge of retirement and a non-terminable pension. One day, without explanation, he was made redundant for "operational reasons." The real reason was that his boss had left the company, and the new boss had gradually replaced the entire team. However, the company continued to expand and hire staff. My father took this global company to court, sure he would win, and he did win. But the company simply did not implement the points he had fought for; it was a Pyrrhic victory. Represented by the HR manager, the company shifted the attack to a psychological level, trying to break Franz with bullying methods. They finally imposed a contact ban to "maintain peace in the company," something known internally as the "Fiat Method." All to ensure that he finally resigned of his own accord to spare the company the expensive severance payment. Ironically, the HR manager's story also ended badly. When he did not manage to get my father to resign after a year, he was dismissed himself. He was given

two hours to clear his desk. The new HR manager ended this "solitary confinement," but Franz was too mentally broken to reintegrate into the company. At some point, he accepted a severance offer from the company and left in defeat.

Conversation with Franz: Exploring the Primal Conflict

When I started working on the film, ten years after this episode, I still had many unanswered questions. Above all: what made Franz put up with this degrading treatment for so long? And why did he even want to sue his way back into his old position? For me, time spent in a lonely office symbolized a waste of a lifetime. I knew for sure that I did not want to make a personal film, but the journey had to start at the place closest to me, my family. I made an appointment with Franz for a two-day interview. My idea was to tell my father's Kafkaesque, brutal work story, thereby making the guilt and the chain of effects of social bullying visible. And share my father's story to give his struggle the attention it never got. The film was supposed to bring some justice, albeit late.

The reality, I discovered, was more like this: My father wasn't just a victim of the system. He was also terribly inflexible and could not see his way out of the situation. Through the interview, it became clear how much my father was a product of a time when lifelong employment was still the norm. And how much the world of work had changed. Apart from traditional wage labor, he had no vision of how he could continue to participate in social life. This realization provoked a change of perspective. I saw my father and the HR manager, at war with each other because the system dictated it. They lacked a vision of how things could be different. Wanting to understand the dependencies of the HR manager tasked with getting rid of Franz at the time, I phoned him. Terminally ill with cancer, he told me that he had not spoken about this time to anyone, not even his partner, so there was no way of getting him to speak in front of a camera. My father saw my contacting him as a betrayal and avoided contact with me for a few months. At that point, I understood that finding my attitude towards my father's story was much more than just working on a coherent film. It was also about finding my place in the complex world of work. I decided to adapt the filmic form to the gradual removal of layers.



Movie Poster Sollbruchstelle/Devil Hides in Doubt, © Stefan Ruhmke

Essayistic and Associative

I divided the shooting time into five phases and went for an essayistic structure of the film. The essayistic form does not strive for a stringent narrative but is rather about the development of thoughts before the eyes of the viewer. A search that may move associatively. The multiple shooting phases allowed me to concretize the new questions which arose after each phase. In my experience, most importantly, I needed clear questions to get clear answers. After being unable to obtain the HR manager's interview, I focused on Franz's colleagues in the company. Why had his work buddies of so many years respected the contact ban?

Walking the Labor Chain: Employees, Students, and Children

Shortly afterwards, I read an article about acting classes for managers. Participants learn how to use acting methods to make a targeted impact on their colleagues. I found a class that agreed to let me film them. When I presented my film and its structure to the group, one of them gave me clear feedback: "If you are open to all sides, you can't be quite right in the head." The essayistic approach is unusual in a goal-orientated environment such as work and management, where predominantly linear thoughts, goals, and narratives are produced.

After shooting with the managers, I examined students at a career center, a generation before the molding of the world of work began. Recalling my own visit to the career center's informational training 15 years ago, I was horrified to find that this preparation for the world of work was still standard. With both the acting managers and the discouraged students, only one person at a time agreed to an interview. But exactly the right ones. Their statements were a gift to my film and provided important answers in my exploration of the topic.

Saskia, a participant in the career center's informational training, said:

> I recently asked my career counselor what I am in this society after leaving school. To get the status "unemployed" I will need to work for at least a year. That is if I don't get the university place that I want or a place for a voluntary social year. What am I if I don't have all that? And then he said to me: Nothing. And I find that so blatant. That you're nothing.

Gunnar, a participant in the managerial training, said:

> A working relationship is like a love relationship. Often, the love is already over, but you still stay. My mate always calls it "the warmth of familiar shit." Actually, it sucks, you're up to your neck in shit. But at least it's warm here, because it could get cold when you go out there. That's why a lot of people become very immobile and stay crouched.

I wanted to take another step away from the streamlined world of work and talk to children. I happened to hear a radio report about a primary school that hosted philosophical discussion rounds with children. My scriptwriter friend and I decided to turn a story that my father had often told into a children's story. Fittingly, he had observed this incident from his office window. Outside, there stood a bridge, and one day, a shepherd was leading a flock of sheep across it. The young and agile sheep came first, followed by older ones, and bringing up the rear were the limping, injured animals. One sheep collapsed in the middle of the bridge and was left lying there. Much later, a car pulled up and, in my father's words, a "torn, dirty shepherd", got out and lifted the sheep into the boot. The way my father told the story made it clear that he identified with the broken-down sheep, which, like him, was too old and had been carelessly disposed of by society. The perception of this scene through his eyes in a moment of "solitary confinement" was naturally extremely charged. I wanted to see what thoughts this story would inspire in children who have no connection with the world of work. We told the slightly reworked story to a class of eight-year-olds and then filmed the dialogue:

> Boy 1: Well, I can imagine that the sheep ran out of the flock and then the dog came after it and bit it on the leg.
> Boy 2: If it hadn't run out of the flock, it wouldn't have hurt itself and the shepherd wouldn't have to do anything. So, the shepherd is not to blame.
> Girl: I think the shepherd is to blame because he should have seen that the sheep was running away and should have looked out for it.
> Boy 2: But it's not the shepherd's fault. If the sheep had walked along well, the shepherd wouldn't have to do anything.
> Girl: No. He should have taken care of it or even carried it. That's what you can expect from a shepherd.
> Boy 3: And what's it like in nature? Where there is no shepherd?

Boy 3's clever question alludes to another: If we do not meet within a system that dictates how we live together, how caring are we for each other?

Stefan on the Billboard

I had been wondering for some time how I could translate Franz's oppressive period of isolation in his office into a picture to make it tangible. One day I drove past a huge billboard attached to a tower block above a wide street; it was an advert for a flat screen. There was an actual seat in the center and an actual person sitting on it! A large arrow pointed at this person with the words "He waves back too!" And indeed, if you waved at the man sitting 20 meters above the street, you could see the little figure waving back. I immediately felt a connection to my father's story; two men at work in an exposed situation who are treated in a derogatory manner. It seemed to me like the translation of my father's inner space into another reality. This one was completely different but full of subtle points of contact. I got in touch with the man on the billboard, Stefan, and was soon able to interview him. Both shared dreams about flying and thoughts of suicide. My father talked about it at the end of the film, and for the first time his controlled attitude broke, and he burst into tears. Stefan became severely depressed two years after the billboard job and ended his life by jumping from a tower block.

It took many months of editing to arrange these and other elements into meaningful cinematic form. It was like putting together a jigsaw puzzle in which the pieces had to fit together in an associative way. The trick in this form was not to let the gap between scene A and scene B become too big, or the viewer cannot make a connection and gets lost, and not too small either because the clumsy visualization becomes tiring. Large enough so that a resonance chamber is created in which what is said continues to influence the next scene. With a gap that the audience can fill with their own experiences. My film came at the right time; *Sollbruchstelle* was published in 2008 when the economic crisis hit. Many companies were forced to downsize, and people everywhere were made redundant in shocking ways. The systemic predetermined breaking points of our working world became visible everywhere.

The film won awards. The German Television Award came as a particular surprise. The awards recognized the uncomfortable essayistic narrative style, which is rare in today's TV productions where the audience is mainly considered "overworked and tired people who just want to relax." Many screenings at

film festivals around the world have shown that the result of this fragmented storytelling is more than the sum of the individual parts. It became clear how much this topic and its open form invited people to recognize themselves in it and to examine their own thoughts and actions. Several times, people in the audience reported experiences very similar to one of the protagonists or to those of Franz. This brought about a change in my father. Hearing the words of gratitude from other people, that he was not alone in such humiliation, helped him to find some closure. When the film was shown at a festival in Turin, at the company's European headquarters, I informed the press that it was about Fiat. When two newspapers reported on it, this film ultimately became a small vendetta. With far fewer heroic gestures than I had originally imagined, but with the sustainability of a contemporary documentary, and with great personal growth. And above all, with the satisfaction of giving space to a suppressed voice. An employee fighting for his dignity, one of many. Because it is my father's story, and my relationship is a personal one, showing him as vulnerable was not an easy choice. But the deeper I delved into the pain of this story, the more it detached itself from the person. As if in the unconditional analysis of an individual pain, one discovers the universal one.

Global Home, 2012, 90 min.

For my next project, I wanted to focus on an alternative to this growth-oriented economic world. I came across the age-old concept of the Gift Economy, where the economy is not based on commercial exchange. Rather, it is a form of cooperation that relies on people initially making a voluntary advance contribution without being directly remunerated for it. Gift Economy ascribes to humans an intuitive accounting system and a need for balance. I discovered the online network of Couchsurfing.com. On this website, people from around the world offer a place to sleep to travelers for free. It was already apparent that the Internet, as a technology of globalization, was increasingly encroaching upon our private lives. For me, the attitude of literally opening the door to strangers was the right way to deal with it. I visited five people I had found on Couchsurfing. Casey, the website's first programmer and founder of Couchsurfing in San Francisco; Mamatal, a Tuareg music manager in Bamako, Mali; Clara, a Brazilian dancer in Göreme, in Eastern Turkey; and Alice, a British permaculture activist in Beit Sahour, in Westbank, Palestine.

There would of course be a lot to write about, but I decided for this essay not to go into details. Unfortunately, I don't think it's a good film. To be fair, it became a 90-minute documentary with profound, great protagonists, beautiful locations in enchanting images, special sounds, and music. And yet, the film doesn't take off and become an experience of its own in the mind of the viewer. This production was the first one where I worked with stronger guidelines as it was a collaboration with an established production house. The funds came faster, but to apply for such funding one needed detailed scripts, research footage, scene descriptions, and photos in advance. From the beginning, the magic of the surprise was not really allowed to unfold. During the shooting, my gaze was searching. I felt that I had to deliver and wasn't available to follow the crazy script of life. During the editing, there was pressure to serve certain 'viewer groups'; people who has hardly traveled in their life was also supposed to understand my film.

I had not conceived of the film in this form. I wanted to let my associative free spirit play out and not kill the vibe with an explanatory personal voiceover. We entered the editing phase with these controversies, and the result was a compromise—an average documentary film. Even back in 2012, when not every released film competed with such a huge amount of newly released media, an average documentary film had a short lifespan. A great premiere at SXSW in Austin Texas, a few festivals, a few courtesy awards, late TV airing—and that was it. Investing three years of my life, albeit not exclusively, no longer felt balanced. I strongly reconsidered whether I should continue in this profession. Or make a big change to stay true to making authentic films. I decided on the latter and founded my own production company, ronjafilm; inspired by Ronja, the robber's daughter, one of the few female and wild role models of my childhood.

One Million Steps, 2015, 20 min.

With ronjafilm, I produced the next project, *One Million Steps – A Short Documentary in Istanbul*. I was very stirred and felt connected to the series of revolutions in the Arab world from December 2010 onwards. Then there were the Occupy protests around the world beginning in September 2011. I felt part of the general expressions of mistrust towards existing systems. What was my narrative within it? After my research in Tunisia and Egypt, the complexity of this topic was overwhelming. I could not find an authentic approach to a story, there was

no clear "yes" that I should make a film here, and in the end, even my camera was stolen. I was looking for a different, non-verbal approach. *One Million Steps* was born out of a spontaneous fusion with the Dutch-Indonesian tap dancer Marije Nie. We both had an interest in communicating socially relevant issues without words. Marije's tap dance was to me a thrilling approach to people, bold, humorous, and direct. We came up with the idea of using her as a semi-fictional character, as a "dancer of steps," to tell the story of the metropolis and the pressure it exerts on its inhabitants through movement, rhythm, noise, and music. We chose Istanbul rather by chance.

The experiment of merging fiction and documentary fascinated me. I wanted to challenge reality with an imaginary character and was also hoping to speed things up. I could not take the time that a purely observational or essayistic exploratory documentary film requires. This dancer character with a polka dot skirt and red lipstick interacted with the flows and movements of people. In addition, there were certain staged scenes with non-actors who embodied a conflict of daily life in Istanbul. These fictionalized scenes were intended to get closer to depicting life in a metropolis under economic, political, and social pressure. The reality that emerged showed the limits in the mixture of documentary film and fiction. It was amazing to see how the documentary images simply had a much greater impact. The viewer immediately senses the power of the real.

Back in Berlin editing, I struggled with the gaps in the material. Something fundamental was missing in this story. Then Ufuk, a friend and co-producer in Istanbul, called: "*Come back, Istanbul is full of what you were looking for; rhythm, noise and movement. Every evening, pots and pans are banged on all the windows. Everyone is fighting to not lose the last park in the city center!*" Two days later, Marije and I were back and continued filming. It meant adapting everything to the unexpected and opening doors for other narrative styles, but staying calm as my original intention came back in an unusual form. We had been looking for signs of pressure, now we got to see the release of pressure up close.

The Gezi Park was one of the last green and non-commercial places in the city center. Suddenly there were plans to build a shopping mall on it. One morning, men came with bulldozers to uproot the trees. A small group of the "usual" eco-activists were present and chained themselves to the trees. Through social media networks (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube), the call to "Occupy Gezi" spread like wildfire and just three days later, more than 10,000 supporters flooded the park. Representatives of an otherwise divided society entered into dialogue, generating an infectious hope. With witty and creative

actions, the protests spread all over the internet and sparked solidarity actions in Germany, the USA, Greece, France, and many parts of Turkey. It felt like this solidarity, the sheer number of people, and the international attention could not be ignored. Our call for fair living conditions and peace must be heard.

Being "in the right place at the right time" amid historic change gave me the feeling of fulfilling a greater task with a film. My protagonist's tap dance, her iron-shod shoes, suddenly became an instrument of protest. At one point, a drummer friend of ours climbed onto a barricade made of iron bars, beds, and shields, and turned it into a drum kit. The two of them improvised and, with incredible speed, a rhythmically-clapping, cheering crowd emerged. Every gathering of people at this time ended with the slogan shouted at the top of their lungs: "*Her yer Taksim her yer direniş! Everywhere is Taksim, everywhere is resistance!*"[2] This was followed by a brutal tear gas attack by the police. We ran in the gas, panting, and I thought for a moment that I was going to lose consciousness. My friend Marije, in her costume dress and tap-dancing shoes, skittered across the streets. My camera kept rolling. We found an open stairwell and fled inside. In the edited film, I left our panting audible as well as the sounds that are usually cut out, such as the change of the camera aperture and focus pulling. I wanted the reality to brutally break the film frame. The reality here went beyond. In this moment the film was about two women struggling with the shock of excessive police violence.

In post-production, it was challenging to give the somewhat naive character of the tap dancer a credible basis. "Where does she come from and what is she looking for?" were the questions viewers asked after screenings. In the end, the only approach that worked was the most honest one and closest to our perspective. We started the film in an animated world. The playful character follows a musical curiosity and then falls from the sky into the center of an Istanbul on the brink of revolution. This worked fine as a beginning but in *One Million Steps*, my exploration of the "dilemma of the real" showed that one's own reality determines the direction. You cannot hide yourself even behind fictional characters.

The eponymous million steps taken in this film come to a standstill at the end. We end with the standing protest of Duran Adam. Many people in Istanbul and various places around the world stopped and stood still to express their solidarity and protest. The years 2010 and 2011 were characterized by a particular

2 Taksim is a square next to Gezi Park where a lot of the demonstrators gathered and camped.

hope for profound social and political change. However, the downward trend after the Occupy protests as well as after the Arabellion was noticeable soon afterwards. Too many people lost their lives in these protests, and thousands suffered from the return to authoritarian practices and increased repression. Many civil society actors had to leave the country and have been living in exile ever since. The hoped-for reforms remained unfinished. The film traveled around the world and remains a memory of a time full of hope and global solidarity between citizens. Anyone who witnessed it will carry a spark in their heart that will remain indelible.

This film marked a turning point for me. People fought for their vision of the world in a concrete and human way. The film's height was created by the comprehensibility of their desires. And yet they seemed absurd in the context of a world that is geared towards increasing turnover. This brought me to my next project in Berlin, Field Trip.

Field Trip, 2018, 100 min. in 14 episodes

Back in Berlin, something surreal happened. A referendum was held in May 2014, and in all Berlin districts, an overwhelming majority voted in favor of the "Law for the Preservation of Tempelhofer Feld (ThF Law)." This concerned the future of the former airfield at airport Tempelhof—the place where I shot my first doc film at the fence. After air traffic ceased in 2008, the gates were opened to the public two years later. For the first time in eighty years, everyone was allowed to enter the 386 hectares of emptiness! The draft law, published by the sponsor of the petition for a referendum "Initiative 100% Tempelhofer Feld," contains the following provisions:

1. The State of Berlin will refrain from selling, developing, and partially privatizing Tempelhofer Feld;
2. The Tempelhofer Feld will continue to be available to the public in its entirety and without permanent restrictions;
3. Tempelhofer Feld will be preserved in its significance as a historical site and as a place of remembrance.

Coming from the fight for Gezi Park in Istanbul, the field meant an even more utopian force for me. Can this be true? Tempelhofer Feld is already being tugged at from all sides. Urban planners, architects, and investors are greedily

eyeing at the enormous, lucrative area. Where is the freedom in this open space real, where is it fake? But as long as the earth remains intact: What stories are stored in this soil? How can we encounter the past on this empty strip of land, and use it to develop visions for the global city of tomorrow?

Now that the decades of longing behind the closed fence are over and it has been opened, I felt it was almost a duty to explore this place in depth. This vast, rugged piece of land in the center of Berlin, which strangely defies the laws of capitalist society, deserves a long-term documentary. Yet, what is the right form to tell the story of this place? The history of the place is so old, crazily eventful, and will continue to be written in so many ways, both now and in the future; It seemed almost presumptuous to me to create a hierarchy as to which story should be told.

Finding the Form

The idea of a long, linear documentary film was unsatisfactory from the start. The debates surrounding the field were so fast-moving that a document carved in stone would be outdated in five years. When I met Frédéric Dubois, an expert in interactive storytelling, with journalistic practice on internet- and data-related topics, the idea to approach the place through an interactive narrative was born. We also connected on the interest in using storytelling for active community building. With two more strong team members on board, Joscha, the creative technologist and Svenja, the creative producer, we freed ourselves from many conventions.

We brought the first interactive open-source documentary film into the world, made the timelines round and no longer linear, had "clickable crossroads" between the film and gave away our material and the software for free. We even invented a new genre, calling Field Trip 'a hyperdoc.'

My Principles Applied

This form does not give the impression of being something complete. Ergo the "dilemma of the real" was a much smaller one in this project. The many short films are small excerpts of a large reality that can be expanded infinitely. Also, the connection of the film to the real world gave this work a different, tangible quality. The great documentary film lesson of "stop, immerse, let go" was very

much challenged in this project. It is difficult to tell touching stories and create surprising images in a huge open space where there is nothing but grass, a handful of trees, and the sky. New qualities of immersion were needed. Stopping time was above all in the sensitive conducting of interviews and searching for archive images. I lived out my love of associative storytelling with archive material.

For example, the story of a woman who fled the GDR with her mother as a child. They flew from Tempelhof Airport and the field became a portal to a great new chapter in their lives. But how to make this tangible? In a long interview, I came across the part of the escape story where the family was separated from their brother and one day it looked like they would have to flee without him. I made this painful story an essential pillar of the film and connected archive material associatively to the story in the voice-over. As is so often the case, it is the pain that breaks us open as viewers and connects us to the shared human experience.

In other episodes, I concentrated more on the moment of the first encounter with the colorful life of Tempelhofer Feld. For example, with the former forced laborer from Poland whom we found through a contemporary witness organization. At our invitation, the now 90-year-old woman came back to Tempelhof Field for the first time since she was 16 years old. She quotes the commands of the camp leaders and recalls how she used to fill in bomb craters on the field in winter wearing only wooden shoes. Next to her, children roller-skate and fly kites. This project made it clearer than ever before that one of the most important principles in my documentary film practice, "telling authentic stories," is directly linked to the form. And because we remained an independent ronjafilm production, funded by several smaller grants and a successful crowdfunding campaign, we were free to explore such new territory. For me, this interactive form with short films was the most honest for how encounters with people in the field are possible.

