

TANZFABRIK  
BERLIN

CONVERSATIONS  
FILMSCREENINGS  
LIVE READING



# *Facing Nature*

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*Facing Nature* took place from Oct 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022 at Tanzfabrik Berlin. The three day symposium on the relationship between nature and contemporary live art was initiated by the artist Sandra Man and the dramaturge of Tanzfabrik, Felicitas Zeeden. Together, they invited six artists and asked them to find one partner each for a dialogue.

At the event itself each duo was given two slots of one hour each in which they would talk about their respective relationships to nature in their work. It was agreed to simply have a conversation and to not go into presentation, as showing videos, pictures etc.

As the aim was to allow for spontaneous thinking and enabling to express what comes up during the exchange, the event was not video or audio recorded. Three writers were invited to attend and report. Their texts are presented here. In addition, textual insights into their preparation process are given by some of the participating artists.

Next to the conversations that formed the core of *Facing Nature* films were screened and a live reading took place. The five films were chosen as independent classics from various origins, all of them presenting the landscape as partner instead of backdrop.

The long durational live reading was dedicated to a section of Ursula K. LeGuin «The Left Hand of Darkness», read by Lisa Densem, Ohiane Roach and Litó Walkey.

Films and reading allowed for a contextualization of nature and art being a cross cultural topic of all times.

Additional film screenings and the presentation of this booklet took place on Feb 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 2023

**PARTICIPATING ARTISTS:**  
Antonia Baehr, Jefta van Dinther, Alm Gnista, Jared Gradinger, Myriam Van Imschoot, Sergiu Matis, Carrie McIlwain, Harun Morrison, Silvia Noronha, Luiza Prado de O. Martins, Liz Rosenfeld.

**CREDITS:**  
Tanzfabrik Team for tech and production.

**ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION:**  
Micayla Smith, Juan Harcha, Marc Lagies, Henrique Antão.

**FOOD:**  
Nkitinkiti Berlin

# «Three Questions by and to Felicitas Zeeden and Sandra Man»

## SANDRA MAN & FELICITAS ZEEDEN

What was your main motivation in designing this format?

Felicitas: My interest in this format arose primarily from two different impulses: Firstly, as curators we are interested in the conjunction of nature & art and wanted to bring together artists who share our interest. Secondly, I have been getting more and more the impression that many artists in the dance scene are longing for avenues of exchange of ideas. Not regarding any specific domain or topic, but generally a forum or a format that goes beyond the usual artist talk after performances. And even though *Facing Nature* focused on dialogues between artists, it was not constrained to internal discourse but equally intended for and indeed involved the public: Our assumption was that this exchange would not only be enriching for the artists, but also for an audience seeking deeper insight into different artistic approaches and working methods.

With our applied principle of co-curating, we also aimed to get to know new artists and other voices as well, in other words to widen our circle. We wanted the artists to choose their dialogue partners themselves, and encouraged them to work out together the themes that are of genuine interest to them – this certainly proved enriching for the conversations.

Sandra: The format we found for *Facing Nature* had a structural component of letting go and giving up the idea of control built into it; this I found very productive and promising. The frame was simple – we as initiators choose a topic that is specific yet open to interpretation and inviting all sorts of entry points; we provide the time and the space for the encounters and we ask the artists to freely engage with the and speak about each other's work however they saw fitting, without relying on additional presentational devices such as images or videos. Beyond that, what happens during those encounters was basically out of our hand; we didn't try to control them or lead to a certain outcome. There is a reduction that I like about *Facing Nature*: Talk about your work and help your partner to talk about theirs.

Since my time at university, I have been dreaming of a setting that allows people to think in public; a space that encourages you to be fully present while giving a talk or being engaged in a public discussion. I missed that badly during my studies, I felt that conferences make you prepare and defend yourself but do not invite to be right there – in your thoughts and affects.

We noticed how mutually enriching it is to bring artists together for an exchange while working at Flutgraben Performances – an experimental artist-run format which we have been a part of for several years now

together with Tiphaine Carrère, Clément Layes, Jasna Layes-Vinovrški and Moritz Majce. It is simply fascinating and also quite different when artists are encouraged to host one another in their respective artistic universes and to offer each other *insights* (that's how we call one of our main formats).

I think there is a great desire for sustained dialogue with each other and far too few opportunities to pursue it. Of course, artists meet all the time, but I am talking about structured encounters that have a frame and a clear intention. And these talks benefit a great deal from the fact that they are public.

Ultimately, I think that the structured encounters of artists revealing their ways of thinking and making art, brings together the intimacy of a dialogue between people with something strong in common and the generality of the topic of art as something that concerns us all.

What is your relation to art & nature?

Felicitas: The connection between art & nature has been driving me and shaping my work as dramaturge and curator for Tanzfabrik for quite some time. It was the emphasis of our stage program in 2022 and it also inspired our «Pause as Resistance» project last May. Even before that, the concept I have developed for the research lab «Down To Earth» together with two colleagues had a lot to do with the connection between art & nature, and in 2023, we are planning to hold a residency program dedicated to the topic of eco feminism. But even before all this, I had a fascination for this topic that goes back much further:

Perhaps it has been instilled in me through works of visual art, especially in the sculpture projects in my city of origin. In Münster, I practically grew up among those sculptures that make an inseparable part of the cityscape: the *Cherry Column* on Harsewinkelplatz, the dolomite in front of St. Petri's Church, the *Giant Pool Balls* on the banks of the Aasee. Looking back now, I think this is what I understood as «natural» as a child. Only as I grew older, I gradually became aware of these sculptures as art in the urban space and my interest in them grew constantly. These works were all set outside, some more in «nature» than others. To me, when we speak of nature, this also includes the urban space, since with nature in art inevitably comes a redefinition, transformation – or deconstruction – as well. I am thinking of works on the banks of the Aasee, in the countryside in Münsterland, but also in a potato field in Brandenburg, in the Karlsau in Kassel or a wasteland on Landsberger Allee, the courtyard of the Uferstudios, the Spree, and so on. In all of these places, the focus (or my main interest) was on the correspondences of the works with nature. Or, more precisely, in those urban and public spaces, how does the work of art relate to its surroundings: is it a form of commentary, does it blend in the environment, or is it a counterpoint of sorts?

Later, my interest became gradually more refined and specific: Firstly, through the exploration of dancing bodies in nature. At this point, it was no longer buildings or objects that were embedded in space, but bodies that related to and interacted with environment, be it a pond or a field, dirt or noise, etc. Secondly, the climate crisis, which could no longer be ignored, made it inevitable to ask new questions about the role of art and how we think about and deal with nature in art, especially in *art production*.

Furthermore, it is evident, that the examination of the connection between art & nature does not necessarily have to take place outside. It is accessible and indeed present in many ways and places; it can happen indoors and through many kinds of (artistic) discourses and practices that somehow refer to us and the world around us, the city, the outdoors, the earth and so on. In this context, we have initiated *Facing Nature*.

Sandra: Nature and art are fundamentally linked. There has always been a connection between the two; maybe next to religion, it is the most substantial relationship art has.

And while being ancient and at the beginning of art and relevant for the whole history of art, nature is at the same time one of the most contemporary questions.

The effects of global warming make it apparent that we still face nature in storms, wild fires, melting glaciers, floods etc. It makes us rethink our imagined role as co-creators and co-builders of the world; in turn, it may also force us to rethink what creating is all about, including art, as well. Ultimately, the relation between art and nature leads to questions of presence: How do we experience our relationship to our environment? Generally, how do we sense and make sense of our being on earth?

*I am a native of this Earth*, Virginia Woolf says. What does this mean? In my own work, it is landscape that allows me to sense and experience presence. A presence as a being-on-earth that is at the same time alien and familiar.

