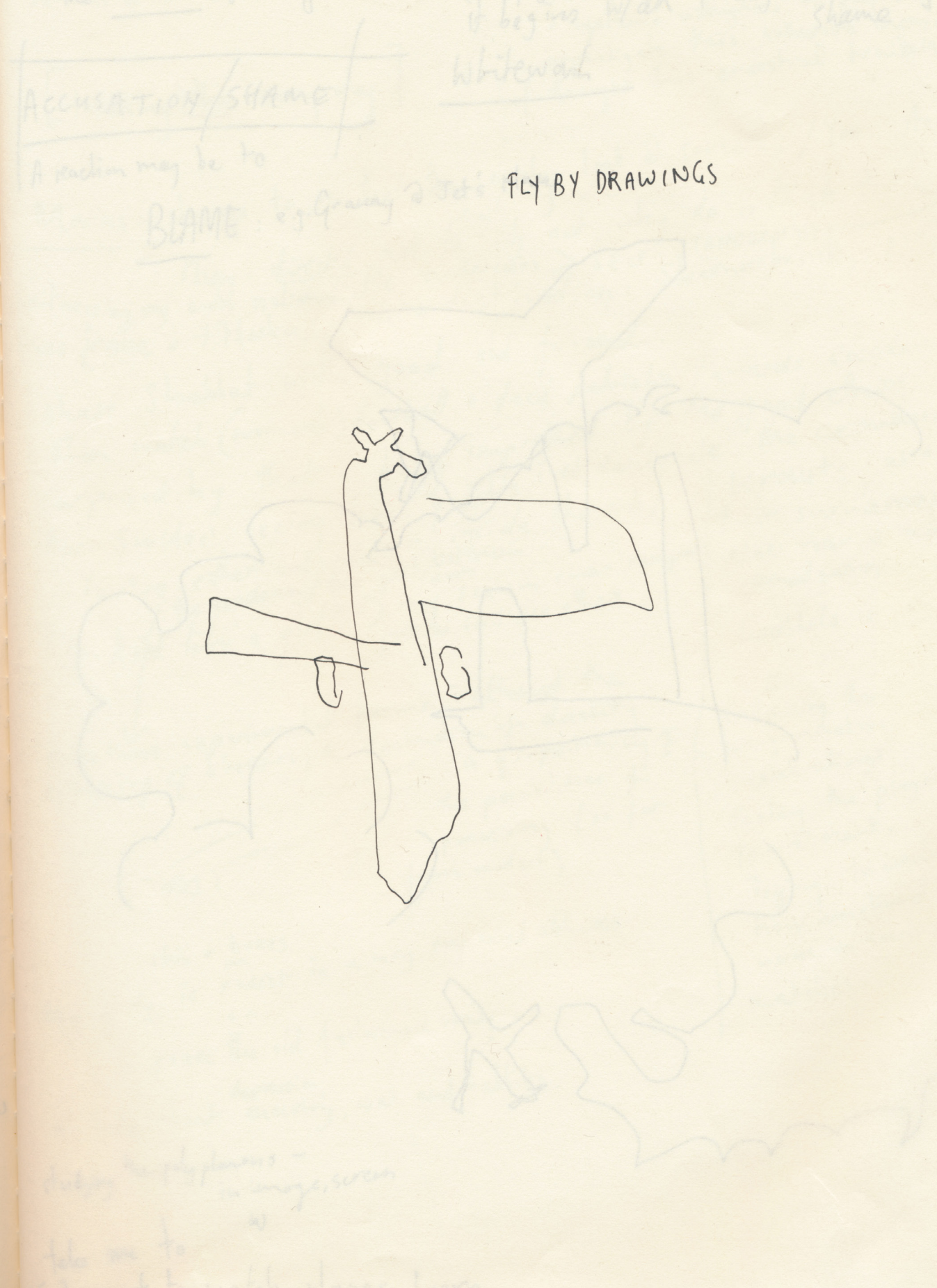


FRAGMENT  
**Nº 09**

# fruitful uselessness

*making boredom great again  
or how accurate is your listening?*

(this fragment is entangled with the film *Clown Alone* and the photographic essays *something strange happened in the studio*, and *doodles from the academy*, as well as with everything).





# fruitful uselessness

—  
Stacey Sacks

SQUIRM (the book)  
Fragment No. 9, fruitful uselessness  
Documented Artistic Research Project (Doctoral Thesis)  
Stacey Sacks  
Publication Series X Position, No. 8  
ISSN 2002-603X;8  
© Stacey Sacks  
Stockholm University of the Arts  
Department of Acting, Valhallavägen, 2019  
[www.uniarts.se](http://www.uniarts.se)  
Design: © Büro Comrie  
Copy-Editor: Jill Weintroub  
Printing: Typo, South Africa  
ISBN 978-91-88407-16-0

## Cover Images

Front - Still frame from stop-motion animation *a fleshy cartoon*.