Co-operation, Not Competition

Behind the scenes, there were other moments of liberation for me as a filmmaker. The fact that the material we shot did not, as is usually the case, disappear in archives after being selected once for a film was an enormous liberation. Competition and exclusivity play a significant role in documentary film-making. As I producer I was also able to develop our fair payment models.

All employees at *Field Trip* were paid equally and based on "lifetime spent"—the strongest currency. In mediation, we worked worst- and best-case scenarios out beforehand, and therefore grew through the project close together. We worked for three years on this project. Even though everyone had to secure their livelihood with jobs on the side, it was a beautiful closing of a circle for me.

Trust as a Cornerstone

My twenty years of practice in documentary film have taught me one thing above all: trust. Trust in myself—the more honest I am with my perspective on the world and my specific narrative style, the more powerfully I can tell and touch people. Trust in other people, who show themselves in their essence, and devote themselves to a film narrative without a hidden agenda. Trust in the carthasian impact of documentary film, both for the filmmaker and the audience. And trust in life itself, as a surprising and never boring author. With each film, I grew as a documentary filmmaker into an increasingly open and accessible world. Nevertheless, after coming full circle, I was no longer prepared to be on this 'busy motorway.' Fighting for attention in the flood of new daily audiovisual media seemed a strange use of my energy. I am currently working mainly as a lecturer and film craftswoman where I create for people and projects with the videos needed by artists, projects, and institutions. However, my journey as a filmmaker continues and I feel blessed performing in this profession. Since a documentary film is never just a simple report of reality, it is always a comparison between my imagination of the world and the way I experience it. The camera shows me what I often overlook, but it is also a tool to make visible my own fantasies and projections as a filmmaker. I know that I will always seek the magic of the real and strive for collective transformation through this art of imagination.

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Section II: (Re-)Imagining Places and Social Institutions

Imagination and Rewriting in Joshua Whitehead's *Jonny Appleseed*

Layers of Material Practice

Can Aydın

Abstract *Writing carries special significance for Indigenous peoples. In North America and beyond, European colonizers have used writing to commit and justify acts of violence against Indigenous peoples from the first days of contact. Writing creates and relinquishes authority; it includes and excludes subjects. Where writing has gained such authority, the act of rewriting has become an essential tool of disruption for the political struggles of marginalized peoples worldwide, including women, members of LGBTQ+ groups, people from postcolonial settings, and Indigenous peoples living in Western settler countries and countries that experienced European colonialism. In this article, I analyze First Nations author Joshua Whitehead's 2018 debut novel, Jonny Appleseed, as a rewriting of settler-colonial coded concepts surrounding Indigenous sexualities, Indigeneity, and the link between Indigenous peoples and technology. Whitehead thereby materializes new knowledge which challenges dominant discourses. Through a Foucauldian perspective, I frame writing as a material practice because of its relationship to power and discourse. The novel's protagonist Jonny rewrites the established cultural scripts, what Diana Taylor calls "scenarios of discovery," for his own financial gains. Jonny might reproduce a conventional notion of cyberspace and the 'discovery script,' but he is the one in control of his materiality; his own body, image, and story.*

Keywords *Two-Spirited; Cyberspace; Indigenous; Rewriting; Scenarios of Discovery*

Introduction: Writing, Rewriting, and Materiality

To put it mildly, there is a complicated relationship between the act of writing and Indigenous peoples in the Americas. Since first contact, writing has been

used by European colonists to commit and legitimize acts of violence against Indigenous peoples. Postcolonial and Indigenous scholars like Diana Taylor and Craig S. Womack, maintain that writing has emerged as the dominant means of knowledge production and exchange in the hegemonic, white-coded settler discourse across the USA and Canada. This phenomenon dates to the early years of colonization and settlement of the "New World," or more accurately, Turtle Island.[1] Historically, writing has mostly been the domain of linguists, philologists, historians, and literary scholars who have focused on linguistic and translation-related textual meaning. Kathryn E. Piquette and Ruth D. Whitehouse claim that although such work is necessary, it is also critical to pay attention to connections between scribal practice, tools and materials, and textual interpretations (10). From sociohistorical events and the advancement of technologies, different forms of writing have emerged throughout the millennia. Writing practices are part of a material culture that is "preceded by and constituted through the material practices of human practitioners" (1). Thus, the practices of writing are diverse and unfixed and go beyond the conventional (Euro-Western) idea of writing as we know it.

Writing then is material not only due to its physicality but because of its connection to power and discourse. It gives and takes authority, constructs and is constructed by discourse; it is a medium of the language, its materialized form. Discourse not only refers to the world, objects, bodies, and practices but also creates them (Foucault 57–58); power "is not something held but something *practiced*" (Nealon, emphasis mine 20). The central idea of Foucault's work is materiality, as discourses emerge and function at the intersection of the verbal and material realms (Hardy and Thomas 681). Writing then is a form of power practice, as it constitutes the material world through discourse.

In a world where the conventional practice of writing has gained epistemological authority through the forces of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism, *rewriting* has become a crucial tool in the political struggles of marginalized peoples across the globe. This includes Indigenous peoples in neoliberal settler nations, people in postcolonial countries, especially women, members of LGBTQ+ groups, and their intersections. The editors of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* stress that "literature offers

1 The term "Turtle Island" is a creation myth shared by various Indigenous populations across the North American continent. It "is the name many Algonquian- and Iroquian-speaking peoples mainly in the northeastern part of North America use to refer to the continent" (Robinson and Filice).

one of the most important ways" to express and understand the influence of ongoing colonialisms on contemporary peoples worldwide (Ashcroft et al. 1). Feminist scholar Adrienne Rich remarks that it is crucial to "know the writing of the past" to disrupt popular ideologies (19). Rewriting functions as a disruption strategy in the hands of BIPOC authors, thinkers, and artists to provide fertile ground for the possibility of non-hegemonic lives. Acts of rewriting are playful and disruptive practices that authors use to unearth hidden naturalized discourses. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* Maia Kobabe's *Gender Queer: A Memoir,* and many other examples of rewriting allow us to question the legitimacy of established societal structures such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, and white-coded settler colonialism.

One such example, and the subject of this article, is *Jonny Appleseed*, the 2018 debut novel by First Nations author Joshua Whitehead (Oji-Cree).[2] The novel follows the eponymous protagonist and his life in a contemporary Canadian settler state. Jonny is a young Two-Spirited Indigenous person who has moved from Peguis, the First Nations reserve he grew up in, to the city of Winnipeg.[3] Living in the city and renting an apartment require money, and he must find a way to make ends meet. His goal is to earn enough money to go back to Peguis to attend his stepfather's funeral. Jonny earns money by performing cybersex and sending photos or videos of his erotic acts to his clientele. He also acts in live videos, offering additional explicit material for a higher price. Alongside the reserve and the city, one of the most important locations in the novel is cyberspace, which is not physically restricted to the other two locations; Jonny can be online and inhabit cyberspace anywhere as long as he has a reliable internet connection. Despite the omnipresence of the non-material cyberspace, I read the figure of Jonny Appleseed as maintaining some material qualities. The content is material, it transforms discourses around Indigeneity

2 Throughout this article, I indicate Indigenous identity and tribal affiliation in parentheses following the person's name.

3 "Two-Spirited" in simplest terms is a pan-Indigenous concept that refers to non-binary, non-Western sexualities, sexual orientations, and ways of living that predate settler contact on Turtle Island. In the Anishinaabe/Ojibwe language, the term "*niizh manidoowag*, refers to a person who embodies both a masculine and feminine spirit" (Filice). It is however imperative to differentiate Two-Spiritedness from queerness as sexual orientation. Although a Two-Spirited Indigenous person can be queer and/or practice queer sexualities, queerness is a settler-coded term which falls short when referring to the self-defined Two-Spirit peoples. For more on the tensions between queerness and Indigeneity, see: Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*.

while shaping realities. In the novel itself, Jonny materializes his virtual self, rewriting his material body in cyberspace. His body becomes liquid, ergo he transforms the materiality of his body. As an Indigenous, Two-Spirited author, Whitehead produces new knowledges while rewriting some established settler-colonial definitions about Indigeneity, Indigenous sexualities, and the relationship between Indigenous peoples and technology.[4] Here, it is important to highlight Whitehead's (and other authors') Indigeneity. The meanings that texts produce change drastically when their authors change. In the fashion of the famous feminist slogan "the personal is political", the individual experience matters. Thus, by being Indigenous and writing about Indigenous characters (especially a Two-Spirited young male), Whitehead utilizes his individual experiences to provide space for a collectivity. Whitehead's Indigeneity is crucial because Whitehead's source of rewriting is what Donna Haraway would have called, his "situated knowledges" (590). Whitehead's situated knowledge functions for him to imagine a Two-Spirited character in modern-day Canada.

Following this, I examine two different layers of re/writing as material practices in *Jonny Appleseed*, that are shaped through imagination and individual experience. On the extratextual level, the Two-Spirited Indigenous author imagines a Two-Spirited Indigenous character who exerts control over settler colonial narratives and challenges them to a certain extent. On the textual level, which I foreground in this article, Jonny reimagines and rewrites what Diana Taylor calls "scenarios of discovery" with a queer twist (53). Taylor describes the early encounters between Europeans and Indigenous peoples in the Americas as "theatrical scenario[s] structured in a predictable, formulaic … fashion" (13). An oft-reproduced cultural script is found in the history of settler nations of North America. Beginning in the fifteenth century with Christopher Columbus' journals to the nineteenth-century romantic paintings of the American West, the script, in a nutshell, is: The settler arrives at a new, 'untouched space' and 'discovers' Indigenous people who welcome the settler with open arms. As "culturally specific imaginaries," these scenarios

4 On a side note, whenever I write "white-coded" I refer to the idea of a universalized whiteness (and maleness) that is used to refer to people. By pointing out that whiteness is not "natural" phenomenon but a set of discourses and ideologies, I show that how non-whiteness gets othered. Similarly, I use "settler-coded" to show how settler subjecthood is universalized within nations with a settler-colonial context such as the US, Canada, and Australia. Although there is considerable overlap between "white-coded" and "settler-coded", they do not necessarily represent the exact structures.

create and reinforce a settler/native dichotomy and simultaneously hierarchize it as the settler superior to the native (13). Whitehead reimagines the performative act in his novel, in cyberspace where the Indigenous and the settler initially cross paths and the active latter 'discovers' the passive former. Through his re/imagination of the scenarios of discovery, Jonny rewrites the dominant scripts of the settler Canadian society. He 're-visions' the scenario in cyberspace; "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering a text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (Rich 18). While Rich highlights the importance of re-visioning for women, this statement is valid for other non-hegemonic subject positions as well. Through his protagonist, Whitehead rewrites the settler-coded perception of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and modern technology i.e., that they do not gel. In contrast, Jonny is tech-savvy and navigates the online world with ease and it even helps him circumvent colonialist gender roles: As a young boy, he rewrites himself in virtual space by embodying a young girl; cyberspace gives him the freedom for his genderqueer performance.

Thus, cyberspace plays a crucial role in the novel. Yet in geographies that predominantly contain Indigenous populations in North America, such as federal reservations and reserves, information and communication technologies (or ICTs) are relatively scarce. There are (still) fundamental injustices in terms of infrastructure and access to ICTs between settler-dominant areas and Indigenous-populated spaces. Echoing the popular discourse on cyberspace, I frame the space in the novel as 'cyberwilderness.' This is a conscious decision based also on how Jonny pursues cyberspace and situates his virtual selves. It is important to note that Whitehead's novel contains ambiguity and Jonny's interactions with and in cyberspace are in no way black and white. Jonny plays into the settler exoticizations of Indigeneity by foregrounding his Indigenous background as a commodity for the settler gaze to enjoy. Moreover, he reproduces the established cultural script of "scenarios of discovery" (Taylor 53), with a reversed power positions: Jonny imagines himself being 'found' in the cyberwilderness by the colonizers and rewrites the scenario without giving away that he is the author and the others merely his characters. Zooming out from the textual level, Whitehead writes a novel that does not stereotype Indigenous peoples either as 'bloodthirsty savages' or 'noble savages.' Jonny is alive, he does not shy away from the city. He is messy, morally ambiguous, he is material.

Making it in the Modern World

Queer Indigenous Jonny writes his own virtual self in cyberspace, performing as a trickster in both the urban space and cyberspace, what I consider a material epistemological practice that opens new ways of thinking. Jonny's explanation of his clients' needs captures the intricacies of his online presence:

> Most times though, they only want me to play NDN. I bought some costumes a few Halloweens ago to help me: Pocasquaw and Chief Wansum Tail. Once I know what kind of body they want, I can make myself over. I can be an Apache NDN who scalps cowboys on the frontier, even though truthfully, I'm Oji-Cree. (Whitehead 25)[5]

To analyze what Jonny's online presence means for contemporary debates on Indigenous peoples within the naturalized settler coloniality of Canada, we must first discuss the material state of the information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the so-called 'Indian Country.'[6] This refers to geographies where Indigenous peoples are more densely located compared to other areas of North America.[7]

Information and Communication Technologies in 'Indian Country'

Marisa Elena Duarte (Pascua Yaqui) draws an interesting parallel between contemporary digital gadgets, such as notebooks, tablets, and smartphones, and Indigenous peoples. For her, the "sleek look and discreet design" of these

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5 "NDN" is a contemporary term used by Indigenous peoples especially online to refer to themselves. Moreover, this becomes an act of rewriting from Indigenous peoples by reappropriating and tweaking the misnomer "Indian" to "NDN."

6 Duarte defines the term "Indian Country" as a "legal term that refers to the federally recognized tribes and state-recognized tribes, pueblos, rancherias, bands, and Alaska Native villages and corporations within the political boundaries of the United States. Colloquially, the term also refers to Native peoples' habits and norms in this somewhat parallel society … It inherently refers to an intertribal state of being for Native peoples in the United States" (166). I use the term in both double and single quotations, the latter to acknowledge its political and social implications.

7 I extend Duarte's definition to First Nations reserves, Métis, and Inuit settlements in Canada since the ICT conditions and solutions in these areas of both countries are similar.

gadgets leads to them being imagined as "devoid of historical legacies. Ironically tribal peoples are also imagined as beings without histories: prehistoric, precolonial and pretechnological subjects of a techno-scientific American empire" (9). This is a sardonic comparison, given that the hegemonic settler discourse situates Indigenous peoples as antithetical to modern technologies. Craig Howe (Oglala Sioux) takes this ironic parallelization further by suggesting that the concepts of time and space (or spatiotemporality) are becoming increasingly irrelevant with the advancement of Internet infrastructure and speed (20). Cyberspace is iconized as ahistorical and independent of spatiotemporal limitations, a description that sounds similar to settler notions of Indigeneity as anachronistic.

Duarte suggests that settler colonial discourse, especially its 'vanishing Indian' imagery, does not allow Indigeneity and modern technology to be perceived in harmony (11).[8] It constructs Indigeneity as a state of anachronistic stupor and locates Indigenous peoples, cultures, and philosophies as antithetical to the white and settler-coded narratives of progress. In other words, it imagines Indigenous peoples as antiquated, archaic, and thus antithetical to modern life.

This obscures the fact that pre-contact Indigenous cultures had ways of creating, storing, and transferring knowledge. During the Spanish missions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a wide variety of Indigenous writing practices existed.[9] These differed from the written narratives of Europeans, which perpetuated the myth that Indigenous societies lacked any form of writing. In addition to the extensive and well-established oral civilizations, which prioritize memory as the primary means of preserving and transmitting information (Levine 12), there are also the codices of the Mayan and Aztec cultures, called *amoxtli* in the Nahuatl language. In addition, "[m]any indigenous communities used visual records in subtle and sophisticated ways, with a notable example being the Andean quipu, a type of knotted string. North American recording devices included shellwork belts, known as *wampum*, and painted animal hides, tepees, and shields" (Levine 12). There were several similarities between these Indigenous methods of information preservation and written

8 The myth of the 'vanishing Indian' is a settler-coded romantic idea that Indigenous peoples are destined for extinction due to being incapable of living in the modern world.

9 This timeframe corresponds to Diana Taylor's arguments when the discovery scenarios start to pop up in the narratives of the Spanish friars (16).

works from Europe, such as *wampum* belts, which were similarly used to written paper (12). For Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee), *wampum* belts go beyond just documents; they depict intricate human interactions, and ought to be understood in the context of Indigenous rituals and cultural performances (23). These cultural products show how diverse the acts of writing can be, and foreground writing as a material practice due to their execution. These may be referred to as Indigenous *material* technologies and practices or Indigenous understandings of ICTs differing from the European ICTs of the time.[10]

The diversity of Indigenous writing and knowledge preservation practices demonstrates a clear démenti of the settler colonial epistemic institutions that are discursively produced to support Eurocentric adversarial attitudes toward Indigenous material epistemological practices.In light of this, Duarte directly addresses Indigenous thinkers:

> Indigenous thinkers should not imagine that notions of binary mathematics, categorization, classification, accounting, cartography, technique, and literacy were unknown in places such as the pre-Columbian Americas. There were the codices of Tenochtitlán, pictographic and woven systems for inscribing and calculating trade histories and outcomes, Incan quipu, bas-relief, astronomy, and, of course, the Mayan calendar and the continuing work of the Daykeepers. (12)

Similarly, Ashley Cordes (Coquille/KōKwel) refutes settler colonial claims that technology and subsequently hypertexuality are inherently Western phenomena ("The Future of AI"). She also gives the example of *wampum* belts made by different Indigenous nations, especially the Iroquois. They are made "to tell stories, to mark occasions, to make contracts; there are layers of meaning that make them hypertextual. They are also arguably digital in that the beads are strung, they are code, and can be read; they are retrievable, decodable, memories of Indigenous epistemology" ("The Future of AI").

Studies on the present day state of Internet access in predominantly Indigenous-populated spaces blame deficiencies on "inadequate infrastructure, remote geography, and insufficient market demand endemic to reservation life …[which made it] an 'Indian problem'" (Duarte 29). However, Duarte rightly challenges these findings, stating that these studies did not consider

10 This thought can be extended to understanding Indigenous forms of writing as a technology that is not a Euro-western specific practice.

settler colonialism and the consequent damages it did to Indigenous populations, which still defines the everyday realities of many rural Indigenous communities (29). For Duarte, this points to the "epistemic blindness" of governmental organizations such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and private Internet service providers (91). As we shall see in the next section, in Jonny Appleseed, the rural reserve and the urban Winnipeg are also juxtaposed in terms of ICTs, especially during Jonny's childhood on the reserve.

Indigeneity and Cyberspace in Jonny Appleseed

I read Whitehead's fiction parallel to Duarte's investigative and academic work. Jonny recounts a childhood event when he visited the "shoddy little makeshift library" in the Peguis First Nations Reserve (10) to do some research. This indicates that at the time, Peguis did not have an internet connection or at least not one stable enough to service the reserve's library. From this, we can infer that households in the reserve did not have internet connections either. While there are no distinct references to years in the novel, we can deduce that approximately five years pass between Jonny's visit to the local library without internet and fifteen-year-old Jonny accessing a stable internet at home (7).

Interestingly, Jonny's first mention of the internet is on the first page of the novel (7), where he encounters the "It Gets Better" campaign.[11] From early on, Jonny's relationship with the internet is defined by his trickster/shapeshifting abilities. He describes the excitement in which cyberspace "was packed with people wanting to connect with other people, especially there in Peguis. We had Facebook and cellphones to keep us in the loop. I used to sext with others in chatrooms on a gaming website, Pogo. I went by the name Lucia and pretended to be a girl to flirt with other boys" (8). This passage not only foreshadows Jonny's urban life, where he pretends to be someone else with a different gender identity, but portrays cyberspace as a safe space for Two-Spirited Jonny to pursue his same-sex desire, albeit pretending to be a girl. At this point in his life, Jonny is bound to the geographical space of the reserve and the reserve's oppressing habitus as an Indigiqueer boy. It is cyberspace that frees him from these material and societal constraints.

11 "It Gets Better" is a nonprofit online campaign to increase LGBTQ+ visibility and aims to empower LGBTQ+ peoples to share their stories with other LGBTQ+ members.