I depict the relationship between bodies and landscapes through text, video, and performance. But it is not only that I show nature in art, it is also landscape that makes me think and make art differently. To engage with an outdoor space, to see, feel, listen to it, produces new ways of moving, writing, and arranging media. Art not only becomes more relational and «environmental,» it is also affected by different paces and temporalities such as deep time of geological processes. In this sense, art also opens up to questions of duration. And I think this goes beyond «long durations» and up to the point where time and space meet; in art they do so in the encounter of performance and installation art.

I think that the deeper reason for the desire – mine as well as of many other artists – to cross-fade performance and installation and to bring bodies and spaces together on an equal level, and to find new ways of statics and dynamics meeting each other etc., the deeper reason for these fundamental changes of genres in art, lies in the massive changes of that which was long considered unchangeable, nature.

*How did you experience the event?*

Felicitas: I was surprised that the format de facto worked, especially in terms of the duration of the dialogues: the artists spoke to each other for a total of two hours (two times one hour). This made it possible to illuminate different facets of the thematic complex and the format allowed for in-depth conversations and insights. The artists were able to say more than what might be written in a program booklet or on a website announcement, and the conversations were not focused on individual (current works), but rather touched on more fundamental concerns, highlighted constants or developments in the artist's trajectory. It felt like a real exchange, born out of mutual interest.

Sandra: I enjoyed a lot the fact that over the course of a few days, an atmosphere of mutual trust and support built up that I rarely experienced in public contexts. The audience together with the artists in dialogue created a common state of being very relaxed while remaining truly focused and attuned.

I found it refreshing and inspiring to listen to conversations that are neither interviews nor monologues. I embraced my moments of disorientation as a member of an audience. The conversations became more open as the ones speaking had to be at the same time with each other and the public. As one of the artists engaging in dialogue, the feeling of being part of a triangle was very powerful and enriching.

# «Facing the Many Faces of Nature»

MICHELA FILZI

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### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The grassy «Impossible Forest» rising from the concrete in the middle of Uferstudios campus waves at me with its ever-inviting wilderness. The humid air, polluted by orange streetlamp light, brushes against my skin one last time before studio five absorbs me by osmosis. A warm dim-light welcomes my eyes, greeted by other familiar and unfamiliar gazes. An array of low, beanbag covered platforms and pillows holding different rocks, branches and seeds, guide me across the floor; until one drooping beanbag lures me in and I settle, melting my body into it. The atmosphere is welcoming and relaxing, the space swallows more people in as time slows down. The force of gravity pulls everyone down to the ground; soft bodies landing on soft surfaces.

Inspired by Timothy Morton's textuality-ecology parallelization,<sup>2</sup> the following chapters are landscaped reflections of one-on-one encounters which took place during the three-day *Facing Nature* program; encounters made of lakes and shorelines, craters and trees, and no rigid boundaries between organisms and environments nor between observer and the observed.

The authorship of this texts is thus shared with the invited artists; their words populate and animate the following landscapes.

<sup>1</sup> In this paragraph I'm using the task proposed by Silvia and Carrie, to alter my role as agent.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Morton, «Ecology as Text, Text as Ecology», link.

## «*Speculative Geology*<sup>3</sup> and *Somatic Fantasy*<sup>4</sup>»

SILVIA NORONHA & CARRIE MCILWAIN

Silvia & Carrie guide our imagination through a devastated mine in Brazil and urban construction sites populated by corroded metals, seashells, wires, colourful plastic, sand, gravel, twigs and caterpillars; then back to a forest near Berlin. They share a keen interest in the performativity of materials, viewing stones as potent symbols and as portals connecting deep time and distant futures.

Silvia performs alchemy at 1200 degrees Celsius, simulating stone formation through temperature and pressure; Carrie facilitates ritual work with participants, attuning to moments of magic that cannot be explained. At the crossing of *Speculative Geology* and *Somatic Fantasy* (SF), they ask what it means to be in a relationship with the non-human; a relationship based not on violence, consumption, and exploitation, and which even resists the definition of Nature as a form of violence in and of itself.

They write about each other's work, taking on the task of shifting perspectives for observer to the observed, opening a space for different frequencies of nature to emerge. Geological time travel from the witch's point of view: we follow them through a series of encounters with things and their agencies. A dried Poppy fruit peers at me from a pillow in front; I touch it with my eyes; it perches on the palm of my hand, and makes a shaking sound, like a whisper: «spread my seeds».

## «*Trees and Texts Witnessing*»

LIZ ROSENFELD & SANDRA MAN

From a coal mine in Lausitz to a cruising area in London, Liz & Sandra take us on an intuitive journey through contact zones and charged places, as comparable to sacred spaces. They contemplate the fragility of the landscape and recognize its queerness where the boundaries between the body and the environment dissolve.

Liz's multidimensional practice engages with an ecology of the flesh through different media, viewing the materiality of the work as an extension of the artist's body. Through obsessive drawing, they delve in explorations of unfulfillable holes and eroticism with the landscape, like craters in Iceland; exposing pockets of spaces where relationality between bodies and Nature is created, and places testify to human desires. The Fuck Tree (2017) is an informant of sorts, a witness to the undocumented history of a cruising site, and the epigenetic trauma that unfolds in it.

Sandra practices sensorial listening to landscapes, through which she portrays strange beauty and moments of softness. Her source of inspiration resides in specific landscapes where natural appearance and human intervention meet and become zones of contact between the intensely personal and the extremely general.

Her work becomes a genre of its own, where the medium of writing exposes an array of intimate encounters between the artist and the environment: the digestive system writes about (eating) fruit or the skin writes about being touched by the rocks. Her contemplative video work is a medium of witnessing the presence of the site, and of questioning the belonging of the human presence within it.

Sandra and Liz's artistic endeavours meet where the body is touched and charged by the landscape, where exposing oneself becomes a way of charging places and environmental burn-out becomes traceable in the body.

<sup>3</sup> Term coined by Silvia to define her practice of reproducing the natural process of stone formation.

<sup>4</sup> The term is inspired by Donna Haraway use of the SF initials. For Carrie Somatic Fantasy is a practice of dwelling on a topic of interest for speculative utopias and to make it as complex as possible, in order to conjure its potential realisation.

## «*Gardens of Lost Knowledge*»

HARUN MORRISON & LUIZA PRADO DE O. MARTINS

Harun & Luiza's conversation is a crossbreed of herbal gardens and itinerant waterways, re-sensitizing places of Nature and memories of expunged localities.

Harun's writing beholds the curiosity of strangeness for a species of butterflies which is a fugitive from taxonomy, and whose unique defence mechanism is that of possessing the predators' minds and drawing them to confusion. His ongoing practice brings learning back into gardens, as sites of thought production, of seasonal work and acts of tending to Nature. Drawing a parallel between literature and gardens, he is building a database of fictional gardens, from which a host of questions arise concerning the many temporalities of knowledge production.

Luiza's work oscillates between fiction and autobiography. As an activist-artist and practitioner of herbal medicine, she deals variously with choice as well with loss; loss of choice, loss of cultural heritage, loss of local knowledge and recognition. Her accounts of green spaces and cultural institutions conjure multiple layers of history as well as questions of restitution. Her story about the fire that broke out in Rio de Janeiro's Museum of Natural History addresses the dislocation of ceremonial objects from indigenous cultures to artefacts of colonization. Objects that got lost in a limbo, until they are turned into ashes.

## INTERLUDE

*As my eyelids sink  
the lake emerges.  
Vast, ancient crater  
filled with rainfalls, relicts  
and childhood reminiscence.*

*The volcano is extinct  
placid, tamed along the shores.  
Witness of my play, my swim,  
my first kiss.*

*The black sand ablaze,  
in the midsummer heat,  
burns my soles  
and puddles my tears.*

*A strange dance  
from shade to shade,  
lizards on the beach,  
wetted by the gentle waves.*

## «Theatre as Landscape and Ghost Forests»

ANTONIA BAEHR & SERGIU MATIS

From the idyllic plateaus of ancient Greece to the cemetery of extinct animals in China, Antonia & Sergiu host us in a safari of extinct species whose stories are divulged by the zoomorphic figures of the Faun and the animal drag king. Through the art of queering, drag(ing) and interspecies(ing) theatre, they ask: which of the many faces of nature shall we face today?