Back - Notebook, August 2016

**‘Boredom is the dream  
bird that hatches the  
egg of experience.’**

WALTER BENJAMIN  
(1968, p.91)



*Work with what you have they said. Selfie, Stockholm, October 2018.*

This fragment could have been called ‘shadow ontologies and the potential deep psycho-social benefits of doodling’, but realise I’d need further research to make that neuro-beneficial claim. *Fruitful uselessness* is an allowing, an acquiescence – falling into or penetrating a state of being. It is a method for slowing down, a privilege I have been afforded by the research. Allowing utter immersion into the moment’s encounter, where forgetting oneself, a release of self-consciousness, is key to engagement. Can I play with something so I forget its name?

I’m always a clown in the studio, entering vulnerable zones of stupidity and openness, attempting to remain in a state of discovery, curiosity and exploration, listening as both a stretching towards and receiving from, a multi-directional penetration. *Fruitful uselessness* requires softness, and openness to contingency, to chance encounters having potential impacts – impressibility, porosity, listening, acquiescence. I draw on this notion of impressibility from Kyla Schuller who explores the plasticity of the body in *The Biopolitics of Feeling*, as well as the cultural and political implications of sensibility, the capacity to be transformed by one’s environment and experiences. Schuller (2018, p.6) writes:

... impressibility denotes the capacity of a substance to receive impressions from external objects that thereby change its characteristics. Impressibility signals the capacity of matter to be alive to movements made on it, to retain and incorporate changes rendered in its material over time.

Late in the research, upon the suggestion of my examiner – writer, curator and professor Adrian Heathfield – at the Final Seminar ‘ARS DIALOGUES: live at the Castle’ (October 2019), I encounter Kathleen Stewart’s book *Ordinary Affects*, which resonates with this fragment *fruitful uselessness* as a simple ‘argument for attention to the affective dimensions of everyday life and the potential that animates the ordinary’. On its website announcing the book, Duke University Press asserts that Stewart

refrains from positing an overarching system – whether it’s called globalisation or neoliberalism or capitalism – to describe the ways that economic, political, and social forces shape individual lives. Instead, she begins with the disparate, fragmented, and seemingly inconsequential experiences of everyday life to bring attention to the ordinary as an integral site of cultural politics.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing from Stewart’s ‘ordinary impacts’ this project perceives ordinariness as possessing impressibility beyond the mundane. By sensuously attuning my gaze to banal details of the every day, I have come to know myself in new ways. What lines, shapes and shadows am I drawn to, what focuses my interest, where does my eye stray, what does it settle on?

I believe a capacity to be lost, being in states of unknowing, could open or mediate an ability to encounter otherness. In an attempt to destabilise my regular theatre and performance practice, I’ve been remediating performance through multi-modal forms. Being disorientated has been an interestingly uncomfortable posture to assume for five years and, consciously nurturing a sense of comfort with the unfamiliar has evolved into a method for performer training I now call *impulsive studio* – embodied explorations of spontaneous making, listening, seeing and thinging, incorporating methods for attuning and training attentiveness to the minutiae of the everyday. *Impulsive studio* is about stimulating the senses and imagination in unconfrontational and undemanding ways, removing responsibility but for the being with that which presents itself.

My hope is that this research, by de-familiarising habits, patterns and routines could potentially develop a training for encountering uncertainty that could lead to delinking/decolonial thought. I call it a series of idio(t)-syncratic experiments attempting to uncover methods for rewiring imperial minds. This de/re-skilling is a conscious disorientation, trusting that instability and confusion are fertile grounds for generating new ways of perceiving and doing. Exploring these expanded performance realms in film, sculpture, animation or notebooks may lead to greater capacities to generate sensitivity and encounter difference, which may lead to twisting patriarchal, hetero-normative oppressive mentalities.

Then again, they may not.

The embodied material experiments of my project are engineered to help me lose my way as I search for methods to rewire my imperially-conditioned mind by gently placing myself in situations through which I explore methods of unknowing, disassembly and reassembly. It’s interesting to attempt this dismantling of the senses in an institution of academic knowledge production, but as theatre and performance theorist professor Karmenlara Ely, Artistic Director of The Norwegian Theatre Academy, relates at the Summer Academy of Artistic Research on Utøya in 2019, the very privilege of research is its precarity.

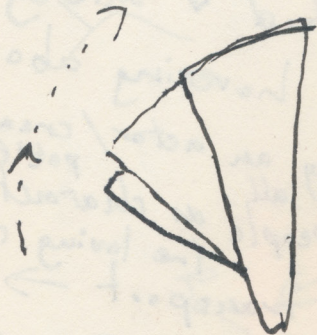
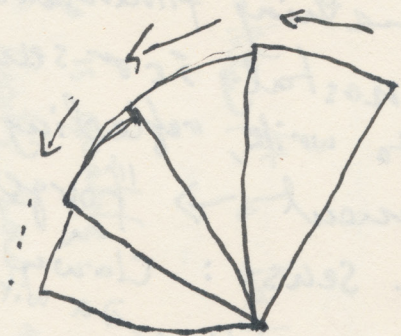
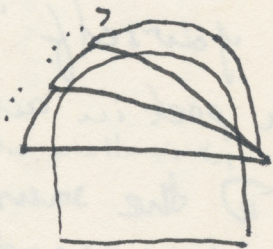
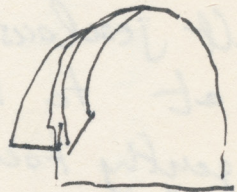
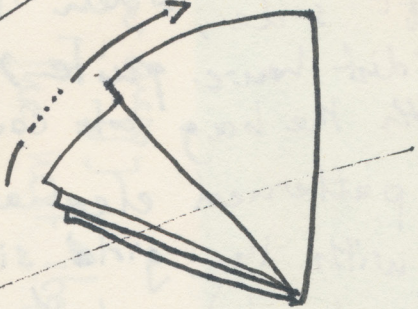
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dukeupress.edu/ordinary-affects> (accessed 16 February 2020).