Cyberspace for Jonny becomes a place "where access to information does not depend on who you are, where you are located, when you are visiting, or what you are seeking" (Howe 20). Howe refers to the dwellers of cyberspace as "netizens," claiming that cyberspace allows them to "transcend their biological, cultural, and social backgrounds by presenting themselves on the Internet as whoever they imagine themselves to be" (20). Corroboratively, Jonny transcends his biological sex and performs as a woman in cyberspace. Howe recognizes the potential of the World Wide Web for democratizing access to information regardless of identity markers and lists a strain of enthusiasts amongst Indigenous communities who hold the Internet in high regard for the betterment of Indigenous conditions in North America. They believe that access to cyberspace provides an opportunity for Indigenous peoples "for the first time in five hundred years … to be the avant-garde of a new technology" (21). However, he goes on to argue that Indigeneity and cyberspace are antithetical. The crux of his argument focuses not on cyberspace but on tribalism, and the disharmony in between (22). For Howe, cyberspace is "founded on the ideals of Western civilization" (26), which he lays out as democratic, "paperless …, economical, … and nondiscriminatory in that any person with access to the information superhighway may become a netizen" (20). Therefore, he argues that performing in cyberspace does not reflect Indigenous tribalism in which land is seen as "fundamental to tribal identity" (22). Further, Indigenous identity is relational whereas in cyberspace, it is the individual who stands out (22). Thus, Howe's article begins with excitement over the then-budding World Wide Web and the opportunities it gives to the individual, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. However, his enthusiasm ends there, as he goes on to construct Indigeneity on a notion of tribalism that regulates 'Indigenous selves' as related to space, time, and specific spiritual and cultural practices in certain ways.

There are other scholars following this line of thought, such as Taiaiake Alfred (Kahnawà:ke Mohawk) suggests that Indigenous communities have been in a "precarious state" since the 1990s "with personal technology—omnipresent television, computerization, Facebook, all that kind of stuff—where there is really no accountability to *community* anymore" (emphasis mine 83). Alfred argues that social media severs the individual's ties to the community and is detrimental to Indigenous community building and kinship. Social media addiction is a legitimate and serious problem, and not only in the Indigenous context; people's screen time has been increasing exponentially across the globe. It is noteworthy that both the Indigenous scholars' criticisms toward the In-

ternet and cyberspace are based on the contemporary ICTs' discrepancy with community and tribe.

I disagree with the discursive juxtaposition between cyberspace and Indigeneity, which is reminiscent of the era of the early Native American Renaissance when urban space were portrayed as 'the evil' and a settler trap for Indigenous characters in novels. If settler colonial discourse constructs Indigeneity as antithetical to modernity in the 'conventional' sense, then describing Indigeneity from this perspective can also be a limiting discourse. Framing tribalism or reducing Indigeneity to an individual's relationship with their community, although important elements in Indigenous peoples' daily lives, can be harmful by reproducing oppressive discourses. Furthermore, there are countless benefits of contemporary digital technologies, *especially* from an Indigenous context. The Internet has become a tool for Indigenous means. Neal Mcleod (Cree) has a positive approach to the Internet and views Facebook as one of the primary sites for preserving the Cree language. For Mcleod, "[d]igital technology can be quite liberating …. It has to be a living, daily language. You have to text in Cree. You have to be cool in Cree. If you're cool in a language then people want to speak it" (207). Thus, Mcleod extends what Howe found emancipating about the Internet for the individual to an important issue for Indigenous rights and self-determination: The preservation and transfer of Indigenous languages by being fun.

Like Mcleod, Margaret Noori (Anishinaabe) also has a positive approach to contemporary ICTs and focuses on the Internet's ability to teach and spread Indigenous languages, in her case, Anishinaabemowin.[12] I surmise from Mcleod and Noori's examples, contemporary Indigenous peoples use the power of the World Wide Web to repair the damage done to Indigenous languages by hundreds of years of ongoing settler colonialism. Ergo, contrary to Howe's and Alfred's views, cyberspace can act as a source of kinship and community where Indigenous people from different geographies who speak/learn the same language come together as a *community*, as a *tribe,* and thereby create contemporary Indigenous kinships. In the novel, Jonny's relationship with the internet does not make him less of an Indigenous person nor is it detrimental to his Indigeneity. In this sense, Whitehead rewrites the internet in a different light. Although ahistorical, cyberspace here becomes a material place where Jonny practices his non-cis femininity as a young girl. Following Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe), the Internet gives Jonny the ability of "transmotion" (65). Indige-

12 Anishinaabe language.

nous literatures "are instances of natural motion, and transmotion, a visionary resistance to cultural dominance" (65). In cyberspace, he creates a safe space within the heteropatriarchal and homophobic reserve for himself where he can perform freely.

Practicing Authorship: Rewriting Indigeneity

Taylor claims that in Western thought, writing (or the Euro-Western understanding of writing, conventional pen and paper) "has become the guarantor of existence itself" (xix). These limited conceptualizations of writing are designed to consolidate European imperialism and allow colonial powers to maintain control over Indigenous populations from across the Atlantic (18). The Indigenous author of *Jonny Appleseed*, Joshua Whitehead, holds a PhD from (and is currently an assistant professor at) the University of Calgary, which is a settler colonial institution situated on the "traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta" ("Territorial Land Acknowledgment"). Both the book's success and Whitehead's authority in academia, which is a legitimized and state-backed epistemic institution, show Indigenous peoples' agency in changing the dominant narratives of settler colonialist material practices. Even though Whitehead did not hold a PhD when *Jonny Appleseed* was published, his continuing oeuvre that involves non-fictional essays and anthologies alike shows that Whitehead (re)writes what it means to be an academic in a Western setting.

For his protagonist Jonny, the fetishization and erotization of Indigenous bodies play a crucial role in Jonny's self-marketing. His clients are mostly non-Indigenous men, some of whom are married to women, have children, and do not openly identify as homosexual or queer. Jonny is aware of the interest in him as he 'catches' his customer's gaze and interest in cyberspace. In this regard, his Grindr profile functions as a well-lit sign for interested buyers, and there is certainly no shortage of them. "The funny thing about Grindr is that it's full of treaty chasers. They'll fetishize the hell out of you if you tell them you're a real NDN wolf-boy, that you got arrows pointing at their faces and cocks" (Whitehead 18). Jonny calls them "treaty chasers" (18) in a word play collage of the problematic term 'tranny chasers' with the official treaties between the Canadian Government and First Nations in Canada. The non-Indigenous men in cyberwilderness desire an Indigenous body. Jonny checks the "Native American" option on Grindr, which he confesses, "did a lot of leg work for me. 'You're

Indian, eh,' someone would message me, and I'd reply, 'Yeah, wanna see?' and link them to my websites" (18). Jonny experiences an immense amount of fascination and desire toward Indigeneity in settler Canada. The settler customer is mostly ignorant and reduces Indigeneity to what Vizenor highlights as a simulacrum of the 'Indian.' "The *indian* in this sense, is striven, a hyperreal simulation" (27, emphasis original), that is devoid of actual referents.[13] When Jonny chooses the bear as his tribe name on Grindr, since that is his clan (Whitehead 19), he gets reactions claiming he is "a twink [rather] than a bear" (19). In a queer context, the term "twink" refers to a young, slim gay man whereas the "bear" is used to refer to men with big and hairy bodies. The responses from the clients show how little informed the public is in terms of Indigenous cultures, only being aware of the meaning of bear in the context of contemporary gay male slang.

What is worthy of attention here are the modern circumstances of Jonny's environment. Jonny as an Indigenous young man is tech-savvy, comfortable both in the city and online. He juggles his digital material around with ease to accommodate more clients and earn more money. "I was a professional—work smart, not hard. I used the collage that I had made of dick-pics to help me gather clients" (18). His online presence disrupts the settler colonialist discourse that ascribes Indigeneity to the concepts of savagery, backwardness, and primitiveness. Furthermore, he is almost constantly online, checking Facebook during breakfast, and replying to potential clients through other networks (24). The author of the 2018 novel *There There*, Tommy Orange (Cheyenne and Arapaho), highlights an alternative perspective regarding the urbanity of Indigenous peoples, equating urbanity to being present in the cyberworld. "Plenty of us are urban now. If not because we live in cities, then because we live on the Internet" (9). Jonny makes a living from being online and occupying cyberspace. In this vein, Whitehead's Indigenous protagonist embraces urbanity with all its 'raw' and 'gritty' realities.

Cyberwilderness

Although cyberspace offers a certain freedom to Jonny, the way it is conventionally framed is deeply connected to Euro-American imperialism. As I men-

13 Vizenor writes the word "Indian" without a capital 'I' and in italics to indicate the artificiality and emptiness of the word.

tioned, I view the cyberspace in the novel as a 'wilderness,' a site where the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous meet. I am aware that by referring to cyberspace as "cyberwilderness" I evoke the settler colonial understandings both on the concepts of 'space' and 'wilderness'. By *materializing* an otherwise virtual cyberspace, people in the tech industry have superimposed settler colonial frameworks of land grab and ownership onto the internet. Furthermore, the concept of "wilderness" brings the spatial understanding of cyberspace to another level. Within a North American settler context, the lands Indigenous peoples lived on were considered wilderness, empty, wild, and dangerous spaces that were up for grabs and the God-given right of the European settlers due to the help of national narratives such as the myth of Manifest Destiny. These ideas also entailed thinking that the wilderness was an opportunity for many European settlers. In *Jonny Appleseed*, cyberwilderness becomes an opportunity not for the European settler but for the Indigenous individual. Jonny reclaims this "wilderness" by setting up his profile on cyberspace. Whitehead's fiction foregrounds Indigenous agency, and to a certain extent, Indigenous self-determination in which his protagonist reproduces the scenario of 'discovery,' with him as an Oji-Cree being in a position of power over these easily led white men.

Going back to the roots of theorizing cyberspace, Cordes emphasizes that in the early days of the Internet, cyberspace was:

> anticipated and imagined by techno-optimists for its potential to act as a new gathering place. However, cyberspace has been discoursed and materialized in a manner that frames it as commodified land, reproducing colonialism as well as the exclusionary gendered and raced notions that undergird it. ("Meeting Place" 285)

She refers to Dave Healy's framing of cyberspace as a frontier, as "a tired but useful metaphor" to understand the dominant discourses surrounding it (285).[14] Framing cyberspace as a frontier comes with certain connotations and a discursive framework. Frontier imaginary is filled with settler colonialist rhetoric and stereotypes of Indigenous peoples. Duarte claims that associated frontier discourse, such as the crucial myth of Manifest Destiny, is dominant in discourses around the Internet and cyberspace. She asks her readers to

14 Healy draws his ideas from US historian Frederick Jackson Turner's famous "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" thesis. Turner's thesis constructs the frontier as the defining trait of Americanness, distinct from Europeanness or Indigeneity.

"[c]onsider the terms and phrases *information wants to be free, Electronic Frontier Foundation,* and *Internet pioneer.* For Native peoples, it is as if the imperial urge to westward expansion moved into the cybersphere" (113, emphasis original). This shows that the dominant discourses on cyberspace or referring to the Internet as a spatial concept mirrors the hegemony of settler colonialism in North America.

This frontier imaginary works on the premise of normalizing and justifying the removal of Indigenous peoples from Indigenous lands and is inherently connected to settler colonial violence. Using the frontier metaphor, cyberspace is closely associated with warfare and land conquest with terms such as "(cyberwar, doxing), terrain conquest (owning networks), and rule" (Cordes, "Meeting Place" 286). Duarte, on the other hand, refers to the internet as a "richly featured terrain, with the topographies of technical networks shaped by a mixture of the personal agendas, political will, mundane habits, and desires of the individuals who create and use them" (32), and argues that a single conceptual framework to understand cyberspace is grossly inadequate.

Jonny's rewriting practices stem from exploiting the conventional ways of thinking about cyberspace as a site in need of 'settlement.' As a scholar of performance studies, Taylor conceptualizes colonial encounters as a defining act, performance, or embodied action that goes back to the first contact between Indigenous populations and Europeans in the fifteenth century (16). She sees performance as "an episteme, a way of knowing" and through performing, "we learn and transmit knowledge" (xvi).[15] Scenarios of discovery are material practices because they are bodily manifested and mediated through the practice of writing. They include contact narratives, and stories of colonial encounters, which are "theatrical scenario[s] structured in a predictable, formulaic, hence repeatable fashion" (Taylor 13). Ultimately, they are Eurocentric and imperialist renditions of encounters between Indigenous peoples and Europeans.

Taylor goes back to 1493, to Christopher Columbus' first letter to the Spanish queen in which he describes that the islands he 'discovered' were in fact inhabited by people (55). In the Canadian context, *The Jesuit Relations* is considered one of the first encounter narratives between Indigenous populations and Europeans. These written reports by Jesuit missionaries date back to 1632 in what

15 This corresponds with Judith Butler's idea of gender as learned performance. By repeating embodied actions/performances passed down to us by our families, schools, and other institutions, we reproduce hegemonic gender binaries and associated gender roles in our societies. In other words, we learn discourse and reproduce it.

is now called Quebec (Boon et al.). The scenarios within create a spatial (also latently temporal) distance between a here and an "exotic 'there'" (Taylor 54). Scenarios of discovery are self-explanatory in that they are narratives based on the act of discovering. However, they are also quite successful in obscuring their discursive position. They give complete agency to the non-Indigenous subject, as in they are there to be discovered and their entire existence relies on it and render the Indigenous subject passive and powerless.

In the novel, the Indigenous subject, Jonny reproduces these scenarios to the extent that the settler 'discovers' the Indigenous in cyberwilderness. Jonny sets his online profile to be discovered by potential clients, deliberately setting it up to cater to the "treaty chasers" (Whitehead 18) in Canada. Jonny's body in cyberspace becomes the object of desire for the non-Indigenous subject. Additionally, there is a queer twist in the scenario where the desire for the Indigenous is infused not only with colonialist exoticization but is a homosexual desire where men are looking for other men.

Indigenous Rewriting of Discovery Theatrics

Exploring the intersections of male queerness and Indigeneity means being simultaneously aware of the dominant heteronormative settler ideology, as well as the stereotypes of Indigenous manhood oozing with hyperbolic masculinity. For Sam Mckegney, the term "masculindians" personifies popular representations of Indigenous manhood (1). He claims there is a "settler North American appetite for depictions of Indigenous men that rehearse hypermasculine stereotypes of the noble savage and the bloodthirsty warrior (as well as their ideological progeny—the ecological medicine man, the corrupt band councillor, and the drunken absentee)" (1). Jonny's identification as Two-Spirited and Indigiqueer man challenges this supposed hypermasculinity of Indigenous men. From his stereotypical Halloween costumes of 'famous' Indigenous figures to the black velvet bodysuit of Catwoman (Whitehead 26), Jonny shifts his appearance for the occasion, dressing as feminine, masculine, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous. Noori highlights the importance of the Internet to Indigenous communities: "If Nanabozhoo were among us (and he might be) …, he would be a hacker, a gamer, a halfhuman, half shape-

shifting avatar" (18).[16] In this regard, Jonny is Nanabozhoo, an oft-mischievous shapeshifter trickster.

Furthermore, Jonny's hyperreal Indigenous costumes allow him to participate in settler America's practice of "playing Indian," which Philip J. Deloria (Standing Rock Sioux) describes as a "persistent tradition in American culture" (7). Starting with the Boston Tea Party, where members of the Sons of Liberty dressed as Indigenous peoples and threw chests of tea into the Boston Harbor, "playing Indian" has become one of the quintessential American performances (8). As a material practice, "playing Indian" portrays the complexity of settler-native relations. In the quest for establishing a distinct idea of 'Americanness,' Indigeneity serves the settler-colonialist rhetoric as the 'other,' which delineates the contours of Americanness with a distinct European descent. In American identity formations, Indigenous subjects also function to separate Americans from their European counterparts, with Americanness thus achieving a unique position that is neither European nor Indigenous. In the novel, Jonny's participation in the performance of "playing Indian" is complex; he plays not just one but multiple Indigenous figures with male and female gender identities. In this sense, Jonny becomes the ultimate trickster: He participates in a non-Indigenous, settler 'practice' and subverts it by tricking settler males into believing he is someone he is not. He plays the caricatured, hyperreal 'Indian' characters in his self-made scenarios of discovery. Social geographers Steve Pile and Michael Keith remark that resistance is not about killing the oppressors; it is practiced in the "deceptive spaces of costume and trickery, through which people blur the edges of political identity" (14).[17] Thereby, Jonny's performance in the cyberwilderness builds a "geography of resistance" (Pile and Keith 23).

Jonny confesses that sometimes it is difficult "to create an entire world for clients that fits your body and theirs … [but to no surprise] [m]ost times, though, they only want me to play NDN" (Whitehead 25). These relations of power are evident in scenarios of discovery where the active party, i.e., the discoverer, is the "one who 'sees' and controls the scene" (Taylor 61). As clients

16 "Nanabozhoo," "Nanabozo," or "Nanabush" is a trickster figure who appears in Anishinaabe and Cree creation stories and plays a crucial role in and representing the vitality and perseverance of Indigenous cultures.

17 Interestingly, Sons of Liberty also use 'costume and trickery' to rebel against their oppressors, the British Crown. Thus, the Boston Tea Party achieves a complex position as a simultaneously subversive and oppressive practice.

view Jonny's online profile, they enact the colonial gaze between screens, in other words, there is a "*mechanics* of spectacle" at play between Jonny, the 'brown found object,' and the clients, the 'discoverers' (13, emphasis original). This is one of the important elements of the novel that foregrounds its complexity. Classic attempts, to either situate the book as a cultural work of complete resistance and defiance or treat it as an artifact that surrenders itself to the status quo, fail to capture the depth of Whitehead's novel. Continuing the 'tradition' of rejecting closed analyses and fixed interpretations, the novel neither does so nor accepts reductionism from either side. Jonny's practice of cybersex is a gray area where Indigenous stereotypes and settler reductionist perspectives on Indigeneity are reproduced, even if for Indigenous means, which still complicates Jonny's position. Taylor is clear on the delineation of power between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous: "No matter who restages the colonial encounter from the West's perspective—the novelist, the playwright, the discoverer, or the government official—it stars the same white male protagonist-subject and the same brown, found 'object'" (13). Even though Jonny is the author/creator of the scenario, questions inevitably arise. If queer Indigenous Jonny ultimately does what he is told by non-Indigenous men in terms of putting on an erotic show with various costumes of 'Indian' stereotypes, how much authority does he exercise on his own body and self-formation? To answer this, I suggest we look at the way Jonny transforms cyberspace as his own.

Both parties in the scenario, the settler, and the Indigenous play their roles in one of the oldest practices in North American nation-building rhetoric that has "appeared constantly throughout the past five hundred years in the Americas" (Taylor 28). What is noteworthy here is that Jonny is the creator of the digital discovery story. He is not a passive figure waiting to be discovered. He creates and initiates a scenario where the non-Indigenous user believes he 'found' Jonny in cyberwilderness, and a new type of colonial encounter ensues. Jonny sells an image—a settler colonial fantasy resonating perfectly within Canadian settler society—which demonstrates his awareness of these structures. He can play into settler colonialist expectations, however faulty and ignorant they are. Along the lines of New Age ignorance, the buyers of the 'NDN' image are clueless about the rich cultural and spiritual landscape of Indigenous peoples in North America. They desire not the real person but a hyperreal image, a colonial simulation that derives from the accounts of Columbus and other Europeans who came after him. And this is exactly what Whitehead's protagonist exploits in the novel.

Conclusion

Whitehead's fiction functions as a contemporary example of a material writing practice that offers and validates contemporary and alternative Indigenous lives that are Two-Spirited, tech-savvy, and not drenched in narratives of victimhood. Queer studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz argues that queerness "is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (1). Whitehead's writing of Jonny's rewriting of the scenario of discovery is an active form of a (queer) utopian imagination where Whitehead rejects the heteronormativity of settler Canada and insists on a world in which Jonny claims agency for his life. What are scenarios of discovery if not material practices? They are narratives with established tropes and characters. They are embodied practices, material in nature, and then mediated through writing. Whitehead is the one who writes and transforms the scenario into a contemporary setting that is cyberspace. Moreover, he shifts the perspective of the scenario and exploits the established structures that non-Indigenous men look for and expect. Jonny's exploitation of expectations is twofold. First, Jonny exploits the material practice of the scenario of discovery, the encounter narrative. Second, he exploits the 'Indian' stereotypes by dressing up in a hyperreal fashion as 'famous' Indigenous male and female figures.

Looking back at his early years of online shapeshifting into 'Lucia', Jonny confesses to the reader: "I always liked to let them think they were the ones in control. I'm a sadist like that, I guess. I may be the sexual fantasy but I'm also the one in the *driver's seat*" (Whitehead 8, emphasis mine). This is the exact same metaphor Cordes uses to talk about the implications of Indigeneity and artificial intelligence in the future, when she remarks:

> By making AI serve us [Indigenous peoples] and owning it as an Indigenous project, efforts like these … break down the epistemological underpinnings and exemplify the fact that Indigenous people are not only surviving in the digital age, but are in the *driver's seat* of envisioning futurity in an increasingly digital and globalized world. ("The Future of AI," emphasis mine)

Not just AI, but contemporary ICTs in general serve Indigenous peoples and Jonny is able to use the Internet and cyberspace keeping authority to himself. To share in Cordes' and Jonny's metaphor, Two-Spirited Indigenous Jonny is the one driving and deciding where to go in the cyberwilderness.