Antonia's solo piece «Abecedarium Bestiarium» inhaled its first breath in the conserved air of the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle de Paris, where a reconstructed Dodo stared at the artist through the gaze of failed conservation. Antonia then invited friends to co-author the piece as a portrait of friendship based on the metaphor of extinct species. Absence and extinction thus go hand on hand and continue to expand since the work was first performed in 2013.

Sergiu follows the itinerant figure of the shepherd who celebrates the beauty of the landscape in the Greek pastoral tradition. Here, the song is intended for an urban audience. Antiquity blends with contemporary culture and scientific notions, giving rise to a new form of folklore that portrays the timeless relationship between humans and Nature from a Western perspective. Like in traditional forms of folklore dances and songs, Sergiu's performers invoke the animal kingdom by imitating its sounds, creating a ghostly soundscape of disappearing forests and lamenting species on the brink of extinction and those long gone.

In Antonia and Sergiu's theatre of absence, landscapes are animated – and haunted – by stories that attempt to conserve at least the memories of the absentees.

## «The Solace and Language of Nature»

JEFTA VAN DINTHER & MYRIAM VAN IMSCHOOT

Jefta & Myriam meet on the border between domesticated and wild Nature, the city and the countryside. Their conversation crosses a suburb, an archipelago, a trope, a biotope, to ask themselves how different beings coexist and can be heard.

In his theatrical pieces, Jefta faces the urgency of staging and outing Nature through the force of moving bodies, as for example a pregnant woman running with her unborn child, at the end of his work «On Earth we are done, Mountains».

Jefta reflects on how the concepts of Nature and culture have come to form a continuum, in the arts; yet individually he tends to experience Nature as something completely separated from urban life; a place of solace, health, and formidable forces. Foraging for mushrooms, fishing, or jumping off a pier into a cold lake is homecoming for some and completely foreign for others.

Myriam does not share the literacy for expeditions like her fellow field-recorders. As sound artist she seeks the sounds of the natural world that pervade her own domestic realm. She has developed practices of sustained presence, wherever she dwells, insists, persists, without moving or traversing. In her performances, installations, and scores she creates insect choirs, sang by humans, who learn stridulation from crickets and grasshoppers. In her careful construction of language, she moves from content-, to contact-oriented understanding of language. In their common interest with voice, they acknowledge that either human or non-human we are all voicing, squealing and squeaking in order to be heard.

## «Gardens of Renewed Interdependencies»

ALM GNISTA & JARED GRADINGER

On two screens at studio 4, a digital conversation takes place between Alm and Jared; the one is in a hut in Finland and the other in a garden in Berlin. The time is early autumn, the dogwood is turing brittle and the smell of decay announces coming transformation; the two ponder the question, what Nature means to them and how it informs their practices? Jared speaks from «The Impossible Forest,» which he has co-created with Nature since 2007; a garden and open-air classroom, that has been trans-mutating ever since then in the middle of the yard on the Uferstudios campus. For him, Nature is a giant consciousness that makes up our reality, it is form, order, and organization, seen and unseen, in everything we perceive. Essentially, these are also the notions that dance and choreography deal with.

The processes of constructing gardens are a type of training for making artistic work; he cocreates gardens, whether botanical or choreographic, that are always rooted in an intention, like «The Impossible Forest» was devoted to the non-humans and intended as a classroom for himself and his community.

In his direct relationship with the non-human, Jared tries to escape taxonomies; rather than identifying by differentiating and separating, he seeks inclusion and honors interdependency. How can one stand behind such an intention when presenting gardens as art?

Jared & Alm share a similar inclination in their artistic practices, a penchant for non-separation between work, art, and life. Family relationships are fused with landscaping, the home erupts into the studio and vice versa. They both seem to explore avenues of habitual work that are necessary to stay in tune with Nature.

From a little hut he built in Finland, Alm speaks about how space communicates, fills or empties itself, to become a meeting place for artists and activists. He engages with the natural world in a deeply ecological sense, whether by building a hut, digging a hole in the backyard, playing with his children, or attending a jazz music festival.

At the core of his relation to Nature lies the question: how do we, as organisms embedded in the environment, interact with Nature in every aspect of our life: our profession, our family, our activism?

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Many of the questions proposed by the artists in conversation, as well as the images from the film «Daughter of the Dust»<sup>5</sup> have been inhabiting my thought since. The atmosphere of the space, as a site of openness, generosity, and exchange resides in my emotional memory, which is what often stays with me after meaningful encounters with landscapes. Not an image nor a story, but a feeling for the place, a place of facing Nature and the nature of things; a sense of self-discovery through this very encounter.

Every encounter is essentially metabolic; we eat and we digest, we are eaten and digested. We transform and become transformed.

«Facing Nature» was warmly accompanied by the Indian-Ethiopian fusion food, made by Nkitinkiti Berlin, which reminded me that gathering around Nature also has its roots in gathering around food, not only for sustenance but also as a means of creating community and sharing a sense of gratitude and belonging. Belonging to Nature is a feeling of deep bodily entanglement – flesh and gut and world. In fact, facing Nature is, for me, ultimately about facing ourselves as an integral, and equal, part of a larger ecosystem.

<sup>5</sup> «Daughter of the Dust» 1991 film by Julie Dash, screened during the event.

# «Attempts on Facing Nature»

MICHA TSOULOUKIDSE

## PART I: EXCITEMENT

«In the depths of matter  
there grows an obscure vegetation;  
black flowers bloom in matter's darkness.  
They already possess a velvety touch,  
a formula for perfume.»<sup>1</sup>

During the penultimate conversation of the event, between artist and writer Harun Morrison and artist Luiza Prado de O. Martins, I suddenly became overwhelmed with excitement. They asked us, the listeners, who were spread through Studio 5 of Uferstudios Berlin-Wedding on beanbags, cushions, and chairs, to try to recall our first encounter with the sea, and then briefly share it with everyone. It was a plain proposal, but the outcome was multilayered — like *Facing Nature* itself, a three-day symposium curated by multimedia artist Sandra Man and curator and dramaturg Felicitas Zeeden, whose main purpose was to invite artists in 1:1 conversations about the role nature plays in their artistic practice. As people in the audience started sharing their stories, I found myself slowly drifting away until I was fully immersed in old but vivid memories of my encounters with nature — at least that's what I initially thought.

### MEMORIES: A TREE

I remember a golden autumnal afternoon in what must have been late 2008. Having recently received my driver's license, I secretly borrowed my parents' car and took M. and L. out for a drive. It was the time before smartphones and we had no idea where we were going. I'm not sure if I have ever done that again: Getting in a car and driving for hours without having a plan where to go. It was my last year of high school and I knew already that I would be spending the following year on another continent. M. was a mysterious person whom I had just met and had a huge crush on; with L. I was openly but unhappily in love, on and off since I was 12. As I write this I'm wondering if that was the moment in which my sense of personal freedom peaked. We pulled off at a random highway exit and landed in the middle of nowhere, or so it felt. Apart from a few scattered wind turbines, we were surrounded only by pastures and trees. I cannot recall any specific conversation we had that day. L. was my ex's best friend, and M. lived with L., so it's not unlikely that, in opposition to my current memories which are colored with excitement, the trip back then was actually drenched in awkwardness. I remember that at some point, L. and I climbed a tree together, and M. was cheering us from below. I have also completely forgotten how we got home.

### BARKS

The talk between Luiza and Harun was exciting: They had an amazing conversational flow, next to quite some moments of audience engagement. Luiza and Harun touched on a range of things, from the unpredictable nature of a garden, governed by the logic of seasons rather than by anyone's will or expectation (and whether this can also serve as a model for the arts), to the differences between plant and human temporalities, as well as the differences

<sup>1</sup> Bachelard, Gaston: *Water and Dreams. An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, translated from the French by Edith R. Farrell, Dallas (The Pegasus Foundation) 1983, p.1.

between artist's and activist's temporalities. Their talk approached the topic of nature in maybe the most critical way — but interestingly, it was also the talk that touched on nature in the most specific, material way. During the Q&A, Luiza delivered an impassioned monologue about the superficiality of decolonial discourses in institutions where she has been teaching. Suddenly, a loud bark filled the room, followed by a wave of laughter in the audience. I have to think of a similar moment: «Woof,» too, barks a dog in the audience near the end of a lecture by Jack Halberstam<sup>2</sup>, where the author discusses the state of being stuck in capitalism's everyday life, and it makes me wonder whether our canine companions are becoming more responsive toward discourses of dismantling.

## PART II: EXTRACTION

### ANIMALS

Active since the 1990s, Antonia Baehr has cemented herself as a pioneer in the Berlin queer performance scene. Baehr's oeuvre is teeming with animals: a cat («Cat Calendar»), a dog («My Dog is My Piano»), a dead owl («Music for dead Animals»), two chimpanzees («Consul and Meshie») as well as an impressive gallery of extinct species such as the Dodo, the Tasmanian tiger and the Steller's sea cow («Abecedarium Bestiarium»). Towards the end of a conversation between her and choreographer Sergiu Matis, the latter asks: «Antonia, how much are you interested in actual animals — or are they more metaphors, vehicles for you?» I don't remember her exact answer, only that she made the audience laugh, but the question stuck with me for the rest of the symposium. Independent from Antonia (who seems to be interested both in actual animals and animals as metaphors) — what difference does it make how an artist approaches a so-called natural phenomenon, topic, or entity? It would be hasty to understand Sergiu's question morally as if it would be asking for a right or wrong way. Both ways can be potentially tricky: If animals are solely used as metaphors, it might imply that there is no interest in actual animals, which emits a subtle smell of appropriation. On the other hand, whenever animals are engaged in a performance, whenever they enter the stage, the question of exploitation arises. Artists can draw inspiration from animals by way of fables, costumes, and movements both in harmful and gentle ways. Seen in this light, Sergiu's question can also be interpreted ethically: Does an artist have a responsibility for the subject matter that they deal with in their performances? This, in turn, opens up the question of the distinction between the spheres of art and activism. I feel it hasn't become easier in recent years to give an unequivocal answer to those questions.

### OCTAVIA

We also learn that Sergiu has a cat who is named both after American science fiction writer Octavia E. Butler and the fact that she was born the eighth. Based on a traditional understanding of nature in opposition to culture, or the human, maybe people's most common relationship with nature in western societies is through pets. There are also plants, but they communicate in a much more subtle way, so it's harder to understand them. However, one could say that dogs, and especially cats are relatively simple in terms of care-taking, and for most people very rewarding. But what is actually at the core of the interspecies relationship between humans and pets? Donna Haraway's recent work has been increasingly characterized by the inherent ambivalences of the subject of domestication of pets: «A partisan in the world of dog evolutionary stories, I look for ways of getting coevolution and co-constitution without stripping the story of its brutalities as well as multiform beauties.»<sup>3</sup>

Other scholars of animal studies like Jack Halberstam, however, are less interested in the ambivalences of the topic — for him, the idea of the co-evolution of species is rather a romantic phantasy. Animals and humans don't co-evolve — the former are being trained and owned by the latter.<sup>4</sup> In other words, pets might just be on the same trajectory of the capitalist exploitation of nature through humans, and maybe we love them so much because we could train them to tell us that what we want is what they

<sup>2</sup> See «Jack Halberstam Wild Things: An Aesthetics of Bewilderment,» 2020, online at <https://youtu.be/la5CmrzTqw4?t=4468>.

<sup>3</sup> Haraway, Donna: *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Chicago (Prickly Paradigm Press) 2003, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Halberstam, Jack: «Animals Wild and Tame,» in: id., *Wild Things. the disorder of desire*, Durham (Duke University Press) 2020, p.115 – 124.



want, too. This leads to the general question: When humans take care of plants, animals, and the earth — what do they take care of? Do they primarily take care of living beings, or do they rather ensure that the value that can be extracted from them is secured for the people?<sup>5</sup> And what does one answer or another change?

MEMORIES: A LANDSCAPE OF SOLAR PANELS

A few years later, I went looking for that place again. Retracing an accidental route that has been taken years earlier turned out to be a difficult feat, as I was unable to recall the names of neighboring villages or streets. How often do we allow ourselves to get lost these days, how often do we have to rely on our sensorial memory for orientation, let alone on vague memories about places we’ve visited long ago? I suspect my memory was vague not only because of the time that elapsed and the nature of memory in general, but because a part of me wished to protect it — to protect a part of my old self that was left there, unspoiled. Maybe that’s why I kept the place secret from everyone, especially myself. Did I betray myself when I decided to go search for a place I hid away? Or was I simply wishing to get lost, craving the feeling of bewilderment?<sup>6</sup> After a while of driving around, I was finally able to find it. But only then did I find out that my magical place was just a small island, fully surrounded by a sea of highways and railroad tracks. Amidst the wind turbines, a huge field of solar panels had emerged where before there had been a wasteland. My impression of a utopian encounter with nature remained intact, however, despite all the surplus that the sun and wind generated during my contemplative walks.

PART III: AMBIVALENCES

«Don’t bird in a hoodie. Ever.»<sup>7</sup>

LANDSCAPES

One trope was regularly being floated around throughout the symposium: *Facing Nature* as a landscape of words; landscape as a dramaturgical construct or model; the symposium as a landscape of bodies; scenography as landscape and vice versa. A conceptual inflation of landscapes (what would that look like in terms of landscape)?

What is it about thinking (in) landscapes, about applying the notion of landscape to objects, practices, and abstract things, about tapping into or becoming a landscape in the process of forging one?<sup>8</sup> For Gertrude Stein, who is considered the originator of the idea of «landscape plays,» conceptualizing a performance as a landscape implies a fundamental shift in the structure of narration — departing from the traditional storytelling, abandoning the linear plot line for a «certain textual spacing out of imaginary situations, where relationships between the characters, actions and objects are first of all visual [...] [and where time stands] almost still and spread[s] synchronically over the textual space.»<sup>9</sup> In her text «Meandering together: New problems in landscape dramaturgy,» Ana Vujanović examines the change in meaning that landscape as an aesthetic category has undergone up to the present: While Stein was interested in landscape as a concept that «challenged [the] communicative dimension of language and its logic» as a way of dealing with the traumas of the world wars, a recent trend of the term rather refers to a «late capitalist world of hyper-production of signs [...] [and its omnipresence of] mass media, marketing and advertising.»<sup>10</sup> In doing so, she explores the different, and often ambivalent, aspects of this aesthetic and dramaturgical category in the context of European dance and performance. The source of ambivalence that Vujanović grapples with has to do with what she identifies as the inspiration for «landscape dramaturgy,» namely slow cinema and post-internet art. Since the introduction of the internet and social media (particularly in the form of TikTok) into our lives, our cultural landscape has lost even more of its already not much remaining aesthetic innocence. Spacing out, meandering on the internet is usually not connected to experiential pleasure anymore, but rather leads to the total opposite — numbing. Similar

5 I am paraphrasing here from a private interview from 2021 I did with choreographer Karol Tyminski about his work «Water Sports» (2020).

6 I am taking that term from Halberstam, Jack: «A New Kind of Wildness: The Rite of Spring and an Indigenous Aesthetics of Bewilderment,» in: Ibid., p. 66ff.

7 Rule 3 from the manual «9 Rules for the Black Birdwatcher,» 2013, online at <https://orionmagazine.org/article/9-rules-for-the-black-bird-watcher/>.