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Placing the Translation from Implicit to Explicit

Arenas, Psychoanalysis, and Ocean Voyages

David Kempf

Abstract *The essay examines Clifford Geertz' Deep Play and its views on explicitness in the context of Balinese cockfighting. Drawing Geertz' analysis of the cockfight as social ritual, it carves out the translation from implicit to explicit expression of sentiments. The reading of Geertz' text leads to an analysis of the interplay between exclusion and inclusion. Hence, this paper tries to (1) outline this interplay, to (2) arrive at a preliminary understanding of what purpose this translation from implicit to explicit serves, with a focus on its imaginative features. To make these ideas more concrete, the paper then (3) discusses the empirical case of experimenting with the football simulation game Football Manager, and finishes (4) with a brief conclusion.*

Keywords *Practice Theory; Ethnography; Sociology; Game Studies; STS; Football Manager*

In his famous text *Deep Play*, Clifford Geertz describes the Balinese cockfight as a cultural means of expression to make explicit what usually remains implicit. Asking why a striking number of bets placed on the cockfight's outcome appear questionable from a classical economic utilitarian perspective, Geertz works out that the main goal of betting is to explicate and underpin one's own familial, friendly, and village community relationships; for instance, family members often bet on animals owned by their relatives. He expands and generalizes this argument: cockfighting—and, for example, theater in Western countries—is fundamentally about explicating what otherwise remains culturally implicit and offering an opportunity to come to terms with oneself as a society:

> As any art form—for that, finally, is what we are dealing with—the cockfight renders ordinary, everyday experience comprehensible by presenting it in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced (or, if you prefer, raised) to the level of sheer appearances, where their meaning can be more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived. … An image, fiction, a model, a metaphor, the cockfight is a means of expression; its function is neither to assuage social passions nor to heighten them (though, in its play-with-fire way, it does a bit of both), but, in a medium of feathers, blood, crowds, and money, to display them. (79)

For Geertz the most important cultural aspects expressed in the cockfight center around aggression, violence, and sexuality, all topics which Geertz observes as not openly discussed or explicitly expressed in the Balinese culture. In his description, the alterity of the cockfight is given important meaning—albeit implicitly—through the clear demarcation from everyday events, marked also by the specific location of the arena. The arena is the ideal place to condense the events. What happens in the Balinese arena, theater, or even soccer stadium, has a unique status. While Geertz did not focus on the arena as much, both the specific space and the associated rituals and practices (like betting) take on a dramatizing function (Flick et al.). The arena allows for this dramatization by, among other things, ensuring basic observability of the action taking place (O'Donnell 408). My main thesis here lies in the complex interplay between exclusion and inclusion. Hence, this paper tries to (1) outline this interplay, to (2) arrive at a preliminary understanding of what purpose this translation from implicit to explicit serves, with a focus on its imaginative features. To make these ideas more concrete, the paper then (3) discusses the empirical case of experimenting with the football simulation game *Football Manager*, and finishes (4) with a brief conclusion.

1. Exclusion and Inclusion

The possibility of arenas and other similar places to create their specific focus rests on their ability to *exclude* many elements. Consider how most arenas look from the outside: closed-off, behind thick walls. There is a tendency, however, to take this point too far. A striking example stems from Game Studies: the notion of the *Magic Circle*, originating in Johan Huizinga's work *Homo*

Ludens. He understands the boundaries of games as central to their potential to distinguish themselves from ordinary life. Hence the necessity for clearly bounded spaces and temporalities (Böss et al.). The notion of the Magic Circle has led to heated debate in Game Studies (Consalvo; Jaakko; Juul), and though the main controversies have been laid to rest by now, the underlying idea remains extremely influential. Hence, much research, especially from the humanities, still treats games as bounded and isolated objects—often as some kind of quasi-text—and neglects their embeddedness in other everyday practices (Pargman and Jakobsson). This was a major issue in many Game Studies contributions to my own research focused on the football simulation game *Football Manager*. This game affords its players plenty of time for planning and strategizing, and much of this effort takes place outside of the narrow definition of "playing" as only the time spent in front of the game's screen. Instead, players scribble down notes, create Excel sheets, discuss widely with friends and strangers in online forums, take walks to think about tactics, etc. Geertz hints at such aspects, too, when talking about the everyday practices that surround the cockfights: taking care of the animals, feeding them well, etc., but also ubiquitous discussions about the last or next big fight.

The close embedding in other everyday practices and spheres can be better understood by focusing on a remark made by Erving Goffman in *Fun in Games*. In this work, Goffman develops the detailed notion of a "membrane." He thematizes games as encounters that usually take place in small groups and whose success depends on a definition of the situation shared by the participants. The "as-if" mode of a game (e.g., this wooden piece is a queen and can therefore move almost at will on the chessboard) constitutes its own unit of meaning, a "world for itself" (20). A matrix of possible events and a cast of roles through whose enactment the events occur constitute together a field for fateful dramatic action, a plane of being, an engine of meaning, a world, different from all other worlds except the ones generated when the same game is played at other times (26). This world must be actively created and jointly maintained by the players as it is constantly threatened by competition from other worlds or the leading definition of the situation. Just think of a game of chess suddenly interrupted by a ringing phone. In this respect, the active maintenance of joint activity requires a demarcation from other possible worlds. This function is assumed by the application of "rules of irrelevance" which exclude many elements that protrude into the situation as irrelevant. Goffman cites the example of completely different-looking pieces in the board game of checkers (19). Whether classically made of wood, or of whatever is currently available, like

bottle caps, the game pieces have a purely symbolic meaning; their material and aesthetic dimensions are irrelevant to the definition of the situation. The rules of irrelevance organize on a basic, somewhat epistemological level what is to be understood as part of the situation and what is not, thus preventing a complete overload and the resulting excessive demands.

Even more fundamentally, all participants must know and be able to agree on what is part of the game and what is not:

> The elegance and strength of this structure of inattention to most things of the world is a great tribute to the social organization of human propensities. Witness the fugue-like manner in which deeply engrossed chess players are willing to help each other reposition a piece that has been brushed aside by a sleeve, dissociating this event from relevant reality and providing us with a clear example of a fundamental process, the sustaining of subordinate side-encounter simultaneously with a main one that has been accorded the accent of reality. (20)

The chess piece must be put back in the right place to continue the game. However, to maintain the definition of the situation as "chess," it is necessary to share the knowledge that this is not a move by the player, but that the action is outside the game, or *extradiegetic* (Galloway 7). In more abstract terms: There are cases in which the game depends on attention being directed to factors external to the game, while at the same time, there is a necessary consensus to understand these actions as extradiegetic and not as breaking off the common diegetic framework. The restitution of the fallen chess piece is therefore both "irrelevant" and necessary for the continuation of the game. However, new events can also jeopardize the shared focus. For example, if the phone rings in the middle of a game of chess, or if one of the two players suddenly gets up to cook dinner, the game threatens to collapse. Such an event creates tension between the currently accepted definition of the situation and another, which sometimes suddenly imposes itself as a valid definition, as reality: "… just as the coherence and persistence of a focused gathering depends on maintaining a boundary, so the integrity of this barrier seems to depend upon the management of tension" (Goffman, *Fun in Games* 43).

This "management of tension" cannot simply rely on dismissing certain elements as irrelevant. In some cases, for Goffman, it is hardly possible to ignore certain characteristics or events, but it is possible to introduce them in such a way that they do not lead to any significant tension, and do not jeopardize the

prevailing situation, or even support it. Charm and tact often fulfill this role in group conversations (48). Just think of the embarrassing "elephant in the room" that threatens to destroy conversation, but which can be addressed by skillful explication—perhaps with the help of friendly irony. In such cases, the group is aware that, for example, a topic that is highly unpleasant for a participant is coming up. Tension arises between the current definition of the situation—friendly small talk—and another intruding definition: talking about an unpleasant, difficult topic. This tension becomes too great to simply ignore and pass over. It threatens to destroy the "world," for example, when the group disperses slightly embarrassed: "*I'm going to get something to eat*." The only way to get the embarrassing, tension-inducing point out of the way is to introduce it in a transformed way, perhaps in the form of a charming joke, and thus make it manageable. The "rules of irrelevance" are then accompanied by "rules of transformation."

For Goffman, this transformation often takes the form of a direct reversal in relation to games, particularly when it comes to social hierarchies, for instance, when children, as the youngest and with the lowest hierarchical position in the group, are allowed to roll the dice first. In other cases, transformative inclusion is used to ensure the exclusion of other influences that could potentially cause tension. As an example, Goffman cites a bridge game in which married couples do not compete against each other, but in mixed teams (30). The fact that several participants are in a relationship is too influential for the situation to simply fall under the rules of irrelevance. It is therefore integrated into the composition of the game partners, translated into a kind of diegetic logic, so that it can then become irrelevant to the game. With the rules of transformation, the potential inclusion of external characteristics is systematically introduced alongside the omnipresent external demarcation: "We found that the barrier to externally realized properties was more like a screen than like a solid wall, and we then came to see that the screen not only selects but also transforms and modifies what is passed through it. Speaking more strictly, we can think of inhibitory rules that tell participants what they must not attend to and of facilitating rules that tell them what they may recognize" (33).

The metaphorical description changes from a "solid wall" to a "screen," which does not simply operate as a simple demarcation to the outside, but rather proceeds dynamically and selectively on a case-specific basis and, as already described, transforms what it includes. In addition to "inhibitory rules," there are also "facilitating rules" that organize this type of inclusion (33)."We fence our encounters in with gates; the very means by which we hold

off a part of reality can be the means by which we can bear introducing it" (78). A wall, a sieve, gates—during the text, Goffman uses various metaphors that are not systematic but rather follow the train of thought on a figurative level. Eventually, he ends up with the metaphor of the membrane of a cell (65). Here, selective inclusion and exclusion, the transformation of the included, as well as activity and processuality are pointedly expressed.

In the footnote I want to subsequently focus on, Goffman refers to Melanie Klein and her description of the psychoanalytic consulting room. The psychoanalytic therapy method mobilizes a form of membrane that allows everything from the patient's perspective to flow into the situation without jeopardizing the valid definition of the situation as therapeutic (Goffman, *Fun in Games* 75). The strict emphasis on the professional psychoanalytic setting is essential for the possibility of this radically permeable and at the same time extraordinarily robust membrane. In this context, Goffman quotes Melanie Klein in a footnote with special reference to the spatial dimension inherent in the psychoanalytic therapy setting:

> More important still, I found that the transference situation—the backbone of the psycho-analytic procedure—can only be established and maintained if the patient is able to feel that the consulting-room or the play-room, indeed the whole analysis, is something separate from his ordinary home life. For only under such conditions can he overcome his resistances against experiencing and expressing thoughts, feelings, and desires, which are incompatible with convention, and in the case of children felt to be in contrast to much of what they have been taught. (qutd. in Goffman, *Fun in Games* 76)

The function of demarcation already discussed in Geertz's case of the cockfight appears once again: to enable access to, or explication of, what is otherwise implicit—in this case the unconscious. Goffman's reference to psychoanalysis is not aimed at demarcation *per se* but at its function of enabling inclusion precisely through segregation. This is made clear by the remark directly following the Klein quote in the footnote: "Perhaps then, an ocean voyage is fun not because it cuts us off from ordinary life but because in being apparently cut off from ordinary life, we can afford to experience certain aspects of it" (76).

Arena, psychoanalytical treatment room, and cruise mark a clear dividing line: what takes place here is different, subject to its own rules and contexts of meaning. This enables the appearance and explication of elements that otherwise have no place in Balinese society: violence, agonality, and openly sex-

ualized symbolism in the Balinese cockfight described by Geertz; feelings or desires that otherwise remain unconscious to the analysand because they are, e.g., shameful; furthermore, think of the openly revealed extent of at least verbal aggression in the soccer stadium. However, these elements do not come from nowhere, they are at least implicitly always already present, part of the everyday life of a culture. Geertz, Klein, and Goffman agree on this, even if the first two authors do not make it so explicit. What emerges in these separate places is therefore different not in terms of content, but in terms of appearance: from implicit, private, unconscious, and hidden, to explicit, publicly performed, and dramatized.

Goffman's characterization of the supposed separation is to be understood in this sense: What happens on the cruise is not strictly separated from "ordinary life," but rather allows certain aspects of it to emerge by the supposed separation, as if under a burning glass. Of course,—and Goffman remains brief and nebulous here—a very essential separation takes place. On the cruise ship, one generally leaves one's everyday working life behind, and (especially in Goffman's time without cell phones or the internet) much of one's everyday social contacts. In the psychoanalytic session, the usual conventions, for instance politely asking the therapist how they are doing today, are no longer applicable. That is essential for the business of transference and countertransference as it is a testament to stepping out of the usual social interaction regimen. And in the soccer stadium, the world is condensed into the famous ninety minutes and the round ball. Much is radically excluded from these situations. In this sense, it is important to treat Goffman's "apparently" with caution, to avoid the misunderstanding that this is an argument operating in the style of actuality: "*You think the 90 minutes in the soccer stadium are separated from everyday life, but the opposite is the case!*" Instead, the argument is more complicated and works dialectically, so to speak. By organizing exclusion, these culturally produced situations enable inclusion; they separate to make visible what otherwise remains absent and present. The membrane is both extraordinarily fluid and robust, like a spider's thread:

> Fighting cocks, almost every Balinese I have ever discussed the subject with has said, is like playing with fire only not getting burned. You activate village and kingroup rivalries and hostilities, but in "play" form, coming dangerously and entrancingly close to the expression of open and direct interpersonal and intergroup aggression (something which, again, almost never

> happens in the normal course of ordinary life), but not quite, because, after all, it is "only a cockfight." (Geertz 77)

To a certain extent, this absence of practical consequences also applies to the psychoanalytic setting, which allows the analysand, for example, to express her erotic desires to the therapist without, in theory at least, having to fear that this might jeopardize the prevailing definition of the situation or the framing of the situation as therapy. This separation of the usual consequences of actions is essential for the equally radically elastic and yet robust membrane. Nevertheless, it is neither the sole determining factor nor is it fundamentally necessary. In the example of the cruise, for instance, the decoupling of practical consequences of the event is not the main driver of stepping out of the usual social interactions.

We thus gain an idea about how exclusion and inclusion must work together to derive these specific translations from implicit to explicit. Geertz slightly oddly compares the Balinese cockfight to theater when hinting at how to understand it in his own Western cultural setting. Why not stick to sports and/or playful activities? To better understand the importance of such mundane, everyday cultural performances, I turn to Goffman once again. In his *Frame Analysis*, he makes a few observations about what he calls "stunts." "Whatever the viewers obtain from such exhibits, it is clear that interest in cosmologically grounded issues is an everyday concern of the layman and by no means restricted to laboratory and field researchers" (31). The "exhibits" Goffman is talking about here are those "stunts" performed by acrobats, knife throwers, "daredevil" drivers, but possibly also specially trained animals. These exotica are fascinating because of the opportunities they offer to learn something about the otherwise culturally implicit ideas about what is "normal." "Trained seals, sociable porpoises, dancing elephants, and acrobatic lions all exemplify the possibility of ordinary guided doings done by alien agents, thus drawing attention to the cosmological line drawn in our society between human agents and animal ones" (31).

Goffman appropriately quotes Victor Turner in a statement about monsters, whose cultural function he sees in their ability "to teach neophytes to distinguish clearly between the different factors of reality, as it is conceived in their culture" (Turner 104, quoted from Goffman, *Frame Analysis* 31). In the cases described, it is about radically exaggerated deviations from what is otherwise considered normal, about the "supernatural" and the unexpected.

2. Imagination as Generation of the New and to Keep Step

As was shown, exclusion and inclusion work together to create a unique kind of focus that allows for an explication of what would otherwise remain implicit. Geertz's thick description of the Balinese cockfight paves the way for this understanding. However, Goffman's contributions point to a slightly different function. While Geertz's characterization seems to be close to a psychoanalytical understanding demarcating unconscious and conscious, Goffman—especially when talking about "stunts"—rather points to an understanding that focuses on *generating* new insights instead of unearthing them. Both points are fairly alike, and in no way mutually exclusive. I also must clarify that I do not claim that Geertz follows a psychoanalytical framework; my goal is to subsequently focus on this latter understanding, on arenas, psychoanalytical couches, and cruise ships as places that not only make explicit what might have been implicit, but as places that foster the genesis of the new, and therefore allow for some kind of *imagination*, often collectively. In the sense of this interpretation, the Balinese cockfight for example does not merely express the formerly hidden aspects of aggression, violence, and sexuality, but rather, by allowing their expression, *creates* them in their specific meaning. This turn is closely connected to a practice-theoretical take that vehemently rejects any mentalist concepts (like the unconscious) and insists on the necessity to publicly perform and practice any given concept (Wittgenstein; Schmidt and Volbers; Reckwitz; Schatzki).

The places and practices formerly described—Balinese cockfight, psychoanalytical setting, cruise voyage—therefore play an important role in generating practiced ideas and concepts. In its function, this role is close to what Susanne Langer calls *feeling*. In *Scientific Civilization and Cultural Crisis,* she operates from the basic diagnosis of scientific progress that had become much too fast for the imagination of Western society to keep step with:

> The fact is, I think, that scientific production has outrun our imagination, and the change in our civilization—in the practical means and techniques of life—has advanced with a gathered momentum of its own and outstripped the advance of our thinking. Our technological civilization, consequently, seems to overtake and overwhelm us as though it were something foreign coming in upon us. (91)

This lack of imaginative capabilities would thus cause the incapability to symbolically express these newest scientific and technological developments (91). What might be done about this problem? For Langer, it is not predominantly theory that has to step in (such as in Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World / Alfred North Whitehead*); instead, she envisions art to be at the forefront of this quest. "It begins when imagination catches fire, and objects and actions become life symbols, and the new life-symbols become motifs of art" (92). To arrive at a deeper understanding of how this might play out concretely, I turn now to the video game *Football Manager* and present it as a means for imagination to catch fire, focusing specifically on the topic of experimenting using a simulation.

3. *Football Manager*: Experimenting on Theories

Propelled by the extreme progress that digital computing has made since the early middle of the twentieth century, there has emerged a new possibility for scientists to experiment and research. Today, scientific simulations are ubiquitous in our daily lives. Models of the future shape many of the most important political debates of today—just think of COVID-19 (Enserink and Kupferschmidt) and the climate crisis (Gramelsberger, "Climate and Simulation"). In these examples, simulations are radically future-oriented, projecting outcomes of today's actions that are highly undesirable in most cases. They serve as a warning sign that says: "*Don't take that path!*" Thus, there emerges a circular approach: in the first step, current states—COVID-19 infections, CO2 emissions, etc.—are extrapolated and give the picture of a predicted future; in the second step, this information is referenced to inform actual decision-making in the present. Hence, simulations offer a unique temporal approach in the grammatic form of the future-perfect (it will have happened):

> The future perfect offers a grammatical structure for a retrospective from the future. In so doing, the present changes: It is already remembered while it is still happening. On the one hand, it is present; on the other hand, it has already been presented. Whilst the events are still happening, they are already history and can be seen in historical context. (Bexte 220)

This way of "understanding backwards" from a predicted future state is not only important for simulations that directly target a yet unknown future. Many

simulations stand in for objects that are not in the future but out of the scientist's reach for other reasons: experimenting with these objects might be physically out of reach as with neutrino-stars, ethically problematic as in the case of nuclear weapons, or simply too complex or expensive (Sismondo). Nevertheless, in all these cases the scientist's grasp via simulations must be understood as a practice of *reverse-engineering*. Simulations are completely artificial, yet by experimenting with them, the scientist can conclude what they represent. According to Gabriele Gramelsberger, this marks a radical shift "from science to computational science" as "the fulfillment of the second half of the scientific revolution" (*From Science to Computational Sciences* 38).

The literature about scientific simulations is vast. Therefore, I want to highlight two different considerations: Deborah Dowling's ethnographic work on the experimental practices of scientists dealing with and using simulations and Alfred Nordmann's philosophical take on *techno-science* as a new form of science that breaks with the goal of representing its object.

3.1 Dowling on Blackboxing

Dowling uses ethnographic methods to study scientists dealing with simulations. She notes that, depending on the researcher's scientific orientation, simulations are either identified as "theoretical" or "experimental." (Dowling 263+) While definitions of theory and experiment vary greatly, she identifies two lines of argument that most researchers agree with. First, the object of theories is some sort of *representation* or description whereas the object of experiments is a thing or *reality*. Second, the practice of the theorist consists of analytically working on equations and forming new ideas whereas, in the case of the experimental scientist, it consists of testing, playing around, and tinkering with things (264). *Simulations* then can be seen as a hybrid of these two modes, combining the object of theories (artificial representations) with the experimental practice (testing and playing around).