8 It seems that (becoming) landscape is also a reoccurring topic in a certain strain of feminist literature of the last 30 years. See Wilk, Elvia: «Toward a Theory of the New Weird,» 2019, online at <https://lithub.com/toward-a-theory-of-the-new-weird/>.

9 Vujanović, Ana: «Meandering together: New problems in landscape dramaturgy,» 2017, p. 1f.

10 Ibid., p. 2.

ambiguities can be found in the political dimension of landscapes: Sandra Man, whose artistic work deals with landscapes and precisely those ambivalences, indicates that also landscapes in nature should be approached skeptically due to their long history of political instrumentalization, most prominently during the «Third Reich».

While the conversations were carried out in an easygoing manner, freed from the pressure to constantly deliver hot takes or maneuver the conversation straight on from one plot to the next, I find myself amidst a landscape strewn with people and objects in a liminal position — between sitting and laying, between focused attention and drifting. Being a landscape of people can mean both being scattered into a multiplicity of individuals or feeling part of a larger, common entity. I like both states, and I like that *Facing Nature* was able to nourish both of those needs.

COMPLICATIONS

As much as I loved the coziness (how often does it happen that you participate in a three-day symposium with lots of input and end up summarizing the entire experience as cozy?), I wonder whether the feeling of coziness is not at odds with an event where people come together under the heading of *Facing Nature*: «Nature has a psychotic aspect. It’s no joke. There’s the chance to really lose yourself,» remarked choreographer Jefta van Dinther in dialog with the artist Myriam Van Imschoot. It was one of the few notes that pointed toward another dimension of nature — one that doesn’t picture it as a refuge, a site of inspiration, or feeling whole. On the contrary, Jefta’s report of nature rather focuses on feelings of distress, threat, or even fear of death. It implies that facing nature is not something to be taken lightly. To start with, we must admit that nature is by no means simply a given. The very concept of it poses a theoretical and ethical problem, as can be attested to by all those who have been historically— and still are — marginalized on the basis of «unnatural» identities and desires. To those, against whom nature has been weaponized on the basis of certain traits, behaviors, inclinations, or preferences, facing nature must mean something entirely different — something complicated, or even dangerous. Hence Paul B. Preciado’s proposition to create not «a new nature but rather the end of nature as an order that legitimizes the subjection of some bodies to others.»<sup>11</sup> Admittedly, also the experiences of nature differ significantly from one context or region of the world to another: Climate change, partly also a heritage of colonialism, is an inherently racialized phenomenon. Countries in the global south, and therefore mostly BIPOC suffer the overwhelming amount of the consequences of actions carried out by others in other parts of the globe. Seen from that perspective, nature can be threatening, hostile, even vindictive, or is simply not available anymore because it has been destroyed or taken away.

In 2020, we’ve all witnessed a Black man named Christian Cooper being harassed by a *white* woman who threatened to call the police on him. He was birdwatching in Central Park, New York, where the woman happened to walk her dog. «I want to go, to just sit and soak it up, but I can’t because I am afraid of the unknown — not of nature’s unknown, but of the unknown of what humans [might do to me],»<sup>12</sup> said another Black birdwatcher in the wake to this incident. Events like this show clearly how nature is only innocent to some, and how many find themselves unable to enjoy it as a site of contemplation or a retreat. Facing nature from these angles could have led to less coziness, but isn’t that usually what happens when we face something?

PART IV: EXTINCTION

«But, as I discovered, it turns out that extinction is not the end. [...] What comes after extinction? I’m still here in this body.»<sup>13</sup>

11 Preciado, Paul B.: *Countersexual Manifesto*, translated from the French by Kevin Gerry Dunn, New York (Columbia University Press) 2018, p. 20.

12 See «Being black while in nature: You’re an endangered species,» 2020, online at <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/may/31/being-black-while-in-nature-youre-an-endangered-species>. The article also mentions that «African Americans make up just 7% of pass-holders at national parks, while white people make up 78%».

13 Wilk, Elvia: «Extinction Burst,» in: id., *Death by Landscape*, New York (Soft Skull Press) 2022, p. 187 + 191.



## MEMORIES: A PRISON

Once the pandemic hit, my secret place acquired a sad relevance. Like many, I lost people forever and was desperately in need of places and rituals to mourn. It was a visceral decision, almost a survival instinct to come back to a place with which I had built up a very intimate, exclusive relationship over the years. Again, it had changed drastically: next to the field of solar panels which had grown enormously over the years, a prison had been constructed. As I am writing this, I discovered that it is Germany's most recently built prison. Still, my small island was spacious enough to accommodate my need for a private memorial site. The spirit of that day when I had climbed the tree still resided there. I went there at different times, day and night, built fires, and brought all sorts of objects, hoping for encounters with the deceased. It took me a while to understand that perhaps such encounters cannot be forced at will but rather happen in quotidian situations when you least expect it, if you allow and are willing to embrace them. My persistent search for the other(s) had only ever led me back to my searching self.

## FEELINGS

Sergiu Matis' «Extinction Room» is an audio-performative installation that immerses the audience in the chants and stories of both extinct and endangered bird species.<sup>14</sup> Throughout two hours, the performers recite an impressively extensive Wikipedia-like text<sup>15</sup>, visibly haunted by the threat of forgetting parts of it. Both Sergiu and Antonia have created pieces about extinct animals. In their conversation, the latter suggests attempting to describe «Extinction Room,» which she has watched more than two years ago. Antonia announces it as a demonstration of how bad her memory is — «how the piece got extinct in my memory» — but it then turns out to be evidence of how many impressions have actually survived.

Next to the recurring motif of landscape, the theme of extinction was also brought up frequently, leaving me with a similar, slightly uneasy feeling. Over the course of the symposium, several concrete examples of extinction were mentioned, including the «World Extinct Wildlife Cemetery» in Nanhaizi Milu Park, Beijing, established in 1999 to commemorate extinct or endangered animals. The tombstones for every extinct species, arranged like dominos, illustrate how the extinction of one species may endanger several other related species. Then the fire of the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro in 2018 is brought up, in which more than 90% of its archive of 20 million items was irreparably destroyed. Many said that this happened due to insufficient state funding, which resulted in very poor maintenance. The incident was described as «a lobotomy of the Brazilian memory»<sup>16</sup> by Marina Silva, a former environment minister of the country.

In one of the conversations between Myriam and Jefta, both say that their artistic connection to the topic of nature happened rather late. «I got closer to it when I realized a certain sadness regarding that term,» says Myriam and quotes a passage from Walter Benjamin, in which he points out that once you notice a feeling of sorrow attached to a word, it means that the subject it indicates will soon disappear. Since then, I have been unsuccessfully looking for this in Benjamin's writings, and I like the idea that it has disappeared or gone extinct. More than sadness though, I always feel a slight discomfort being in those recurring situations: Talking about climate grief, extinction, and the end of the world as if it would literally end — and as if we western Europeans were the first to experience climate change. Global warming with all its frightening side effects has also become a reality in Europe, but in other parts of the world, namely the ones that had been colonized, extinction happened long ago. For the colonized, specifically for Black and Indigenous people, extinction is a reality they have lived with for centuries. Shouldn't rather that be the starting point for every conversation about that topic — without dismissing the validity of everyone's grief?

<sup>14</sup> See the digital album of the piece, «Extinction Stories,» online at <https://extinctionroom.bandcamp.com/album/extinction-stories>.

<sup>15</sup> To get an idea of the sheer amount of text, you can get an overview at <https://pact-zollverein.de/sergiu-matis-extinction-room-hopeless> (in German).

<sup>16</sup> See «Brazil museum fire: incalculable loss as 200-year-old Rio institution gutted,» 2018, online at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/03/fire-engulfs-brazil-national-museum-rio>.

## PART V: EXCITEMENT, AGAIN

«If winds, currents, glaciers, volcanoes etc., carry subtle messages that are so difficult to read that it takes us absolutely ages trying to decipher them, wouldn't it be appropriate to call them intelligent? [...] How would it be if it turned out that we were only the slowest and least intelligent beings in the world?»<sup>17</sup>

What are the holes in your landscapes?» asks visual and performance artist Liz Rosenfeld Sandra towards the end of their second conversation. After talking about darkrooms, anuses, waterfalls, and pores, it turns out that Liz is interested in the «leakiness» of Sandra's work — leakiness as a site of excitement. As I conclude this text, I would like to ask the same question with respect to *Facing Nature* and, more broadly, in dealing with the topic of nature in performance art: Where are the holes, where does it get exciting?

At some point halfway through the symposium, some artists state regretting that they are not activists, or that art can't change the world as activism can. I hear that very often lately, even though I wonder if it is really about wanting to be an activist, or rather making clear that one has understood the crucial importance of long-term, sustainable organizing. But isn't the frequently occurring inferiority complex of art misplaced in this case? Activism can certainly do more in terms of protecting nature. But at the same time, doesn't activism, more often than not, reproduce the same division between humans and nature that is at the very core of our environmental disaster — whereas art, more often than not, has the potential to change our entire relationship with nature?

Understandably, since *Facing Nature* was not an academic event, there was no genuine discussion during the symposium about the history of the concept of nature, or what we actually mean by that term. For various reasons, it might still be interesting to touch on those topics — not least because art has proven that it can be quite influential in this regard. Tobias Rees, a philosopher and neurobiologist, studies nature as a concept that has undergone many transmutations in the history of western thought. According to Rees, throughout most of European history, nature was understood as a part of the human. Only since the 17<sup>th</sup> century and René Descartes, nature and the human have become categorically separated. This can be exemplified in the history of landscape painting, which eventually culminated in the works of the Romantic era, most prominently the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. The reason that landscape painting as we know it today emerged relatively late as an art form is because «for most of human history, humans were too close to nature to actually recognize it as a separate field.»<sup>18</sup> This raises a question: Is the kind of art that is explicitly about nature, as a genre that emerged rather recently in the late 17th century, just another expression of the violent relationship between humans and nature, which in the end also enables exhaustive cultivation and species extermination?

At the end of the symposium, one thing seems clear to me: the field where performance art and nature meet is covered with holes. But what is nature these days but a bottomless abyss? Perhaps this is one meaning that *Facing Nature* could have: a meticulous investigation of this condition of leakiness. If we can't avoid plunging into these holes, we should find enthusiasm being in there. This is precisely what happened during these days, and it leaves me excited — maybe not so much with the youthful excitement of experiencing nature by climbing high in a tree, but rather with the grown-up excitement of believing that performance art can dismantle the prison of our deeply toxic relationship with nature.

<sup>17</sup> Serres, Michel: *Angels: A Modern Myth*, translated from the French by Francis Cowper, Paris (Flammarion) 1995, p. 30f.

<sup>18</sup> See «Tobias Rees «Notes on Nature (Thinking the Human in Terms of the Non-Human),»» 2020, online at [https://youtu.be/\\_AeXDunnvIw?t=1680](https://youtu.be/_AeXDunnvIw?t=1680).

# «Facing Connections»

JENNY MAHLA

We can't just talk about nature and pretend it's an uncharged neutral ground. We as humans have been subjugating nature and other humans from the beginning of time and there comes a responsibility of awareness along with the appreciation of nature and its offsprings.

In terms of sensitivity and respect towards the land we use, there is a concept called «The Honorable Harvest». Harun Morrison and Luiza Prado de O. Martins were mentioning it in their talk, and I found the following thoughts by Robin Wall Kimmerer in the book «Braiding Sweetgrass» very suitable:

«Collectively, the indigenous canon of principles and practices that govern the exchange of life for life is known as the Honorable Harvest [...] The guidelines for the Honorable Harvest are not written down, or even consistently spoken of as a whole—they are reinforced in small acts of daily life. But if you were to list them, they might look something like this:

*Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them.*

*Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life.*

*Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer.*

*Never take the first. Never take the last.*

*Take only what you need. Take only that which is given.*

*Never take more than half. Leave some for others.*

*Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.*

*Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken.*

*Share.*

*Give thanks for what you have been given.*

*Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.*

*Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever.»<sup>1</sup>*

A piece of wire, a stone, a sheet of paper, twigs, chunks of clay and pieces of rusted metal; these more or less random, ordinary objects were deliberately collected and placed carefully on pillows between us in the audience during the talk of Silvia Noronha and Carrie McLwain. They have created this environment and asked us to relate to them simply by choosing a place to sit. It served as a first invitation to familiarize ourselves with the materials that populate our living environments.

It's about staying sensitive to what calls and attracts you, Silvia noted and proposed that, after the talk was over, each of us would go ahead and choose one of the displayed objects and simply look at it attentively; to exercise a kind of openness and try to observe ourselves in the process. In this second invitation, Silvia encouraged us to begin by simply looking at the object, and then ask it for consent to be touched before exercising our will and lifting it with our hands; allowing the non-human to fully resonate.

<sup>1</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013); the excerpt on «The Honorable Harvest» was reprinted in *Love + Regeneration*, Volume 2, Issue 3 (Nov. 2019)

The conversation itself revolved around one central question: Can, and if so, how can we relate to non-human entities and forge relationships with them that are not based on consumption, exploitation, or violence?

Carrie shared one of their attempts where she collected deadwood from Tegeler Forst, worked with it in the dance studio for her performance, and then returned it to the forest. This considerate usage of nature's resources for a certain amount of time is an approach worth exploring further.

In the current climate crisis, time has become a critical resource, and we must ask ourselves how much longer we can continue to live and use nature in this way. Like borrowing a book from a public library, can we, through similar practices, condition ourselves to be more respectful of the things around us, more aware of their belonging there rather than take, use indefinitely, consume, and never return to their proper place?

Earth Overshoot Day, which was marked on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022 symbolizes the moment when «humanity has exhausted nature's budget for the year. For the rest of the year, we are maintaining our ecological deficit by drawing down local resource stocks and accumulating carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. We are operating in overshoot.»<sup>2</sup>

## FACING THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

Luiza Prado de O. Martins and Harun Morrison's dialogue, amongst many other things, tackled the convoluted aspects of restitution, and of coming to terms with the historical injustice. When the Kew Gardens in London set out to correct an historical injustice by decolonizing their collection which included items that once belonged to an indigenous group in the Brazilian amazon rainforest, they were met with refusal on the part of the descendants of the extinct tribe. The reason, as Luiza explained, was that the objects in the museum's possession were supposed to be burnt once the original possessor has perished, rather than be preserved; it would be disrespectful toward their ancestors, in other words, to accept the items back on their behalf. The belated attempt at restitution was thwarted by the fact that correcting one injustice in the name of dealing with the legacy of colonialism effectively meant creating another injustice; the museum's decision to let go of the stolen objects and return them to their rightful owners went precisely against the purpose intended for the objects in the first place – to be let go of with the death of the rightful owner. Kew Gardens were able to convince some of the descendants to come to London and perform a ritual with the stolen objects; however a portion of unclaimed objects remains in their possession.

Decolonization is surely a complex issue, as many such anecdotal examples illustrate time and again. But the incident itself highlights more than just Europe's limited ability to face its past, let alone to make a mend with the victims of its bloody exploits; as one person from the audience suggested in response to Luiza's story, it also highlights the possessive character of the human species by and large, particularly in the context of the western world. We have been subjugating nature and other humans for millennia, and certainly we will as a species have to reach a point of reckoning and take responsibility for a history of dispossession and violent exploitation. But can we, really? And in the process of trying, can we avoid the risk of rehashing old, and sinister, tropes of romantic fascination and glorification of the indigenous other, as did our ancestors in the name of colonization?