What makes Dowling's observation so compelling is that she locates this entanglement of two previously separated approaches in the scientific practice itself. Therefore, she uses the term "strategic blackboxing" (265), referring to Sherry Turkle's observation in *Life on the Screen (1997)*, according to which there are two ways of interacting with computers: the one she calls "calculative" is characterized by addressing the computer explicitly as a *machine* that runs equations, and the other is the "simulation mode" that addresses the given interface without explicit reference to the "machine behind," that deals with the

surface, so to speak.[1] The practice of the scientists dealing with simulations consists of artfully combining these two approaches. On one hand, it seems mandatory for most scientists to understand the simulations they employ from a mathematical point of view.[2] On the other, when experimenting with simulations, the scientists shift that perspective and interact with the simulation as something "foreign"—that is, they employ the practice of strategic blackboxing. Thus, the hybridity of the simulation—being somewhere in between what was usually called theory and experiment—gives birth to a scientific practice that is itself a hybrid between these two formerly separated practices.

> By combining an analytical grasp of a mathematical model with the ability to temporarily "black-box" the digital manipulation of that model, the technique of simulation allows creative and experimental "playing around" with an otherwise impenetrable set of equations, to notice its quirks or unexpected outcomes. The results of a large and complex set of computations are thus presented in a way that brings the skills of an observant experimenter to the development of mathematical theory. (Dowling 271)

The suspense of theoretical interest, of trying to keep track of every single equation, allows the scientist to engage with the now blackboxed simulation as an entity in itself. This leads to the possibility of playing around with it, of discovering completely new and unforeseen consequences. Dowling speaks about "experimenting on theories," the simulation allows the scientist to face their theory. It is as though one's ideas and theories gain an identity of their own and take a seat at the other end of the table, eager to begin a discussion. This encounter with one's own (or a colleague's) theory is crucial for generating completely new ideas and a better understanding of the theory and its internal logic by developing a feel for it (269).[3]

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1 Harth (2014) makes a similar observation by differentiating between two ideal types of video game players: the one group 'trivializing' the game—and therefore their own practice of playing—by solely treating it as an algorithm that must be beaten by the most effective play possible, and the other group seeking immersion in the game's lifeworld and therefore, e.g., feeling emotionally close to certain NPCs (Non-Player-Characters). For an extensive analysis of interfaces in video games, see Jorgensen.

2 It remains unclear to me whether this is still the case in huge and interdisciplinary projects such as CERN.

3 Approaching philosophical metaphysics *speculatively*—as in the work of Alfred North Whitehead (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*)—might be understood as a similar attempt without relying on any machine. This is especially interesting as Whitehead's

3.2 Technoscience

Alfred Nordmann understands *technoscience* as a hybrid between technological engineering and science. Like Dowling's argument, what makes technoscience unique is theoretical representation and technical intervention coming together:

> In technoscientific research, the business of theoretical representation cannot be dissociated, even in principle, from the material conditions of knowledge production and thus from the interventions that are required to make and stabilize the phenomena. In other words, technoscience knows only one way of gaining new knowledge and that is by first making a new world. (2)

One of the most important possibilities for creating such a new world is the use of simulations. Nordmann stresses that technoscience is not something completely new but that the notion rather corresponds to an ongoing shift in how scientists understand their practices and which scientific subjects are seen to be at the forefront of innovation. He gives examples of nanotechnology, pharmaceutical research, and materials sciences as branches which gained influence and can be seen as embodying technoscience. Besides the break with a classic modern understanding of science as representation, this includes close collaborations between public institutions (like universities) with the industry, and hence a strong urge to direct the research by its desired outcomes (4).

But how exactly does technoscience break with the aspiration of representation? Nordmann explores the modern understanding of science using its methods to *mirror* the world in great length. This leads too far for this chapter. What matters is that technoscience *makes use* of its refusal to mirror some distant reality as in the Kantian sense of the thing in itself. Nordmann gives the example of the "onco mouse" that became famous through Donna Haraway's work. This is a genetically modified laboratory mouse that naturally develops what we know as human breast cancer. He argues, following Haraway, that the onco mouse does not represent breast cancer but rather *is* breast cancer itself. It "embodies the powers of cancer that are fought and

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novel takes on metaphysics not as an attempt at grounding any eternal truth but rather as a tool that—precisely by being systematic—allows to think "anew" and differently resembles the shift towards theory as something with which to experiment that Dowling depicts. Also note the closeness to Susanne Langer here.

must be defeated here" (16). There still looms a representational goal in the background but—just as with Dowling's strategic black-boxing—it is almost completely neglected in the actual scientific practice. In this sense, Nordmann compares the position of the onco mouse to that of a voodoo doll: the doll does not represent or mirror anyone but promises to channel its state directly to that of a given subject. This metaphorically describes best how the artificially created world of technoscience and its "real counterpart" relate to each other (15): "[T]he animistic suggestion of technoscience takes its objects as being endowed with powers that participate in the order of nature" (16). Thus, technoscience is not about neglecting any form of representation but rather shifts from mirroring or representing the "world as such" as an absolute goal towards a much more pragmatic (and in fact *pragmatist*) approach that is interested in *what works* for a given and not necessarily scientific goal, such as treating cancer. To make this point clearer, Nordmann refers to an example of a simulation that models the velocity and resistance of a ship in a harbor. As to getting scaling effects right, "in order to preserve physical truth one cannot simply scale down uniformly but must introduce distortions that compensate for the scaling effects" (20). Thus, there is a gap between a model that would be realistic in a representational, narrow sense and one that leads to useful predictions—relying on actively introduced distortions.

Finally, Nordmann briefly tries to put this into a broader cultural perspective and refers to an example that is very interesting in this context:

> This wider cultural context is particularly apparent in the way in which technoscience beholds the world, rather: interacts with it—for here, the characteristic mode of beholding has been instituted in the immersive and substitutive aesthetics of video games. The transition from artful constructions of immediacy to collapse of distance corresponds aesthetically to the transition from absorption to immersion. (23)

Modernity relies on a fundamental gap between world/nature/thing on the one side and researcher/observer/philosopher on the other, with the latter painfully trying to bridge the gap. Technoscience, on the other hand—this post-modern tinkering with reality—makes full use of collapsing this gap. Therefore, *immersion* is its aesthetic cultural mode and video games may serve as a prime example of this cultural frame. Together with this icomesaccording to Nordmann—a break with Weber's claim of modern science as dis-enchantment in support of a "reenchantment of the world through technology"

(Nordmann 25). Hence, technoscience's turning away from representation as an absolute goal might also lead to deep cultural shifts, maybe most importantly a return of a "magical relation to the world (paradoxically, through the rational and rationalizing means of technology)" (25). Next, I want to present the empirical case of the football simulation game *Football Manager* as the mundane art form in which some of the ideas about experimenting described above can become explicit and experienceable.

3.3. Dreaming about Football[4]

Football Manager, like the most prominent football simulation *FIFA* (EA Sports, 2021), is a series of games released annually. Unlike in *FIFA*, the player does not control the footballers directly. Instead, they *manage* their team. This includes scouting, buying and selling players, setting up tactics and formation, planning training, etc. Thus, the game consists mostly of spreadsheets detailing e.g., numerical player attributes with each ranging from 1 to 20.

Important in this regard is the complexity derived by the interplay between the huge range of attributes with how the individual player is used tactically as well as the role of talent. Scouts assess the potential of each footballer; for the video game player, signing young and talented football players is one of the most successful long-term strategies. This also marks one of the most discussed aspects of playing *Football Manager*: The hunt for the best talent is the most defining aspect of the game.

The importance of this aspect can only be understood in the light of the game's goal to represent professional football as realistically as possible.[5] Sports Interactive, publisher of the *Football Manager* series, provide a huge database that covers more than 200,000 players across the whole world, even under-19 youth teams. They claim to employ the biggest scouting network in professional football, working together with scouting companies that exclusively assess data for professional clubs (Parkin). Their scouting is said to be of such a high quality that professional football clubs use their database for actual and real-world scouting of new players. *Realism* is probably the

4 The following sub-chapter rests on knowledge derived from ethnographic research conducted since April 2021 as part of my Ph.D. project.

5 To a certain degree this goal is shared by most sports simulations, which makes them—albeit slightly neglected in game studies—a good example when focusing on simulations.

developer's most important target, met by regularly interacting with different actors from professional football on the daily management practices of a professional football club. Many professional footballers play this game, a fact that is celebrated in the *Football Manager* fan base. In 2017, the video game's slogan, "*Play the Game. Know the Game.*," promised a deeper understanding of professional football through gameplay (Sports Interactive, 2017). This promise extends to tactics but, more importantly, focuses on the potential of young players. With Sports Interactive's professional and highly effective scouting system, combined with the game's emphasis on discovering young talents, the typical *Football Manager* player gains far more insight into up-and-coming players than the average football fan. The experience of buying a young talent, analyzing his attributes, watching him in the game's 3D animations, and observing his progress over time leads to a much richer understanding of who that player 'really is,' rather than simply knowing him as 'talented.' I still remember discovering Erling Haaland in 2018, then an unknown young striker for Norway's Molde FK. He was clearly talented, but his combination of pace and height left me perplexed. How could those traits coexist? At the time, I thought there might have been an error in the scouting. Today, I'm still puzzled by this mix, but so is the entire football world, with Haaland now moving to Manchester City for a record-breaking wage.

The complexity of how a player's attributes work together can be deeply felt by an experienced *Football Manager* player. In 2018, achieving this "deep knowledge" about Haaland would have required extensive video scouting through other means. As space is limited, I want to focus on one pillar of my ethnographic research into *Football Manager* and connect it to two of my previous arguments.

To understand the fascination that *Football Manager* exerts over many players, despite being time-consuming and spreadsheet-heavy, I began to view the playing of the simulation as a *practice of daydreaming*. The most important aspect of this approach is that it allowed me to grasp the entanglement between football fandom and the practices stemming from this video game.[6] What if my club had just bought this or that young player? What if the manager relied on a different tactical setup? These questions keep football fans occupied and give rise to a specific form of daydreaming that is often shared in online fan

6 I understand "fandom" broadly in this case as entailing not only following your favorite club but also watching a lot of football and being interested in tactics, etc.

forums, etc. The realism of the game, together with its strong focus on a possible future that is shaped by the player's actions, allows for a *manifestation* of these daydreams. *Football Manager* can then be seen as some sort of playground where these dreams are acted out.

Hence, one of the main fascinations of the game lies in its ability to *test* these dreams, to see whether a tactic might or might not work. The video game players are thus making use of a similar if not exact principle that Dowling describes: They "face" their theories, experiment with them, and see them played out. This applies to tactical ideas as well as broader strategic decisions such as buying this or that young player and integrating him into the squad. It could even be argued that strategic blackboxing is utilized by video game players to a certain degree: Although they are not involved in creating or assessing the algorithmic rules of the game, many players are very explicit about wanting to keep the degree of realism experienced as high as possible. Cheating—in this case quitting without saving and trying again or looking up player potentials in the editor or specific online pages—is mostly neglected due to the player's wish to experience and experiment with a scenario that is as realistic as possible. Just as the scientist needs to suspend their interest in and knowledge of the underlying algorithmic rules to switch to an explorative and experimental mode, so too is it necessary for the video game player to not obtain access to underlying rules that would give away both the realism and the challenge of the whole endeavor.

As was shown, playing *Football Manager* as a practice of daydreaming is very closely connected to other types of daydreaming in football fandom. The twist I propose is that there exists some vague sort of alternative reality (or in German, *Ersatzwirklichkeit*) that cannot be reduced to the strict algorithmic workings of that specific game. Instead, it ranges from fan forums where tactics of the favorite club are discussed, to more traditional media coverage of transfers, tactics, statistics, etc. via marketing of the clubs up to playing *Football Manager*. It might even conclude what could be called secondary games of professional football, such as the strategic behavior of football clubs on the transfer market. This list is far from complete; professional football entails much more than a match of 22 players, and in this sense, *Football Manager* is a part of it. What is striking about this conceptualization is that now it is possible to understand this creation of a new world as a technoscientific *here* that can be manipulated directly. To some degree, it channels these manipulations directly to its neighbors from the list—and therefore to what makes up a huge part of the whole of professional football.

4. Conclusion

The arena of the Balinese cockfight, the psychoanalytic couch, the cruise ship—all these places allow expression. Following Geertz, this was described as a translation from implicit to explicit, allowing for cultural performances that allow expression of what would otherwise remain inarticulable. Referring to Goffman, this argument was taken one step further, away from a possible mentalist interpretation as consisting only in unearthing what was already existent as in the classical psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious. Instead, I propose to understand this practice theoretically, as a public generation of new ideas, tacit understandings, etc. The article then turns towards Susanne Langer's point according to which scientific progress in the 20th century has been too fast for imagination to catch up with. This introduces the notion of imagination as well as a more nuanced understanding of the specific function of such an imagination. Langer locates the remedy to this problem mainly in artistic practices; I propose including such mundane practices as sports, games, and Goffman's stunts, too. To this end, I introduce an empirical case: *Football Manager*. I attempt to link two concepts from STS—Dowling's "experimenting on theories" and Nordmann's "technoscience"—with the briefly presented empirical case. Therefore, I hope to have sketched how this specific video game offers its players the possibility to grasp and experience some aspects of current developments in (scientific) simulation. Playfully, it becomes possible to engage with the inner workings of a simulation and to therefore, maybe, help our imagination keep up with the rapidity of scientific and technological innovation.

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Uncommon Places and the Public

The Ship and the Car as Literary Locations

Nicole Anna Schneider

Abstract *Town squares, public parks, or benches by the road—our imaginations of public places lead us directly to specific locations, conjuring up certain images of places and their relations to politics. Each of these places, however, has its own entanglements with further imaginaries and practices that complicate our understanding of what is (a) public; and each, in a sense hides a large extent of its politics. Calling to unsettle fixed imaginaries of public spheres and to create a deeper understanding of publics, this article reconsiders their discursive and imaginary location in terms of their mobility, their negotiating capacities, and their structural configurations, as shown in cultural texts. Looking at the car in Valeria Luiselli's novel* Lost Children Archive *(2019) or the abolitionist slave ship icon used in Ava DuVernay's* 13th *(2016) and Netflix's* High on the Hog *(Season 1, 2021) as uncommon places that function like public places, this article addresses the usually unrecognized entanglements in places and public relations. These examples are connected to imaginaries of public discourse and to an active re-placing of the public beyond original locations. They help to (re)configure the definition of publics and public deliberation.*

Keywords *Publics; Public Sphere; Imaginaries; Popular Culture; Literature; Space; Place*

Introduction

Town squares, public parks, or benches by the road—our imaginations of public places often lead directly to long lists of specific locations, conjuring up images of place and its relations to politics. The squares in which we convene and converse are among those imagined, along with the Habermasian coffeehouse,

newspapers, and metaphorical salons. Parks invite to linger and play, offering respite from busy city life while affording the ground for protest and rebellion. Benches give pause, and link everyday lives to infrastructures and democracy; they foster remembrance and responsibility. This list is far from conclusive and may not even be fully reasonable. Yet, it reveals the links and networks that connect locations to politics, tie specific spaces to public discourses and sites to lived realities. Similar connections exist in places that do not directly count as such, linking the concept of publics to place and simultaneously removing it from place-based considerations. Each of these places has its own entanglements with further imaginaries, with ideals of histories, memories, and practices that complicate our understanding of what is (a) public; and each hides much of its political relations and workings—as place or as public.[1]

As the question of what a public is, if it exists, and how it is fragmented and contested has long been discussed and inconclusively answered, I suggest using both the imaginaries of public spaces and those of place to take a closer look at the practices and discourses that form what we perceive of as public. The public space, thereby, is a location or sphere where public encounter and deliberation can occur, while place is always already determined by relations, practices, and connections; space is metaphorically speaking an empty room, while a place is the living room that holds family life and memories. My goal is to study public relations—relations to public discourse and practices—in those places that are not immediately imagined as public place, that might not even be recognized as places, yet function in similar ways. If the town square or the park are promptly seen as public places, what can be revealed about publics through a look at a car as a fictional site of political and private engagement in Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* (2021), or a glance at iconic abolitionist representations of a slave ship used in contemporary cultural productions such as Ava DuVernay's *13th* (2016) and the Netflix food series *High on the Hog* (Season 1, 2021)? By looking at these examples, I contend, we can learn about the political, historical, and memorial entanglements of both places and publics, sharpening our definitions of public interaction. If the town square or the park hides as much of their political structure as they reveal, what comes into the picture if we turn to the unexpected site's relations in place?

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1 I have chosen to use the parenthesis for the article as the considerations in this paper address both questions of publics as communal and discursive communities (e.g., Warner's "reading publics") and the ascription of something as public (e.g., a public place).

These considerations are based on Jürgen Habermas's theory of a public sphere that envisions a body of public deliberation between individuals, discussing matters of public concern to form an opinion and communal resolution (*Strukturwandel* 97). Staged and imagined as a permanent discussion among (then) private men in semiprivate places—the iconic coffeehouse—this imagined sphere expands with print culture and newspapers (104; "Public Sphere" 1500). It is contested in Nancy Fraser's "subaltern counterpublics" (67) that encompass the growing recognition of diverse positions and lived realities in society and recognize those usually excluded and marginalized from the social hierarchy of the public (60; 64). Fraser's prime example is the feminist counterpublics of the late twentieth century with their conventions, bookstores, and lecture series (67). Mary Gray identifies "boundary publics" among LGBTQI2S+ youths in rural America, which link the concepts of publics further to placed practices. These are imagined discursive places in unofficial drag performances in supermarket aisles (6–7). In *Public Things* (2017), Bonnie Honig connects the idea of publics to objects and infrastructures that form a "holding environment" that gives structure to democratic processes and public considerations (5). A public is similarly imagined in Michael Warner's discursive publics of *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005), realized in the act of addressing an imagined group of people, for example, as "Dear Reader" (7). All these theories—discursive, debated, practiced, and imagined—reveal the relevance of place, as well as the political contestation of entanglements in and of publics.

It is not, however, the classic Habermasian or Warnerian ideal that I am interested in here, but those moments in which the concept of publics fails; in which it is overtaken by *dissensus,* in Jacques Rancière's terms, that cannot see the other's position as a valid political position (46); in which it encompasses larger pictures and multiple crises, and brings seemingly faraway conflicts close to everyday lives and lived realities. I consider the moments when publics break apart, disintegrate, and form multiple disparate layers of sociopolitical realities. Literature and diagrams, I argue, can work to remind us of the eclectic character of what we consider public spheres, revealing the unseen workings of political debate and public action.

Calling to unsettle fixed imaginaries of public spheres, this article reconsiders their discursive and imaginary location in terms of mobility, negotiating capacities, and structural configurations as shown in cultural texts. By addressing ties and relations that can be recognized in certain uncommon locations, it conceptually approaches political life in Hannah Arendt's "space of

appearance" (199), while thinking through imaginaries of places and publics. At first, the car in Luiselli's novel is seen as a political place that reveals private connections to the US-Mexico border and US-American history. Then, the paper's second part considers the appearance of the abolitionist slave ship diagram in a contemporary documentary series, addressing the current lived realities of Blackness. Fictional car and sketched ship reveal unseen connections in public places and ask us to reconsider our imaginaries of public spheres.

The Place of the Car: Locating the Car and the Border

The reading public created in Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* symbolically listens in on the tape recordings created throughout a family's journey to the American South-West. Not sure whether this trip is a vacation, a relocation to Arizona, or the beginning of the family's end, the protagonists record their thoughts and what they hear, creating a representation of their family life and inner conflicts. In these personal reflections, the novel links questions of migration to their political complexity, its narrative layeredness combining politics with a personal journey across the continent. Intertextually, the book reveals the contents of seven archival boxes in the family's car, and the family—mother and son respectively—records chapters of a (fictional) book about children lost at a border, the "*Elegies for Lost Children*." They contemplate Geronimo and Chief Cochise and the "last people on the entire continent to surrender to the white-eyes" and ponder how novels, poems, and pop culture figure in political and social discourses in society (204).

As we follow along, the space of the car becomes a place in its own right, a meaningful site of political deliberation. As the border regime and the nation's politics and discourses reach inside the vehicle and into the family's minds, borders between public and private, family/familiar and strange/r, and the difference between uninvolved bystander and active participant are negotiated. In its narrative and discursive complexity, the novel addresses many such sites of political engagement: Family history, the "familial narrative" (16), is mingled with the United States' past and historiographic descriptions; the mother seeks to record testimonies of unattended minors in detention centers and immigration courts (20) and the stories of children missing at the border (145); the father seeks to retrace Native American History through echoes and sounds (21); and the children attempt to find missing girls which merge with the *Elegies* and personal journeys (320). Questions of belonging and exclusion are taken up, for

instance, as the mother with her Mexican passport (129; 216) passes as French (219), evading xenophobic hostility (129–30).

While all these topics tie into political publics, there are three themes in the novel related to questions of publics: the negotiation of proximity, the reflection on documentation, and the discussion of migration. As the family travels South, the political and the personal merge, times and distances collapse, and everything concentrates in the place of the car. With their vocation of recording sounds and memories, the question of documentation looms large, negotiating possibilities of documenting. The family's constant preoccupation with missing children brings the border into the car, opening the private place to unreconcilable national debates.

Home and Growing Apart in Proximity

The novel's first part consists of the unnamed woman's thoughts and tape recordings. As she reflects on her family slowly falling apart and her indecision about joining her husband in Arizona, she thinks about their shared past in New York City. In passages called "Family Lexicon" (5), "Family Plot" (6), or "Time" (13), she recounts the happy life that started when they met over work, fell in love, and moved in together, each bringing their own child into the family. She wonders how practices can establish relations to certain places:

> It's never clear what turns a space into a home, and a life-project into a life. One day, our books didn't fit in the bookshelves anymore, and the big empty room in our apartment had become our living room. It had become **a place where we watched movies, read books, assembled puzzles, napped, helped the children with their homework.** (14 emphasis mine)

While the overflowing bookshelves can be read as a foreboding of the imminent separation, it signifies the coziness and comfort of a loving family. Big empty rooms contrast a home, yet hold the potential to be turned into a homely place through the characters' actions and relations.

In similar ways, the car becomes a place filled with familiarity and family traditions, children's games and the adults' thoughts. Its relations within and without, and the unseen connections to outside places, lever it into a mode of familial and political negotiation. Reflected in the adults' thoughts, for instance, are national events, and personal positions toward crises. Seeping into the car, these discourses maintain their links to the outside, rendering the fam-

ily's vehicle a curiously relevant place of public discourse. This is heightened by the book's intertextuality that lists ostensibly eclectic assortments of novels and non-fiction collected in the car's trunk, links newspaper and radio reports to the conversations inside, and engages songs, pop culture, and literature. The discourse and the public established here are epitomized in the car itself, where different forms of information and pre-discursive knowledges meet, rendering it symbolic for publics and the encounters therein.

The woman's thoughts and the children's presence in the car exemplify connections to publics. Like sponges absorbing their surroundings, public discourses soak up more than verbal information, taking in feelings and hunches, nuances and traces, or playful motions. The children in the car, similarly, absorb information and emotions in the car: turning off the radio to listen to the children in the backseat play, the woman ponders how their games have become "more vivid, more complex, more convincing" (179). In her musings, this is because they have adapted to the parents' somber thoughts and atmosphere in the car, taken in the severity of the political moment, and soaked up the complexity and accumulation of different thoughts, modes, and practices. For her, the children's inquisitiveness is positive. It changes the mood in the car: "Children have a slow, silent way of transforming the atmosphere around them. They are much more porous than adults, and their chaotic inner life leaks out of them constantly, turning everything that is real and solid into a ghostly vision of itself" (179). She thinks her kids are not as easily affected by the nation's mood and gloomy feelings, believes that children and their innocent play offer the opportunity to "modify the world [of] the adults around [them] enough to break the normality of that world, tear the veil down, and allow things to glow with their own, different inner light" (179). She addresses the idealistic trope of a hopeful future inscribed in the presence of children; their innocence and energy capable of creating a different world, and, in turn, the idealized need to do everything possible for a better future for the children.

The passage reflects on the mutual influence between parents and children in the car, even with things not actively spoken about. The woman recognizes how the children's "thoughts are filling our world, inside this car, filling it and blurring all its outline with the same slow persistency of smoke expanding inside a small room" (179). While the adults' responsibility toward the children remains central throughout the book, the car filled with billowing contemplation resounds the requirement for multiple perspectives, the accumulation of positions, thoughts, and knowledges, as well as the impossibility of certainty. This atmosphere in the car symbolizes the idealized concept of public discourse as

constituted in Habermas's private conversations between individuals, constituting a supposedly "rational" authority toward persons and the state ("Public Sphere" 1499). It also shows where the codified theory of publics and counterpublics fails, as many messages and themes are not transmitted via speech and discussion but by other means; "Perhaps we mutually infect each other with our fears, obsessions, and expectations, as easily as we pass around a flu virus" (Luiselli 179). The children, and their supposedly carefree behavior in the car, function as a reminder that there are other possibilities behind what seems to be normal, other perspectives to be taken, and other voices to be considered. They remind us of the centrality of tearing the veil, of trying to make sense of the world beyond our immediate perception, and of acknowledging its (in)tangibility.

Of course, the children are affected by the mood in the car. Fears and expectations have touched the boy, who attentively realizes that something is off. In the familial place of the car, he sees the family falling apart and notes the strangeness of growing apart in close proximity. Negotiating the distance to each other, he muses that "even though […] we were sitting so close together all the time, it felt like we were the opposite of being together" (193). The pensive atmosphere establishes a distance, pushing the family further apart. Thoughts of personal and political crises permeate the car. What is geographically far off, like the border, the lost children, and the topic of migration, becomes too close for the kids in the backseats and the mother in front to bear. It becomes a direct part of their lives, and of the journey itself, collapsing the distance into absolute proximity. This foreshadows the novel's climax in which different narrative strands merge, as the characters from the *Elegies*, the missing girls, and the family's children meet in the desert (319–334).

Matters of Documenting

Repeated references to documentation and archives address the hesitancy to define meanings. The lists of books, the soundscapes, and the family's open-ended discussions amplify this lack of closure. Indirectly, the son is aware of the dilemma of trying to save the moment and condensing perception into a single document. He wants to make the memory of the trip accessible to his younger sister:

> I could document everything, even the little things, however I could. Because I understood […] that it was our last trip together as a family.

> I also knew that you wouldn't remember this trip, because you're only five years old, and […] children don't start building memories of things until after they turn six. (210)

He feels obligated to record their story and knows that documentation hinges on different modes, making it impossible to save everything. Yet, in his childish mind, memory is definite: Once his sister turns six, he believes, she will suddenly be able to form memories. As if they were removed from personal perception and feelings, these memories originate in the family's general interest in keeping the moment alive through traces. It is once again the parents' thoughts and fears that infuse the children's minds as they start obsessing over lost children, the family's disintegration, and the possibility of archiving. For the son, recording the trip is an attempt to keep the family alive, to save the connection to his sister, even if she might no longer be part of his immediate life. With the girls lost at the border with their families' phone numbers sewn into their dresses (18), this ideal of safeguarding family ties becomes more complicated, as such ties are forcibly severed in the US border regime.

The book addresses different ways of documenting as each parent has found their version. Making a distinction between being a documentarist (the husband) and a documentarian (the wife), the boy links each to a specific practice: "The difference is […] that a documentarian is like a librarian and a documentarist is like a chemist" (192). One, it seems, works akin to a humanities scholar collecting traces of stories, sound documents, interviews, and narratives to piece together a scientifically valid and convincing story. The other is seen as a recorder of sounds, echoes, and traces that need no further contextualization, supposedly like a scientist using systematic observations and experiments. The family's backstory explains that the couple met while working on a joint research project documenting the more than eight hundred languages spoken in New York City (19). While both practices of collecting sounds were relevant in this soundscape, their new projects veer off in opposite directions. She embarks into "a sound documentary about the children's crisis at the border" (20) and he seeks to create an "inventory of echoes" concerning "the ghosts of Geronimo and the last Apaches," collecting sounds and their absences (21). There is no right or wrong way to document, this implies, just different practices and perspectives, yet all are reflected in one or another nodal point in the car.

Pondering what documents are, the woman considers their role in forming public opinions. Maybe the sheer number of references and documents ob-

scures essential aspects of the thing portrayed. "Suppose," she reflects, thinking about the boy's polaroid camera, "that documenting things—through the lens of a camera, on paper, or with a sound recording device—is really only a way of contributing one more layer, something like soot, to all the things already sedimented in a collective understanding of the world" (55). Soot and sediments soil the grasp of the world. Interestingly, it is not the world that is corrupted—not the thing that an image or a sound recording is taken of—but the image itself, the "collective understanding" and the grasp on the world. This palimpsest of documenting reflects the novel as a whole. Voices mingle, books are carried across the continent, and pictures are taken; all, asking us to realize that the problems addressed are far too large and complex to be made sense of.

Migration as a Personal Topic

Specifically, the topic of migration reaches into the car, as it starts appearing early on, when we get to hear about migrant children lost or detained at the US-Mexico border (17). These lost children complicate the world within the car with their constant presence in the family's thoughts and conversations; the political discourse is infiltrating the otherwise unconnected space of the vehicle that becomes a political place through these connections. Lost are the more "than eighty thousand undocumented children … [that] had been detained at the US southern border in just the previous six or seven months" (19). A friend's daughters were detained in the attempt to reach their mother in New York, lending another personal story to the statistics and numbers which the narrator lists:

> All those children were fleeing circumstances of unspeakable abuse and systematic violence, fleeing countries where gangs had become parasites, had usurped power and taken over the rule of law. They had come to the United States looking for protection, looking for mothers, fathers, or other relatives who had migrated earlier and might take them in. They weren't looking for the American Dream, as the narrative usually goes. The children were merely looking for a way out of their daily nightmare. (19)

They come to claim the protection, care, and safety provided by relatives and the state, not the rags-to-riches myth of "the American Dream" or the prospect of making money fast. This notion of familial protection and safety, mirrored

in the narrator's family itself, preoccupies the woman's thoughts, and occasionally the boy's as well.

The family's history mingles in the car with the family's disintegration and the stories they tell themselves about their time together. The children weave narratives out of the tale of the friend's daughters and political conversations of the parents which they overhear. Almost all, in different ways, revolve around child refugees as "the lost children" (75). Only later does the *Lost Children Archive* turn into a story in which brother and sister, too, are lost in the desert, representing the children in the narrator's statistics and those they meet in the desert, who have phone numbers sewn into the collars of their dresses (334). As elusive as the definition of "lost children" is the articulation of a world too fraught with different layers and perspectives, too weighed down by *dissensusal* perceptions and contradicting sentiments that do not always directly relate to the problem at hand.

In all three instances, the car demonstrates the indelible ties between public and private, discourses and locations, the border and the individual, through a focus on familiar and familial archives, mobility, and proximity and substitution. The problems, memories, and political realities addressed in the novel are too large to be solved by individuals alone. But with its careful consideration of personal stories, documentation, memory and research, the *Lost Children Archive* seems to argue that it is possible to negotiate the individual's position within these intersecting crises. The car in this family's journey becomes a familiar place for personal negotiation and mediation of the migrant crisis reflecting on our understanding of publics. Another example, of a thing becoming a place that troubles our understanding and muddles perception, is the abolitionist icon of the slave ship, *Brooks*, which highlights different relations to public discourses and places.

The Place of the Iconic Ship: Locating the Journey Without Place

With its comparatively clear origin, envisioned to be a beacon of abolition (Finlay 19), the ship—and more specifically the imprint and icon of the ship—have come to reference African American history and what Bryan Stevenson calls the "legacy of slavery" in a Yale-produced podcast. Strikingly, both Ava DuVernay's documentary *13th* and the Netflix series *High on the Hog* use the icon to reference lived experiences of Blackness in the United States. One links contemporary systems of criminal justice to slavery, the other insinuates a mem-

ory of the American past connected to foodways and a sense of responsibility toward the future. The placing practices of the ship and the icon become relevant for addressing the American past and present in political, historical, and relational ways, influencing sociopolitical publics and personal interactions in public places. The culturally significant image as icon was created and circulated for the "white cause" to end the slave trade and slavery respectively. It has since been reclaimed by Black artists, as Celeste-Marie Bernier explains in her article on the image as imprint (993), as a memorial trace that impacts lived realities and cultural memories.

Created to provide a visual and affective trace of slavery and the Middle Passage, the image of the *Brooks* schematically shows bodies stowed in the cargo hold of a ship.[2] It is based on simple hand-drawn storing plans carried by slave ship captains and seamen, indicating "the cargo area and the space allotted for the different types of goods to be stowed"; these blueprints, Cheryl Finlay explains in *Committed to Memory* (2018), "were a type of visual shorthand […] used to increase the efficiency of packing ships" (34). The bodies we see are symbolic of the commodification of people and the inhuman treatment onboard the slave ships. While it is, in Western visual culture, largely associated with general anti-slavery efforts, the image of the ship was marshaled toward several distinct abolitionist projects over time: "the regulation of the slave trade, the abolition of the slave trade, African colonization, the suppression of the slave trade, and the abolition of chattel slavery" (29). The iconic representation is thus regularly reduced to single, simple readings and its affective capacity, which, although effectively mobilizing white patrons then as now, reduces the enslaved Black people to silent figures in need of being saved.

The trauma of this decidedly white Western archetype of the ship speaks through the silhouettes of men, women, and children neatly packed as if they were mere cargo. It leaves no room for African American articulations of pain and memory and erases the central components of slavery and the slave trade. Bernier, in her article "The Slave Ship Imprint" (2014), for example, calls out the assumption that such objects can project "the sum total of black experiences during slavery" (994). It is often surmised that the image of the ship is enough to represent the horrors of slavery and the entirety of its systems, usurping the voices of slaves and their descendants. This view is building obstacles to "historicizing, memorializing, and narrativizing" the past and Black experiences

2 Launched at Liverpool in 1781, the ship is deemed an "an example of a slaver at its worst" (Finlay 35).

(997). Addressing this lack of agency in representation, Bernier considers how Black American artists use the image of the *Brooks*. Especially Betye Saar has used the icon in her installations to evoke "the traumatizing realities of the Middle Passage" while focusing on "black transatlantic histories, memories, and narratives" (990–991). The image is used, then, to negotiate a relationship with the past, bringing in Black perspectives through mixed media installations.[3]

One important factor in this negotiation is the ship's relation to its audiences, to us, who see the icon and are forced to consider our own position toward what is seen and the times it symbolizes. Thus, relating once more to the theories of progressive topography, the place of the image demands attention and requires positioning toward the ship and its legacies. The very use of the term "imprint" implies, for Saar and Bernier, an ongoing presence of slavery's legacies, that cannot be ascribed to individual communities but remains a common denominator for Western culture. It implies the necessity to address and restitute discriminations and oppressions entangled in the American past. Quoting Saar, Bernier highlights this all-encompassing address of the imprint: "It would never wear out, because the slave ship imprint is on all of us" (991). With its connection to branding enslaved people as property, the imprint as affective ascription into society's mind and body returns memory and liability to a palpable realm that affects the way we deal with the past. Bernier speaks of a "tenacious hold" (992), in which the history of slavery stubbornly lingers, as a chance to visualize its social, political, and cultural stronghold over the present, using these ties to foster equity and liberation (993). The frequent "reuse and reimagining" of the symbol across the diaspora renders the imprinted icon a vehicle for memorialization and action (991).

The Persistence of Caste in the Nation

The relevance of the slave ship icon in sociopolitical debates in the present is visualized in Ava DuVernay's documentary about the 13th Amendment to the US-American Constitution and its impacts on Black Americans today.[4]

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3 Especially Saar and Bernier use the term "imprint" as opposed to "icon" as it incorporates a certain tangibility and affect, imprinting a feeling of responsibility onto the spectator that the icon, which operates mostly in visual terms, does not (991).

4 In the wake of George Floyd's death in 2020, Netflix made the film available free of charge.

Its opening sequence starts with a white animation on a black background, interspersed with interviews and sound clips that describe the system of mass incarceration in America. The string of images begins with a chalky world map that is erased and replaced with a silhouette of the US, which is then overlayed with prison bars gliding in from the top (*13th*, 00:00:12-00:00:33). After initial descriptions and interviews with leading Black Studies scholars in different academic fields, the animation starts anew. Sliding onto the empty black background are the chalk-drawn Roman numerals XIII that grow, tip to the side, and become the backdrop for a bulletin board reading "Abolition of Slavery." This image then blurs and shifts backwards, as the words "Emancipation" and "Freedom" take its place before morphing into a circle of birds flying out of the image (00:01:50-00:02:04). When the last bird turns into a star of the flag and the remainder of the banner comes into the picture, the phrase "To ALL Americans" is superimposed, matching the spoken record of the soundtrack (00:02:04-00:02:10). As the words fade and the flag comes center stage, a magnification of the white stripes reveals the black figures of the slave ship icon in reversed color. Zooming in until the width of the section mimics that of the iconic diagram, the flag briefly turns into the imprint itself before both are overlaid and replaced with the text of the 13th Amendment: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, **except as a punishment** for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction" (00:02:11-00:02:20). The sequence ends with photographs of Black men in prison uniforms and working hats, representing the disproportionately high number of working Black inmates in the US (00:02:22—00:02:42).

The sequence's argument is as simple as it is insistent: with its contemporary criminal justice system, the US indirectly continues hierarchies of slavery, perpetuating a system—as Michelle Alexander explains in *The New Jim Crow* (2010) and the documentary—which maintains forms of inequity based on an American caste system that was merely redesigned, and not eliminated after the end of slavery (2). "Quite belatedly," Alexander notes, "I came to see that mass incarceration in the United States had, in fact, emerged as **a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control**" (4, emphasis mine). Tracing this system of racial hierarchies from slavery to mass incarceration, via segregation, Alexander links this caste system to an officially unrecognized devaluation of Black lives within society and within the system of criminal justice that incarcerates high numbers of Black men, partially stripping them of rights to political and social participation (94). Disproportion-

ate numbers do not emerge from higher criminality or purported cultures of poverty setting Black people on track to criminality. Rather the rhetoric of the "War on Drugs" that started with Ronald Reagan in 1982 used racialized tropes from the beginning (4), criminalizing actions arguably more common in Black communities (53).

As the film discusses these systems of control, it uses the *Brooks* icon as an imprint that reveals its entanglements without having to resort to direct images. The situation's abstraction is mirrored by the sign that speaks across times and spaces, opening room for the discussion of generally unseen topics. Hidden in plain sight, the experiences of Blackness within these systems of control remain a curiously unrecognized plight in everyday reflections. It is as if Rancière's discussion of *Dissensus* found a prime example within these debates: With the general inability to recognize the Other as valid and the Other's position as a legitimate political position, the *dissensus* within society does not always see conversation as fruitful debate or antagonism as antagonism (46). The ship, with its distinctive uses and its reconfigurations, epitomizes these references in its open-ended signification and its attribution of systemic practices over time.

Alexander's study, while boldly declaring the persistence of racial caste systems, directly asks for recognition and debate. As she likens the system to an optical illusion, "in which the embedded image is impossible to see until its outline is identified," she calls out an organization "lurk[ing] invisibly within the maze of rationalizations we have developed for persistent racial inequality" (12). Quite frankly, it is in these rationalizations and justifications that public debate and public consensus are held up, circling in unconscious evasions of the central topics at hand. Without looking deeper and recognizing the problem as structural and perceptual, there will be no changes to Black experiences and racialized structures. *The New Jim Crow*, and the film *13th*, directly call for a new "public consensus" (18) that is aware of these conditions and seeks "a conversation that fosters a critical consciousness, a key prerequisite to effective social action" (15). The existing consensus, the book argues, needs to be "completely overturned" to affect meaningful change (18). This ties to the ideals of discussion that define traditional modes of public deliberation, however, attending to a different layer of debate entangled and addressed in place, hidden underneath layers of soot—to use Luiselli's image—that encumbers facts and lived realities with bulks of information.

The reference to the flag becoming the ship becoming the Amendment is a reminder of these realities that exist at the same time and in the same place. It

reveals *dissensus* in public debate and points toward the (in)visibly coded spaces that, according to Elijah Anderson in "The White Space" (2014), white people traverse effortlessly and Black people need to navigate with care and constant assertions of belonging (19). Reading the ship's imprint as a place of negotiation that offers room to discuss the legacy that slavery and its creation—and cloaking—of racial hierarchies has in the present, allows recognizing discrimination and envisioning possible changes to the public consensus. Slavery and the labor of enslaved people are as woven into the prosperity of the nation as the iconic figures are in the flag of the film's animation. While the image becomes a place of its own in these discussions, it also influences the public view of other places, revealing ties and entanglements that remain unseen or otherwise unacknowledged.

Memory and Responsibility

The use of the ship in the series *High on the Hog* adds another practice of placing to the debate that, while working in similar ways, addresses different parts of public discourse and responsibility. Based on the eponymous book by Jessica B. Harris, the series traces African American food cultures in the US. It looks at specific locations, discerning the place of soul food in contemporary society. Many typical American dishes have their origins in the cuisine of Black Americans, and each has a deeper cultural significance. History, origin, and belonging are fused into the foods eaten daily, connecting to stories of hardship and resilience. Cultural memory comes in as these foods, seen as cultural practice, link nutritional intake with commemorative care and emotional healing. Tracing American foods back to its African origins is both an acclamation of African American presence and an emotional link to ancestors who are often devalued and forgotten. This connection to memory and its social and political implications are introduced through the *Brooks* imprint which is briefly shown during episode one to introduce an artwork that employs it.