As my mind was filled with dread, Harun Morrison veered the conversation back to the heart of the matter. First, let come to terms with our own capitalistic industrial complex and the insatiable hunger for goods which it constantly feeds. Starting with gift shops for tourists and illustrious collections of authentic memorabilia for the pleasure of museum visitors. Let us start with the Humboldt Forum in Berlin. Let us start by being more aware of the dynamic interplay of geopolitical and economic factors that fuels the engine of unchecked progress and all the injustices that come along with it.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/earth-overshoot-day/#:~:text=Earth%20Overshoot%20Day%20marks%20the,We%20are%20operating%20in%20overshoot.30.12.2022>

# «*listening to the world and looking at things*»

CARRIE MCILWAIN

16.09.22

EXERCISE LISTENING TO THE WORLD  
MEETING IN A FOREST IN NEUKÖLLN

A sound just to my right side draws my attention like an itch to be scratched. A tree stripping, dropping one leaf or scrap of bark at a time. The sound is inconsistent and does not correlate with the movements of wind. Almost as footsteps but not – was there a crack? Is this the cracking of the tree, splitting and falling – maybe close to us? The human world of ambulances, planes, and traffic competes in a dialogue with the wave like calls and crashes of the air through the trees. Is there a harmony between the waves of leaves and the wails of sirens?

We listen and call to one another. We do not know silence. We rasp and shake, staccato dropping twigs and sticks. we groan and croak, we make do with what we have and still, we sing, lament or cry out. We yell at a whisper level. We buzz. We reach past, through and inside to resonant spaces. We are immanent. We drone and forget the start of our phrase.

11.10.22

EXERCISE LOOKING AT THINGS  
MEETING ON SILVIA'S ROOFTOP

## FROM FAR AWAY

It looks like the cousin of a brick, unique in its shininess and blue accents. I believe it belongs here in this setting. The bricks of the chimney below are so smooth and it is so rugged. Does it call to me? Would I like to get closer? If I see past the object it almost blurs into the environment no longer separate.

## FROM VERY CLOSE

Hypnotized by the intricacies of the texture. Something woven and the ends like little frills, flagella tentacles. Something oozing expanding outward. Something soft emerging from a stone, as if bleeding at a speed slower than I can perceive. Physically being on the same plane as the object makes me feel silly, because there is a group of workers on the next roof – who can observe me observing the thing. This looking and not knowing what the other is doing – vulnerability.

## WITH EYES CLOSED

I remember the red being much more vibrant. There is a crack I did not remember – it emerges from the one mark that looks very intentional – evidence of a human hand that cut into the material when it was soft. The shininess of

a black melted patch and the texture of the blue raised up. The underside more colorful that I could have imagined all of a desert landscape compressed in one palm.

## OTHER SENSES

Slowly turning the object while squinting my eyes – to make a show of its glittery personality. Smells like Sulphur and has a hollow sound, fingers tapping a porous hull. It tastes like... cold, metallic, slightly sweet.

## PERFORMING FOR

With this rock creature sandwiched between my palms, I turn slowly on one spot to show it the panorama view from the roof. I see the city past this object, while seeing this object between my hands.

# «*Notes on Facing Nature*»

SILVIA NORONHA

GENERAL QUESTIONS    *What is nature?*

*How to have a relationship with the non-human which is not based on violence, consumption and exploitation?*

QUESTIONS

FROM CARRIE  
TO SILVIA

*1. How can we open our sensitivity and perception to nature (multi-species interconnectedness)?*

To me, it seems rather dishonest to attempt something like radical openness or attunement before establishing a plane of equality across all species. There is not much we can learn if we don't abandon our fixed position at the head of the table, so to speak; be it the position of the researcher, or of the master of ceremony. Opening our sensitivity and perception to the more-than-human world becomes possible where all beings are viewed as equally significant. Shifting the focus from essentialism based on division and separation to what actually binds them together. Imagine a «safe-space» of sorts, where everything is relational, in communication with other things.

*2. What are strategies for acknowledging the agency of nature?*

A conversation with materials.

I exercise dialogue with matter and propose a collaborative way of working with and thinking about matter in a non-colonising way. I try as much as possible to conceive this in terms of emphatic

dialogue rather than in terms of forcing human will onto matter, however obscure this may sound. More specifically, I imagine platforms in which material agency manifests itself as a medium in dialogue. Therefore, it is not about mediating information or asserting absolute truths but merely an encounter. The non-human don't speak an immutable language that humans need to learn (nor should things learn our codes in order to tell us something). Insofar as communication can, and does, take place, it is mysterious; but it appears to be necessary to start to broaden reality and make ourselves relate to what we cannot fully identify.

3. Has there been a moment in your practice, when you felt or believed that a material revealed its agency to you?

Yes, this happens especially when I observe transformation in action; materials mixing at high temperatures, melting together and forming something new. As a kind of alchemist, I provoke the reactions, not create them. Matter reacts with other matter, or reacts to my provocation, by virtue of something inherent to it.

4. How do the elements of «risk» and «control» (or lack thereof) figure into your work?

The element of «uncontrol» is important to my working process, or better yet, important to the processes I work with. Particularly with respect to time, the passivity that's entailed in respecting time; acceptance of not-knowing where the materials lead me (and accepting that the path is not for me to determine).

I focus on maintaining open dialogue throughout the process, giving up the illusion of control (i.e., the plan, the will, etc.) so as not to risk losing the spirit of surprises and unexpected encounters that can always take place.

# «Afterscore: Defenses of Animals»

2022 – ongoing

HARUN MORRISON

*Defenses of Animals* is a publication from 1972, produced by the Horniman Museum in London and authored by the curatorial team (based on an earlier display from 1926). The original handbook is a guide to both an exhibition display as well as an independent publication. It concerns different capacities and strategies used by animals to defend themselves. The text below quotes different lines from the book as the basis of a score. In this re-reading and quoting of a natural science book, I look to extract a lyricism from the writing that occurs through it being displaced, which could function interpretively for a performer.

Harun Morrison

One of the most important factors in the defence of  
an animal, both against other animals and against the  
environment generally is the skin of the animal.  
while a wound is open  
surface protection, weapons, actions, colouration  
and mimicry.  
some animals have more than one method of  
defense  
there is only an arbitrary line between  
exoskeletons and armour  
have spines of some sort on the surface of their  
bodies  
can administer shocks whether defensively or in  
stunning prey  
powerful electric organs  
Poison Jaws, Poison Stings, Poison Fangs  
Many animals feign death when attacked and this  
is not a conscious action but automatic. Under this head  
the fainting of a human being under acute stress might be  
thought of as a defensive action.  
All these lizards after losing their tail regenerate  
another which takes quite a time to reach the size of the  
original.  
raises its wings in a threatening manner  
Inflating itself to about twice its normal size  
Complete immobility of an animal combined with  
its colour can hide it from a predator, even at close range.



The actions of the forelimbs is a sideways motion simultaneously scooping the soil from in front of it to the side, requiring considerable power.

within the influence of the sun  
many animals have sight that normally detects other animals by sensing movement rather than seeing their outline

Concealment by colour pattern, Concealment by Transparency, Concealment by rapid colour change, Concealment by seasonal colour change and Warning colours.

concealed by cryptic colours  
their transparency blends with the transparency of the water itself

The time taken to change from one colour to the other is very short.

there is no guarantee that what we see an animal sees and vice versa

Many animals, as we have seen, are coloured to merge in with the background, but others go one step further to resemble various parts of plants, such as thorns, leaves and stems, so becoming even more difficult for predators to detect.

resemblance to Inanimate Objects  
resemblance to Other Animals

If the deceptions are to work, there are other necessary factors

Thus the mimic gains, not only from the defenses of the model, but also by leaving a pool of animals that are regularly the victims of predators.

it is hardly possible to say which is the model and which is the mimic

A world with few animals except those we farm and eat is a barren prospect for the future.

# «The rock pool»

MYRIAM VAN IMSCHOOT

It wasn't as scary anymore as it had been at first. Curiosity had overcome the fear. But it remained as a thin line throughout. A sudden bout of panic could make the whole process stop.