This artwork is discussed by Finlay who starts her study of the abolitionist slave ship engraving with a description of Romuald Hazoumé's installation *La Bouche du Roi*, the Mouth of the King. She carefully describes the components of the work of art, the "plastic petroleum canisters made to resemble masks, with the sprout serving as a mouth and the handle as the nose," the wooden figures and masks of "Yoruba religious and cultural beliefs," and the references to trade goods that were exchanged for human beings (1). Interestingly, she goes on to note that the "darkened exhibition space creates an ominous yet

somber mood for the viewer, providing a **place of reflection and commemoration**" (2 emphasis mine). The room of the artwork engaging "the slave ship icon" (Finlay 5) is rendered a politically and memorially relevant place in its connection to the past, the relations it reveals, and the sentiments it conjures. As the room becomes a place, the icon, too, shifts into a topographic realm, linking its relevance to sociopolitical and commemorative functions and visualizing relations across times and spaces. Viewers are connected to the people behind the icon's figures, as abstract and entangled as the connection might be, linking the exhibition space—like the artwork and the icon itself—to the pressing responsibility to reflect and commemorate. Thereby, it is not the artwork *per se* that influences the atmosphere, but the immanent consequence of the ship: As a place of abduction, oppression, commodification, and death; a symbol for slavery, a trigger for remembrance, and an imprint of cultural trauma. In this sense, the icon has turned into, what Finlay terms "a powerful visual tool for the abolitionist cause" (27). This ostensibly inclusive reminder materializes in the documentary series.

Following the origin of African American cuisine all the way to Benin, *High on the Hog*'s first episode "Our Roots" starts with a stroll through Dantokpa Market, one of the largest open-air markets in West Africa, located in Cotonou, Benin. Host Stephen Satterfield and culinary historian Jessica Harris tour places that are relevant to Benin's food culture, visit restaurants and try various dishes, eventually coming back to times and traditions dating from before the slave trade. Host and scholar reflect on the diasporic ideal of returning to an elusive home. Satterfield narrates, for instance, how strange it was "to come home to a place I had never been, fragments of a lost memory were everywhere, and the sounds and smells and tastes" (00:04:15-00:04:39). As return and loss are a constant reference point in the episode, Satterfield longs to "go home" (to Africa) and feels in place here, while constantly having to negotiate his belonging at home in the US; he mourns the forgotten knowledge and culture of pre-slave trade communities, the things lost with the journey on the ship.

While the ghost of slavery is a constant presence in the episode, the series starts with celebrating contemporary foodways and chefs who keep traditional African dishes alive. We follow the pair through markets and restaurants, listen to their explanations of American foods that have their origin in Africa, and witness their exclamations that the rice brought across the Atlantic by the enslaved "built the wealth of our nation, our now [US-American] nation, before it even was a nation" (00:10:58-00:11:12). Food and sustenance are closely tied

to traditions, history, and home, as well as to the wealth and prosperity that the system of slavery and the physical strength of the enslaved brought to the continent. Lake villages like Ganvié, founded as a refuge from slave traders, are as much part of the story as is the insistence that African people participated in the slave trade too: Abomey Historian Gabin Djimasse explains in the episode that Africans "accepted to supply the Europeans with the manpower they demanded" (0:24:40-00:25:40). We similarly witness Satterfield walking along the road of the four-day journey toward the port of Ouidah, where people were loaded into slavers like the *Brooks*. An overhead shot of the straight red dirt road in the green forest then shifts to images of Benin's capital Porto Novo and Hazoumé's studio.

As Satterfield describes how the gas canisters used in Hazoumé's art connect the "struggles of modern life" to the "ancient past" (00:39:28-00:39:42), we first see a wall of identical gas containers stacked on top of each other. After a quick reference to contemporary Benin's dependence on petrol and Hazoumé's other works, a pamphlet with the slave ship imprint fills the screen. As Satterfield speaks about drawing a link between past and present, the image fades and *La Bouche du Roi* takes the imprint's place. It covers exactly the silhouette of the imprint (00:39:14-00:39:33). Following a communal dinner in which Hazoumé introduces the pair to pre-slavery dishes that, as he argues, have provided the necessary provisions for the enslaved's strength, Harris and Satterfield come to Ouidah, the place of the memorial *Door of No Return*. Harris calmly yet insistently explains the history of the place, the deaths and the horrors experienced here, and the unfathomable courage mustered by those about to be enslaved. Satterfield's voice breaks as he reflects upon the horrors of the place and commemorates the unbelievable strength and pain resonating in this place. He finally breaks down, weighed by the implication of the place and the personal resolution "to bring them [ancestors and their memory] home with" him (00:50:40-00:56:20).

The use of the imprint here, while brief and directly related to the artist's rendition and his studio, allows for the Black perspectives that Bernier calls for. It is the central anchor that connects past and present and the two continents. Visualized in the series is not only the horror and the white perspective that rendered the enslaved victims of unspeakable horrors but also the entanglement of Black people in the trade itself without alleviating white responsibility. The perseverance and courage of Black people are shown, as well as their impact on the US nation, its prosperity and food cultures. The ship, then, is the

imprint that weighs Satterfield down and connects viewers and contemporary societies alike to American histories.

The slave ship icon becomes a relational place that links a responsibility for the present to the affective commemoration of the past. As there is arguably no direct place connected to the Middle Passage, the ship's icon and the traces of food carried along for the journey become such places of reckoning in the series. They become places like the "bench by the road" that novelist Toni Morrison proposes as an anchor of memory and liability, circumventing the lack of memorial sites for slavery in the US-American public sphere:

> There is no place you or I can go, to think about or not think about, to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves; nothing that reminds us of the ones who made the journey and of those who did not make it. […] There's no small bench by the road. […]. And because such a place doesn't exist (that I know of), the book had to. (Morrison "Bench")

Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) came into being as a place for remembrance, that practices what she has elsewhere called "literary archeology" ("Site" 92). In combining available information with informed assumptions, Morrison can reconstruct past worlds from detectable remains, creating a place for African American voices, for the unseen and unrecognized dimensions of the past (92). Where slave narratives and icons systematically left out the horrors of slavery to keep white abolitionists on their page, she argues, her novels—like the representation of the ship in the series—offer room to observe the experiences of Black people, the atrocities endured, and the resistance mustered (91).

When Satterfield walks toward *The Door of No Return* at the end of the episode, announcing the journey of food culture the series will pursue, he commemorates the beginning of the Middle Passage as a place of hardship and resilience. The series' use of the ship's icon, like the memorial, connects the journey and the commemoration of slavery to a specific location at sea, defined by the confines of the ship. Through the conversation between Harris and Satterfield—where she describes the refusal to eat and the merging of foodways as forms of resistance and he chooses to center on "the story of our resilience" (00:54:18-00:54:28)—the imprint is coded as a memorial site for Black experiences and memories, the way Morrison's site of memory is. It renders the memory and legacy of slavery tangible in contemporary discourses in ways that public debate and public spaces do not. It works as a reminder that structures of the past are continuously affecting the present and that

attending to the memory of slave trade, middle passage, and slavery remains necessary for contemporary politics and publics.

Conclusion

As uncommon as it might seem to consider these literary and iconic spaces as public places, they function like the relational places of public debate. Highlighting the links to socio-political concerns, they reflect processes of coming to terms and reason. They do, however, reveal moments in which publics exceed discourse and deliberation as they negotiate proximity and distance, personal and political involvement, and grasp the disparate layers of debate and perception.

The car in Luiselli's novel, while functioning as a place of public deliberation, reminds readers that discourse and documents, while necessary, are too fragmented to represent individual views, as even those are disjointed within themselves. The presence of the family's children in the narrative reflects affective dimensions within public spheres that cannot be rationally explained, giving voice to political topics and global crises mingling in the car. It functions as a reminder that the public deliberation we imagine does not always take place in public but is entwined in the private and the personal and, most of all, not always fully seen.

While these readings of the fictional car reveal theoretical considerations about publics, treating the image of the slave ship similarly touches upon more direct fields of application. Black studies' continuing reference to the (in)visibility of racialized crises in contemporary society shows that these are part of the publics of contemporary US American society and need to be addressed as such. Like the boy's attempt to save the present for future reference, the iconic ship is seen as a symbol of this past as well as its relation to the present. The intangibility of complete documentation is brought up through the reminder that representations of Blackness fall short of giving voice to those presented. The icon's inclusion in the two documentaries, however, treats it like a political place that articulates its political structures on the one hand and commemorates Black hardship and resilience on the other, along with the responsibility that implies. These uncommon places cannot be subsumed under the common imaginations of publics. Yet, the fictional car and the iconic ship still are public places that hold significant positions for publics just like the town squares, public parks, or benches by the road.

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Echoes of Tehran

A Geocritical Reading of Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*

Seyedeh Zhaleh Abbasi Hosseini

Abstract *The Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran initiated a significant transformation of Iranians' urban life, with a drastic reduction in the public sphere of everyday life. Iranian-American writer Azar Nafisi depicts the post-revolution everyday life of Tehran in her book,* Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books. *In Nafisi's narratives, space and place serve not only as settings but as embodiments of her personal experiences, socio-cultural observations, and political commentaries. This paper addresses the recurring theme of the distinction between private and public life within Iranian society. Applying the theoretical framework of geocriticism, which includes space and place, literary cartography, and spatial relations in literature, allows for an understanding of how these spatial elements function within her narratives. This, in turn, influences the reader's interpretation and experience of the story. Nafisi infuses each location with life, highlighting its unique attributes and history. This not only enhances the reader's understanding of the context but also heightens the emotional intensity of the narratives. Nafisi's narrative strategy is characterized by a sophisticated interplay between the personal and political, the factual and the imaginative. She creates an "imagined homeland," a literary cartography that is not just about space, but also about the socio-cultural and emotional experiences of its people. By exploring the urban narratives in Nafisi's prose, this work uncovers the dynamic relationship between the transformation of the city of Tehran and its residents.*

Keywords *Azar Nafisi; Geocriticism; Space and Place; Thirdspace; Tehran*

Introduction

In geocriticism, space goes beyond being simple geographical settings and has a broader significance within the narrative. Space, whether represented as a physical location or a metaphorical construct, is not merely a passive setting but functions as an active element that both influences and is influenced by the characters and events within the narrative. They can also act as a reflection of the characters' inner states, social patterns, or cultural contexts. Nafisi's narrative exemplifies this, with the city playing a pivotal role that goes beyond a mere setting. The actions, experiences, and decisions of the characters directly impact the city's development, while the city itself shapes the unfolding of the story and the characters' experiences. Thus, in the context of this work, the use of geocriticism explores how Nafisi's representations of space and place are shaped by the social, cultural, and historical context of contemporary Iran. Geocriticism can offer insights into the construction of a sense of place in Nafisi's writing and how it reflects larger social and political issues. Therefore, the main question of this paper is: How does Nafisi create and utilize "spaces" within her narratives to portray the complexities of post-revolutionary Iranian society?

Nafisi is a prominent Iranian-American author best known for her memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*. Published in 2003, this work has since gained global recognition (Kakutani). As an iconic writer within the Iranian diaspora literature, Nafisi's works have received acclaim but also courted controversy. Despite initially receiving praise from a supportive community of Iranian American activists and scholars who saw it as a text that could positively impact Americans' perception of Iranians in the United States, Nafisi's memoir has faced critical and, in some cases, even harsh criticism from scholars of Iran, particularly those with Iranian origins (Motlagh 413). Some have questioned Nafisi's general representation of Iran and Iranians, notably Fatemeh Keshavarz in *Jasmine and Stars: Reading More than 'Lolita' in Tehran* (2007) and Hamid Dabashi in *Iran: A People Interrupted* (2007) (Motlagh). However, the focus of this paper is not to assess the accuracy or realism of the author's portrayals of Iran. Here, I discuss how Nafisi's strategy of creating a space transcending time and place not only blurs the boundaries between the past and present but also between reality and imagination.[1]

1 The content of this article is extracted from a section in my doctoral dissertation, titled "The Literary Cartography of Tehran."

Following the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, there was a substantial transformation in the everyday urban life of Iranians. Many public places (bars, clubs, and even coffee houses) disappeared; the hijab became compulsory; gender segregation regulations in certain public places were enforced; and the meaning and names of many symbolic landmarks and streets were changed, e.g., Tehran's Shahyad Tower was renamed Azadi Tower. By renaming the tower to Azadi Tower, which means "Freedom Tower" in Persian, the government sought to reinforce its ideological message of freedom and independence, aligning with the narrative of the Islamic Revolution. This renaming not only reflected a change in the physical landscape of the city but also represented a symbolic transformation of the city's identity and the values it symbolized. Thus, the influence of this new totalitarian Islamic government manifests in various ways. Firstly, it shapes the physical landscape of the city through urban planning and architectural choices that reflect the regime's ideological agenda. Mosques and religious institutions may take precedence in urban development, altering the visual and spatial fabric of the city. Additionally, the imposition of strict moral codes and regulations on dress and behavior can significantly impact the way public places are used and experienced. Moreover, the influence of a repressive regime extends beyond the physical realm into the social and cultural dimensions of urban life. The imposition of state-sanctioned ideologies shapes the mindset and behavior of the city's inhabitants. This leads to self-censorship, where individuals modify their actions and expressions to conform to the government's expectations, thus impacting the overall social dynamics of the city.

In her writing, Nafisi employs language and narrative techniques to construct a sense of place that is intertwined with her identity and experiences. The "spaces"—whether physical, such as her home and the city of Tehran, or conceptual, such as the space of her memories and thoughts—are integral to understanding her work. They provide insights into the socio-political realities of post-revolutionary Iran and how these realities influence individual lives and collective experiences. The general structure of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, which includes chapters named "Lolita," "Gatsby," "James," and "Austen," is rooted in Nafisi's experiences teaching these authors and their works at the university and discussing them in her reading club in Tehran. Nafisi relates these texts and their topics of revolution, public life, prison, love, confiscation, etc., to her reality living in the Islamic Republic of Iran. She utilizes space as a narrative tool, illustrating the dichotomy between oppressive and liberating spaces, public and private spaces, as well as physical spaces and spaces of the mind. Using

multiple flashbacks, the story is presented as a series of narratives in which "space" is the central theme.

In this paper, I clarify the distinction between space and place and introduce the concept of geocriticism to understand the representations of space and place in Nafisi's work. I then delve into the influence of the repressive government on everyday life in Tehran, exploring the physical, social, and cultural dimensions of urban life. Additionally, I examine how Nafisi constructs a sense of place. I introduce the notion of urban imaginaries to understand collective perceptions and representations of Tehran. Finally, I explore the concept of Thirdspace as a way to bridge the gap between physical and mental spaces. Throughout the paper, I highlight the significance of Nafisi's narratives in capturing the complexities of post-revolutionary Iranian society and the interplay of memory, imagination, and reality in constructing a sense of place.

Geocriticism, Thirdspace, and Urban Imaginaries

An important distinction in humanistic geography is that between space and place. Tuan explains what starts as an undifferentiated "space" becomes a "place" as we learn more about it and assign value to it (161). According to Tuan, "space" refers to a more abstract, undifferentiated area, a location which lacks specific meaning or value to a person. On the other hand, "place" is a specific space that has been given meaning through personal, cultural, or historical associations. It is a space in which one becomes invested, or to which one feels a belonging. He elucidates that what makes a place a place, what distinguishes it from undifferentiated space, is the pause, the rest of the eye, during which the observer suddenly grasps the discrete part of the space as something that is attracting attention (161). Place is associated with a certain way of seeing, which can be described as critical—in the sense that the interpretation, evaluation, and analysis of its meaning, functioning, and effects are assumed at the moment when a certain part of the space becomes distinguishable as a place (Tally, *Topophrenia* 32–33). When a space is recognized as a "place," it takes on additional layers of meaning as it is interpreted and analyzed for its meaning, functions, and effects. In other words, the moment we start seeing a space as a "place," we begin to analyze it, and it becomes rich with meaning for interpretation.

While the recognition of space and place in literary analysis is increasing, debates persist on the most effective approach to understanding their impor-

tance in literature. Geocriticism offers a new perspective on the relationship between space, place, and literature by emphasizing how a text fits into its geographical and cultural environment, and how this environment shapes the text itself. Tally states that "[t]he final word in Geocriticism is quite fittingly the verb *explore*" (62). For him, exploration captures the essence of the discipline, which is to discover, expose, and analyze the various ways in which space and place are intertwined with human experience. By exploring literary and cultural expressions, geocriticism seeks to understand how places are created, represented, and interpreted. Through the verb 'explore,' Tally highlights the active and ongoing nature of geocriticism, which is not just about analyzing the world around us, but actively engaging with it.

In this paper, I discuss what Nafisi calls the space beyond time and space, the real-and-imagined space, the space she finds in reading, such as the "democratic" space of universities. Tally discusses Soja's conception of "Thirdspace" as a way of not only bridging the gap between physical and mental spaces—the "real" geography out there and the representations of space we carry in our heads (first- and second-space, respectively)—but also transforming it (16). In *Thirdspace*, Soja explains that:

> [E]verything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (56–57)

Thirdspace is, therefore, a space of complexity and inclusivity where various elements coexist, interact with, and influence each other. It is a space of multiplicity that recognizes the many facets of human experience and rejects binary understandings of the world.

Moreover, the term urban imaginaries will be used to characterize the collective perceptions, representations, and narratives—both real and imaginary—that people hold about urban spaces. The urban imaginary highlights how the inhabitants of a place imagine their city, which is based on material facts and is part of the reality of the city and, therefore, part of the nation's history, traditions, and culture (Huyssen 3). Imaginaries are defined as "socially shared and transmitted (both within and between cultures) representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings" (Salazar 576). These imaginaries may emerge from lived encounters with cityscapes, cul-

tural representations in media, literary works, and collective memories. As such, urban imaginaries become a repository of shared meanings, symbols, and emotions, reflecting the relationship between the external world and the internal world of the imagination. Examining urban imaginaries allows for a comprehensive exploration of how cities are not merely physical entities but also sites of complex socio-cultural constructions. Furthermore, understanding urban imaginaries provides a nuanced perspective on the transformative potential of cities, highlighting how they become catalysts for social change, innovation, and the negotiation of identities.

Socio-Spatial Dynamics of Everyday Life in Tehran

Reading Lolita in Tehran begins with how Nafisi creates a space for herself beyond the harsh realities of her life during the Islamic revolution and how gradually all her contact with the outside world is confined to a place where space and storytelling merge (9). Nafisi highlights her daily struggle against the arbitrary rules and restrictions of Islamic laws as she prepares to enter public life (9). She describes that in "a special class" in her private place, she does not have to go through the painful rituals associated with her experience of university teaching, which determined what she wore, how she behaved, and what gestures she had to remember to control. The situation was especially worse for female students, she continues, who were punished for running up the stairs when they were late for class, for laughing in the hallways, and for talking to the opposite sex (9). The narrator describes her living room, "that room," as a symbolic representation of her "nomadic, borrowed life" (7). From a geocritical perspective, following a stratigraphic logic, Nafisi shows how the present space of her living room contains a past that flows, as the narrator notes, "[v]agrant pieces of furniture from different times and places were thrown together … these incongruous ingredients created a symmetry that the other, more deliberately furnished rooms in the apartment lacked" (7). In describing this place, she reveals how this stratification of time in a space creates a symmetry in her life that other spaces lack. Nafisi explains that "[she] had met all of them in the magical space of [her] living room. They came to [her] house in a disembodied state of suspension, bringing to [her] living room their secrets, their pains and their gifts" (58). Thus, she underscores the living room's role as a safe space where the individuals could shed their societal masks and reveal their true selves.

Nafisi creates a space where each student takes off her robe and scarf, "shaking her head" and "pauses before entering" to forget the external reality and enter a space she imagines is theirs (7). It is what Soja calls a space of "real-and-imagined" (56–57). Nafisi goes on to say that "only there is no room, just the teasing void of memory" (7). Dibazar discusses the complexity of public and private spaces in Iranian society, asserting that the line separating these two spheres is often blurred, with numerous overlaps and "in-between zones" (8). He discusses the way *Reading Lolita in Tehran* portrays the formation of a public community (Nafisi's living room) that is bound together by its respect for elements of privacy (8). This "public-in-private" space offers a venue for intellectual and emotional expression that is semi-public yet shielded from the constraints of the public sphere.