Easy, stay calm, she hushed herself. As long as you have your tricks, you are going to be fine. Blinking her eyes with a quick no-no nod like in the cartoons she watched with the girl in the afternoon did not help anymore, but she found that the *fat blink*, as she called it, was also successful. She would squeeze the eyes firmly in a slit until her ears popped. What people do in air-planes to regulate the pressure in their ears, made her adult body slip back. It was a somewhat funny sight, to be pressing the eyes so hard, but not a living human soul was around to notice it. The fat blink always did the trick, she convinced herself; it always reversed things back to normal.

She was sitting on her favourite rock, the colourful one, covered with red, white, and blue speckles. Its flat top made it comfortable to sit for long stretches of time. Other rocks, with sharper edges that cut you skin if you are uncareful, formed a natural dam, behind which the sea roared at a safe distance. Occasionally a wave splashed over the dam, and sprayed millions of sun-darted droplets over the pool trembling in delight. She had to shade her eyes from the bright sun to be able to see what this morning would reveal to her.

Starfish and Shrimp Turtle were there. Turd Tube was playing hard to get as usual. There you are, she whispered to the tiny bubbles that sprang up from the mud. If not for Turd Tube, she wouldn't have come back to this place. She found out about him when she had absentmindedly stuck a stick in the shallow water. Something near a gaping hole moved and then she could not believe her eyes: a hose, open-ended on both sides, partly buried in the mud, was actually a living creature! In this «nothing-is-here place» she came to discover other creatures too: Scarf Eel, who hissed when she prodded under a pebble with her stick; Weed Stalk, full of pretense; and Water Flea, all bouncy and ready to reproduce into a legion.

Today, Baby Crabs were scurrying at the bottom like white skeletons really. Flash-Fish in translucent jackets, more hue than flesh, zigzagged in trios while the sappy mouths of Tail Toads nibbled at her heel. She let them feed off her dead skin unless they tickled her toes, in which case she shook them off. She always would regret such unthoughtful sudden reactions, though. Look now, the scenery had disappeared in a sand swirl! She shuffled backwards on her bum and pulled her feet back up from the underwater cloud, in which all life retracted behind a veil of murky, sulky silence.

Then it started. A tingle below her knees gave her that odd feeling she remembered from when the doctor hammered her knee and her foot would swing up as if pulled by an invisible string. She bent forward to take a closer look at where the electric buzz exactly was coming from, her breasts pressing against her thighs as she leaned forward to study her legs. She knew that next would come the tearing and cringing. As if something was pulling the hairs back into the follicles and further into the obliqueness of her body. That wasn't what scared her, to be honest. It was the double vision.

Double vision, as she had tried to explain to the little girl the other day, is when you see two images at the same time and you can't tell which one is the dominant reality. «What is reality,» the girl asked looking up from her color book filled with unicorns, a pink marker clasped in her hand. She

waited for an answer that did not come; some questions are simply like that. They hover. Nanny, is ‹dominant› like domino, please tell me, nanny, the little girl tried again in vain.

The memory of that begging look on the little girl’s face made her smile even more now. The eager to know, the urge to have one’s way, the expectation to solve all riddles, the sheer cascade of questions! No where was throbbing will so tangible as as on a child’s face. In this long summer of child-minding, she had never called such behaviour nagging for secretly she admired the power in children’s persistence.

A breeze blew her shirt up, but she did not mind that either. She lifted her gaze and followed a bundle of thin twigs as they rolled on the beach in pursuit of an invisible enemy. Gulls and terns were skimming the debris the sea had left behind. One large gull with a red dot on its beak stared at her sternly. She took a deep breath and let the air in. The iodine had a calming effect on her, now that the electric sensation was buzzing all over her lower body and a silhouette, at first imperceptible, was forming slowly but surely inside, hemmed in the larger contours of her body. It pulsated faintly in sync with the rhythm of her breath.

This is what waterlines do, she thought.They move with the tides and bit by bit they creep up and down the shore, dividing sea and land anew. Now the line is here, and now it’s there; here, there; here, there. Land and sea were just temporary identities before one would swallow the other; hard to say which was the dominant one.

The tingle was spreading further up the navel and higher. Wherever the sensation reached, her body dwindled to a smaller version of herself. Sometimes you could see past and present versions at once: the older body would faintly shimmer around the new form, that was appearing from within. She could not even begin to explain this to herself, she defended herself, as if talking to the little girl, because new versions became almost immediately containers for still newer forms to appear, like circles that ripple around the black hole in the water after a rock hit the surface— but then in *rewind*.

She rocked her bum left to right, as if cradling a pearl in a shell. It had never gone that far, she thought. When she noticed small feet dangling where her knees used to be, panic was surging at last.

But the sand in the pool had settled and the puddle life was visible again in all its bold features. Starfish waved at her with its nobly orange limbs. It was going to be fine, it told her, while her stomach was inverting into a tiny sack. Starfish had its own way of receding too. It ran so slowly you barely noticed how it crossed to the other side, stealthily. Her hands, still holding on to the rock, grasped the matter like clams. It’s going to be fine, she repeated to herself as her chest flattened, her breasts gone. A storm petrel cried ‹fine› from the sky before it plunged and speared a fish. Fine, fine, the seaweeds exclaimed and their pervasive smells entered her nostrils. It was too late to fat-blink with effort, even if she wanted. Her eye muscles narrowed around eyes not even the size of needle tops or grain, and her ears, her ears! They had become pockets of wind with song chiming.

Thus she shrank without feeling too cranky. Fine, her lips tooted from the tiniest mouth. Her heartbeats sped up, hardly audible, in minuscule chambers and valves. Fine, the last breath muttered before the brain stopped bothering. Mine, said the rock, speckled with red, blue, white, and a new yellow dot. Just a detail.

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## October 2022

### SCHEDULE

## Friday 21.10.22

18:00 – 18:30 WELCOME

«Conversations in Studio 5»

18:30 – 19:30 SILVIA NORONHA & CARRIE MCILWAIN

20:00 – 21:00 HARUN MORRISON  
& LUIZA PRADO DE O. MARTINS

21:30 – 22:30 LIZ ROSENFELD & SANDRA MAN

«Film Screening in Studio 4»

22:45 – 00:40 «Daughters of the Dust»  
JULIE DASH  
USA, 1991

## Saturday 22.10.22

«Conversations in Studio 5»

16:00 – 17:00 ANTONIA BAEHR & SERGIU MATIS

17:30 – 18:30 CARRIE MCILWAIN & SILVIA NORONHA

19:30 – 20:30 MYRIAM VAN IMSCHOOT  
& JEFTA VAN DINTHER

«Reading in Studio 4»

21:00 – 24:00 «The Left Hand of Darkness»  
READING BY LISA DENSEM,  
OIHANE ROACH & LITÓ WALKEY  
FROM URSULA K. LEGUIN'S NOVEL

## Sunday 23.10.22

«Conversations in Studio 5»

16:00 – 17:00 SANDRA MAN & LIZ ROSENFELD

17:30 – 18:30 SERGIU MATIS & ANTONIA BAEHR

19:30 – 20:30 LUIZA PRADO DE O. MARTINS  
& HARUN MORRISON

21:00 – 22:00 JEFTA VAN DINTHER  
& MYRIAM VAN IMSCHOOT

«Film Screening in Studio 4»

22:15 – 23:45 «Nostalgia de la luz»  
PATRICIO GUZMÁN  
CHILE, 2010

## February 2023

### SCHEDULE

## Saturday 11.02.23

18:00 – 18:30 FILM SCREENING  
«Historya ni Ha»  
LAV DIAZ  
PHILIPPINES, 2021

## Sunday 12.02.23

16:00 FILMSCREENING  
«Stalker»  
ANDREY TARKOVSKY  
UDSSR, 1979

19:00 DINNER AND RELEASE OF THE  
FACING NATURE – PUBLICATION

20:30 FILMSCREENING  
«El abrazo de la serpiente»  
CIRO GUERRA  
COLOMBIA, 2015