Nafisi explains the societal changes that took place in Iran following the Islamic revolution:

> After the revolution, almost all the activities one associated with being out in public—seeing movies, listening to music, sharing drinks or a meal with friends—shifted to private homes. It was refreshing to go out once in a while, even to such a desultory event. (299)

The revolution introduced new rules and norms that curtailed activities in public, shifting them predominantly to the confines of private homes. This shift represents a significant transformation in the society's sociocultural fabric, with public spaces losing their vibrancy and becoming more restrictive, while private spaces emerged as new centers for social and cultural activities. At the core of Nafisi's narrative is an argument for the necessity of personal freedoms and the ability to engage in a dialogue between the public and private worlds. She illustrates the dehumanizing effects of societal restrictions on these essential aspects of life, emphasizing the importance of self-expression in affirming one's existence and experiences. She feels reduced to a mere "piece of cloth," devoid of personal characteristics, moving under the control of an "invisible force" (167). Similarly, she depicts a scene where everything is familiar yet alien, highlighting the disconnect between the past and the present (169). Nafisi recalls the transformation of her old house into something unrecognizable which signifies her loss of relevance and place in society (169). Her cherished personal spaces and items have been replaced, reflecting how societal changes have invalidated her past experiences and identity. Her feelings of irrelevance extend to the point where she feels unseen in her own house, symbolizing her feel-

ings of invisibility and insignificance in her society. Nafisi discusses the common responses to such feelings of irrelevance, noting that some people may physically escape, while others may assimilate the characteristics of their "conquerors" to regain relevance (169). Alternatively, she suggests that some individuals, like Claire in *The American* by Henry James, retreat inward and create a sanctuary in their own corner, taking the essential parts of their life underground (169). Thus, they preserve their identity and personal space by disconnecting from oppressive societal norms and retreating into a private world. In her depiction of becoming irrelevant, Nafisi underscores the devastating impact of societal changes on personal identity and the importance of personal space and freedom in maintaining one's sense of relevance and belonging.

Nafisi's representation of her room as a mental space becomes valuable only when she discovers that this imaginary space gives her a sense of identity and belonging, which she refers to as a "precious memory" (7). She explains, "[t]hat room, which I never paid much attention to at that time, has gained a different status in my mind's eye now that it has become the precious object of memory" (7). Nafisi describes this unique space as a collection of various elements from her past, including "the fireplace, a fanciful creation of my husband," and "a love seat against one wall, over which I had thrown a lace cover, my mother's gift from long ago" (7). Additionally, she portrays this space with a window that looks out onto a *cul-de-sac* named Azar. This name is the same as the author's, providing a reflective connection between the author and the place. The window symbolizes the author's connection to her geographic origins, and how physical space shapes her sense of self. However, when she looks through the window, she sees only the highest branches of a massive tree and the Elburz Mountains above the buildings in the distance, while the street and its reality disappear from her sight. She has a place on the chair with her back to the window; she adds:

> I could not see my favorite mountains from where I sat, but opposite my chair, on the far wall of the dining room, was an antique oval mirror, a gift from my father, and in its reflection, I could see the mountains capped with snow, even in summer, and watch the trees change color. That censored view intensified my impression that the noise came not from the street below but from some far-off place, a place whose persistent hum was our only link to the world we refused, for those few hours, to acknowledge. (Nafisi 8)

Through the mirror's reflection, the narrator sees the Elburz Mountains, which become a source of comfort and inspiration for her. Beyond a mere physical object, the mirror in Nafisi's account becomes a metaphorical tool for self-reflection and introspection. Through its reflection, Nafisi transcends the limitations of her physical space and transports herself to a different realm of imagination, one unconstrained by the political and social realities of her surroundings. In addition, the mirror is also significant in how it highlights the tension between reality and imagination. Consequently, she creates an illusion of the outside world. This illusion serves to connect Nafisi with the outside world and her memories of Tehran while also remaining isolated in her self-created sanctuary. Hendelman-Baavur discusses how the process of self-alienation in Nafisi's autobiography leads the author into a self-imposed exile, confining herself to one room in the family home and creating a sanctuary for herself and her students that becomes an illusion—a reflection—as she can only see "her" Elburz Mountains from her seat through the reflection of the mirror (51). This new place is not only physical but also psychological, as the author can connect with her memories and experiences through her imagination and the literature she reads.

It is precisely this dynamic space—where imagination intertwines with memory—that illustrates how something transforms into a "place" underscoring the centrality of imagination in shaping her world. Nafisi deepens this exploration of imagination through her use of intertextuality. For instance, she not only refers to Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* (1955), a work with profound literary influence, but also uses the novel as a lens to view the political and social climate of post-revolution Iran. Nafisi's use of intertextuality serves several objectives. Firstly, it establishes a dialogue between her work and the works of renowned authors, emphasizing the immediate relevance and resonance of these texts within the current intellectual and cultural discourse. Secondly, it allows her to draw parallels between the experiences of characters in these influential works and of individuals living in Iran, shedding new light on both experiences. Finally, it allows Nafisi to make broader philosophical and political statements by referring to literary works that have already achieved iconic status. Thus, Nafisi's descriptions of place are layered with meaning and significance that go beyond the physical characteristics of the places themselves. Hendelman-Baavur points out that Nafisi becomes "a guardian of a new space by captivating her self-narrative through her own imagination and affections and reticulating it with her favorite Western literary protagonists, such as Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita and Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby …" (51). Hence,

the city—here Tehran, a physical entity anchored in reality and populated by many visible and significant buildings and urban spaces—is distorted into an illusion, a memory, and a perception reconstructed in the author's imagination.

The narrator explains, "[o]ur world in that living room with its window framing my beloved Elburz Mountains became our sanctuary, our self-contained universe, mocking the reality of black-scarved, timid faces in the city that sprawled below" (Nafisi 5–6). Her poetic description reinforces the authentic space she and her students have created. The mountains, visible from the classroom window, serve as a constant reminder of their struggle and the importance of their work. This contrasts with the harsh reality they are avoiding. The majestic Elburz Mountains occupy a prominent position in Iranian history and mythology, being a distant outpost of heroes and mythical gods.[2] They are woven into the fabric of Tehran's identity, with local folklore and legends cherishing their majestic allure, and spark the imagination of its inhabitants. These mountains hold a central place in Tehran's emotional geography and have become an inseparable part of the city's collective identity and cultural landscape, thereby symbolizing the harmonious connection between nature and urban life in Tehran. The name Elburz itself is derived from Hara Berezaiti, the legendary mountain in the Avesta, which is the main text of Zoroastrianism. Thus, by referring to "my beloved Elburz" which glorifies the setting of "that room," Nafisi is connecting to her cultural heritage and glorifying her country's past. For Nafisi, this connection is important as it allows her to celebrate and appreciate the richness of her heritage. It also provides Nafisi with a sense of belonging and a connection to her roots, which is especially valuable given her life in exile, away from her homeland. The mountains serve as a bridge between her past and present, drawing on the collective memory of Iran and intertwining it with her experiences in the diaspora. Nafisi's use of "my beloved" adds an emotional depth to the text and serves to emphasize the importance of the mountains to Nafisi's sense of self and identity.

Furthermore, Nafisi uses her imagination to bridge two different periods and locations. While in "another room," she recreates the space of "that room"

2 For instance, in the renowned Persian epic, the Shahnameh, composed by Ferdowsi, the Elburz Mountains are depicted as far more than a mere geographical entity; they are portrayed as a mystical and symbolic landscape, where the Simurgh, a mythical bird known for its wisdom and benevolence, shelters the abandoned infant Zal and raises him.

she left behind, establishing a connection between her past and present environments. She explains how she imagined this other room she is now sitting in and describes her room in "this other world" and writes, "[h]ere and now in that other world that cropped up so many times in our discussions, I sit and reimagine myself and my students, my girls as I came to call them, reading *Lolita* in a deceptively sunny room in Tehran" (6). Nafisi describes how her students brought so much color to that room as they took off their scarves and showed their authentic characters. She creates a unique character for "that room" by telling the readers how "that room, for all of [them], became a place of transgression. What a wonderland it was!" (8).

In her speech at a 2017 literary event, Aspen Words, Nafisi emphasized that "*through imagination, through works of art, through works of literature, we find a common space in which to communicate and reassert and reaffirm our humanity*". In *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, she asks the reader to imagine them so that she and her students can live in the reader's imagination:

> Against the tyranny of time and politics, imagine us the way we sometimes didn't dare to imagine ourselves: in our most private and secret moments, in the most extraordinarily ordinary instances of life, listening to music, falling in love, walking down the shady streets or reading Lolita in Tehran. And then imagine us again with all this confiscated, driven underground, taken away from us. (6)

In this way, Nafisi highlights the power of imagination and fiction over a repressive reality. She notes that "we were, to borrow from Nabokov, to experience how the ordinary pebble of ordinary life could be transformed into a jewel through the magic eye of fiction" (8). She creates a literary space that resists the dominant ideological and religious biases enforced after the revolution in Iran. Furthermore, the narrator mentions how *Lolita*'s story is connected to her memories of Tehran, so she believes that *Lolita*'s fictional world provides a new color to Tehran, just as Tehran redefines and transforms *Lolita*'s story into something familiar which ultimately becomes "our Lolita."

Nafisi encourages the readers to contemplate the ways in which our senses engage with the city and invites them to explore the subtle interplay between the visible and the concealed, enriching our comprehension of Tehran's urban landscape. Nafisi's narratives disrupt the boundaries imposed by the external environment. The book club in her living room, serving as a private sanctuary for forbidden texts, offers participants a means to transcend the constraints

of the public sphere. It becomes a site of resistance and emancipation, echoing how individuals maneuver and challenge the city's limitations. Here, Nafisi delves into discussions of literature, illuminating the relationship between text and context. The narrator describes how one of her students, "lived in so many parallel worlds: the so-called real world of her family, work and society; the secret world of our class and her young man; and the world she had created out of her lies" (297). This reveals how the woman is living in and juggling multiple "worlds" or realities, each with its own set of rules, expectations, and experiences. It shows how her lived experience—her personal context—influences her interpretation of the text and vice versa.

Thus, Nafisi's narrative in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* offers a profound exploration of the socio-spatial dynamics of everyday life in Tehran. Through her vivid depictions of private and public spaces and the tensions and overlaps between them, we gain a nuanced understanding of the impact of political and societal restrictions on individual freedoms and identities. Even as she navigates the challenges of displacement, Nafisi maintains a strong bond with her cultural heritage and geographical origins. Consequently, her portrayal of Tehran transcends the physicality of the city, delving into its emotional and cultural landscapes, which ultimately shapes her identity and sense of belonging.

Poetics of Place: Nafisi's Tehran

Classifying a literary work such as *Reading Lolita in Tehran* as either autofiction or autobiography is subjective and relies heavily on the interpretations and perspectives of readers and scholars. This ambiguity arises from the complex nature of genre classification when examining works that blur the boundaries between fact and fiction. As readers approach the text with their personal reading experiences, their views on its categorization may differ. While there are established criteria for distinguishing different genres, these boundaries often remain fluid and open to interpretation. In the case of autofiction and autobiography, the distinction becomes less clear when a work intertwines personal experiences with fictional elements. Readers bring their backgrounds, knowledge, and perspectives, which significantly influence how they perceive and categorize a text. For instance, one reader might focus on the autobiographical aspects of *Reading Lolita in Tehran,* realize the author's reflections on her experiences in Iran, and consider it primarily an autobiography. In contrast, another might focus on the fictionalized elements present in the narrative, high-

lighting the imaginative reconstruction of events and character portrayals, and consider it autofiction.

In *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafisi uses pseudonyms for the students depicted in her memoir to protect their identities and mitigate potential consequences. By incorporating fictional names, Nafisi addresses the ethical considerations inherent in writing about real individuals within a memoir. In the author's note, Nafisi states, "[t]he facts in this story are true insofar as any memory is ever truthful, but I have made every effort to protect friends and students, baptizing them with new names and disguising them perhaps even from themselves". Consequently, within the scope of this work, I will use the term "autobiographical writing" to capture the essence of Nafisi's literary works. This terminology is deliberately chosen, considering the multifaceted nature of her narratives and the fluid boundaries between reality and imagination that are often found in Nafisi's storytelling. This approach allows for a holistic examination that considers the interplay between the author's personal experiences, the broader context of her narratives, and the creative fictional elements.

The importance of urban imaginaries in this research is highlighted by the experience of displacement, as places are revealed in relation to changes apparent in movement and agency. Nafisi captures the essence of Tehran's streets, neighborhoods, and social interactions, inviting readers to immerse themselves in the city's intricacies. By drawing on universal themes and human experiences, Nafisi's prose resonates with a diverse audience, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. For instance, she explores themes such as freedom, oppression, and the power of literature in her work, praised by readers worldwide. Examining Nafisi's literary cartography enriches the diverse narratives that collectively contribute to forming Tehran's urban identity. Her prose goes beyond the mere depiction of cityscapes and architecture, delving into the intricacies of everyday life, social interactions, and the emotional experiences of its inhabitants. Nafisi intertwines personal histories with the broader historical context of Tehran, creating a sense of continuity between past and present. Through this historical perspective, readers become immersed in the city's evolution over time, understanding how cultural and political transformations have shaped its urban fabric. In Nafisi's narrative, Tehran emerges not merely as a physical space but as a living and breathing organism where individual lives intersect and weave the complex fabric of urban existence. Nafisi's literary cartography becomes not

just a depiction of Tehran but a window into the essence of the city's soul, inviting us to explore its collective imagination and cultural consciousness.

The specific historical and cultural context of Tehran during the Islamic Revolution becomes a crucial element that shapes the narrative and themes of the book. The setting of Tehran during this tumultuous period is depicted as a space that exists within and apart from the established social order. The complex layers of existence and experience within that location play a crucial role in shaping the narrative's complexity. The restrictions on speech and expression during the Islamic Revolution created tension between the public and private spheres, allowing for a multitude of narratives and realities to coexist within the city.

The story unfolds within a fluid environment, which allows readers to project their experiences, contexts, and cultural backgrounds onto the narrative. This dynamic quality of the setting encourages readers to engage actively with the text, interpreting and reimagining the story's events in various ways. Different readers may envision the events taking place in diverse cultural, historical, or geographical contexts, leading to a rich tapestry of interpretations. This richness and diversity of perspectives mirror the broader themes of the book, including the exploration of individual agency, the impact of cultural and societal constraints, and the complex interplay between literature and real-life experiences. The act of reading itself becomes a transformative experience, transporting characters and readers to realms that coexist alongside the familiar. Hence, Nafisi's narrative can exist in a state of paradox, where it is simultaneously real and unreal.

This duality challenges our conventional understanding of what is real. Dennis emphasizes that literature can be viewed as a "heterotopic space" (175); this suggests that literature has a dual existence. On one hand, it resides in the tangible and social aspects of our world. On the other, it maintains a level of abstraction that allows it to question and potentially disrupt established norms (175). Dennis continues her argument emphasizing that "the space of literature, then, both removed from our world and strangely proximate, like heterotopia, taps reserves of imagination to unsettle what is" (176). In other words, literature has the power to unsettle our conventional understanding of reality by presenting alternative perspectives, narratives, and possibilities. Dennis concludes that just as certain heterotopias reveal the illusory nature of real spaces, literature also functions as a space of illusion that exposes the partitioned sites of human life as even more illusory (176). She writes, "[t]his space, removed from but related to all other spaces, at its best causes us to

inhabit our own world somewhat differently, changing its hue and resourcing the imagination" (176). However, it is important to note that literature is incredibly diverse, covering a wide range of genres, themes, and purposes; it goes beyond mere illusion and serves to connect different worlds, inviting us to explore diverse cultures, periods, and viewpoints. It allows us to experience the genuine emotions and experiences of characters.

Nafisi's work provides a compelling illustration of Soja's concept of Thirdspace, wherein various dimensions of reality, imagination, and representation converge. The narrator explains:

> I attempted to shape other places according to my concept of Iran. I tried to Persianize the landscape and even transferred for a term to a small college in New Mexico, mainly because it reminded me of home. You see, Frank and Nancy, this little stream surrounded by trees, meandering its way through a parched land, is just like Iran. Just like Iran, just like home. What impressed me most about Tehran, I told whoever cared to listen, were the mountains and its dry yet generous climate, the trees and flowers that bloomed and thrived on its parched soil and seemed to suck the light out of the sun. (82–83)

The narrator's attempt to "shape other places according to [her] concept of Iran" serves as a manifestation of the interplay between the real and the imagined, the abstract and the concrete, the subjective and the objective, and the knowable and the unimaginable, as described by Soja. Additionally, the narrator's efforts to 'Persianize' her surroundings and find elements reminiscent of Iran in a foreign landscape reflect the blending of her subjective experiences and objective reality. This is also an example of the Thirdspace, where personal memories and experiences interact with the physical, tangible world. The "small college in New Mexico" becomes a space where her memories and experiences of Iran interact with her present reality, demonstrating the convergence of first- and second-space in Soja's concept of Thirdspace (82). Nafisi's descriptions of Tehran and her attempts to find elements of Iran in other places illustrate how imagination helps us understand complex spatial relationships and gives meaning to spatial abstractions. Her narrative effectively transforms abstract concepts of space into concrete, relatable experiences. Nafisi's narrative is imbued with collective perceptions, representations, and narratives about Tehran, both real and imaginary. Her detailed descriptions shape a mutual comprehension of the city, symbolizing

the dynamic relationship between the observable world and the realm of imaginative thought. This shared understanding is not confined to the narrative alone—it extends to Nafisi as the author, the characters in her story, and the readers, who contribute their personal perspectives and interpretations, thus becoming active participants in the creation of this shared vision of Tehran.

Nafisi portrays the university as a site of political and ideological struggle, a contested space where her students can explore alternative visions of reality and engage in critical thinking despite the repressive social and political climate of Iran. Foucault's concept of heterotopia suggests that certain spaces are inherently different from the surrounding world and can serve as places of otherness or escape from the norms and expectations of society (19). Nafisi depicts the university as a heterotopic space, where the boundaries between inside and outside are blurred, and where the normal rules and conventions of society are suspended. By doing so, she creates a space of possibility where her students can engage with and subvert the dominant literary canon.

One of the main characters in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is a narrator's friend, referred to as the "Magician." Nafisi's use of the term is symbolic as the Magician seems to hold significance in her life, inspiring wonder and igniting her imagination. This is evident in the way Nafisi describes their interactions and the influence this character has on her perceptions and experiences. The narrator says:

> [d]oes every magician, every genuine one, like my own, evoke the hidden conjurer in us all, bringing out the magical possibilities and potentials we did not know existed? Here he is on this chair, the chair I am in the process of inventing. As I write, the chair is created: walnut, a brown cushion, a little uncomfortable, it keeps you alert. This is the chair, but he is not sitting on that chair; I am. He sits on the couch, the same brown cushions, softer perhaps, looking more at home than I do; it is his couch. He sits as he always does, right in the middle, leaving a vast empty space on either side. He does not lean back but sits up straight, his hands on his lap, his face lean and sharp. (Nafisi 337)

As the narrator describes the chair and the couch on which the Magician sits, she is "in the process of inventing"; she is simultaneously weaving a narrative that combines elements of reality and fiction (337). She imbues the scene with a sense of magic and wonder, particularly through the figure of the Magician. His posture and the way he occupies space—sitting upright in the middle

of the couch with vast empty spaces on either side—create an impression of dominance and importance. She uses her memories and experiences as a starting point and then embellishes them with elements of fiction to create a more engaging and immersive narrative. The 'place' here is simultaneously physical—a room with a chair and a couch—and symbolic, representing a space where memories and experiences are revisited and reimagined. Furthermore, the description of the chair "in the process of inventing" serves as a metaphor for the act of writing itself. As Nafisi creates the chair through her words, she is also creating a narrative, bringing to life the memories associated with the Magician. The detailed depiction of the chair and the couch—their color, texture, and comfort level—contributes to the "poetics of place" in this quote. These objects are not only physically present in the room, but they also hold symbolic significance, acting as tangible links to Nafisi's past. The chair is associated with her, while the couch is linked to the Magician, highlighting the dynamics of their relationship. Nafisi's narrative style here involves a meticulous observation of details, which not only adds depth to the characters but also enhances the reader's understanding of their relationship. This is a good example of Nafisi's ability to create a sense of place through her narrative. By blending elements of reality and fiction, she constructs a richly textured narrative that engages the reader on multiple levels. Her "poetics of place" enable the reader to visualize the setting, connect with the characters, and understand the complex dynamics of their relationship. Hence, the fusion of fiction and non-fiction makes Nafisi's narratives engaging, offering insights into the interplay of memory, imagination, and reality.

Conclusion

Nafisi depicts Tehran, not through its physical geography, but through shared experiences and emotional landscapes. This cartographic representation of Tehran goes beyond physical locales to encompass spaces of resistance, solidarity, and intellectual freedom within an oppressive regime. Through her engagement with literature, particularly her group discussions and analyses of various works, she outlines her positions within the oppressive structures of Iranian society and imagines possibilities beyond them. Nafisi's narratives weave together local and global stories, creating a multifaceted portrayal of Tehran that is interconnected with global narratives and experiences. Therefore, the sense of place becomes a significant part of her poetics. This analysis

provides a path towards a more nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural interplay that both shapes and is shaped by spatial dynamics in literature, thus adding depth to the broader field of geocriticism.

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Appendix

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