Privilege is an awning  
opening & closing  
at awkward  
times

timed to the  
beat of  
tight  
white  
drums.

How inappropriate  
'can' is.

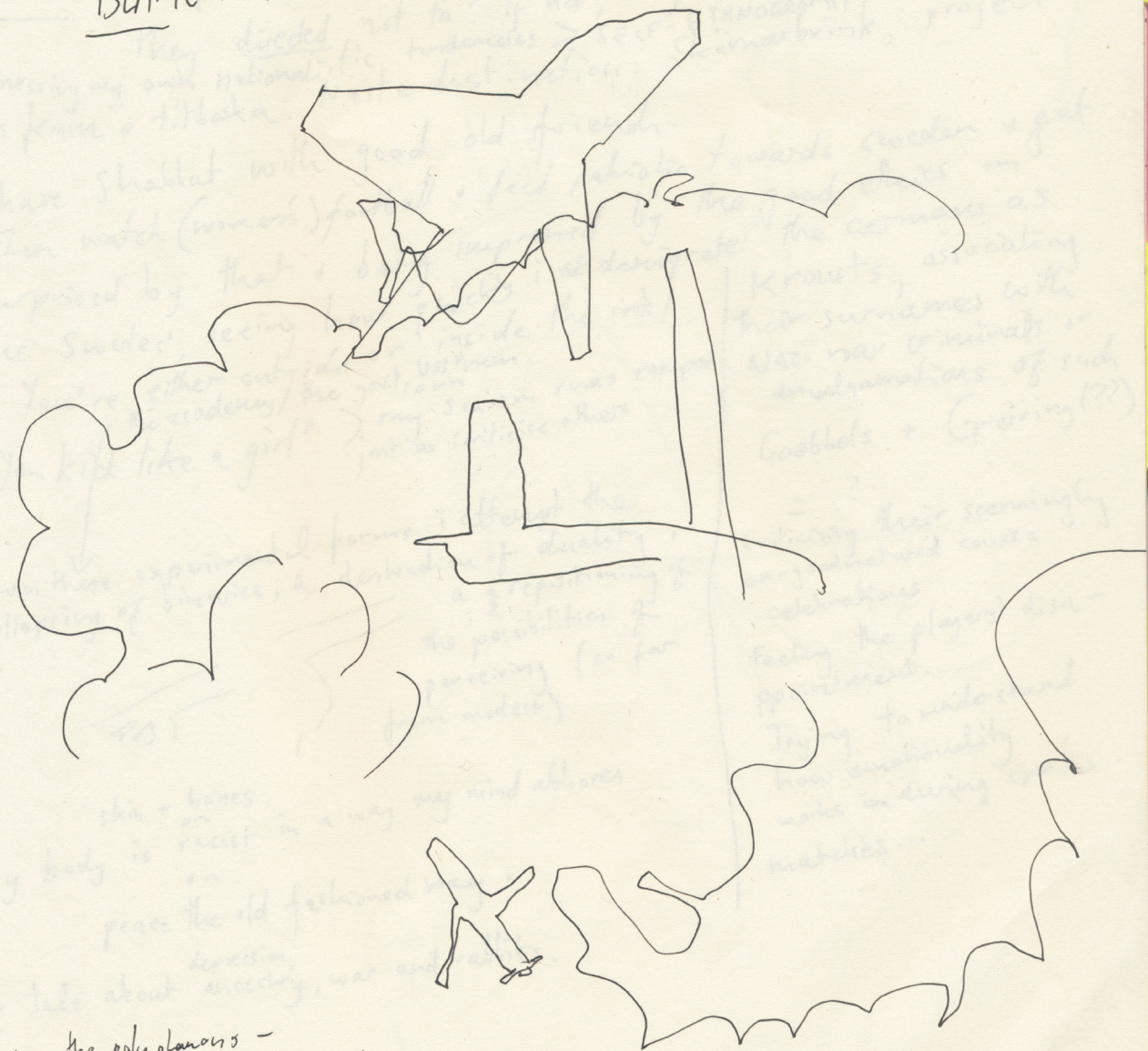


backwards and forwards

the image of the boy from Aleppo @ the back of the ambulance. The way he looks @ the blood then wipes it on the seat.  
the AFFECT of image  
Project  
if begins w/ an investigation of shame & privilege  
Whitewash

ACCUSATION / SHAME  
A reaction may be to

BLAME: e.g. Granny @ Jet's place



studying the polyplanars -  
in image, screen  
w

take me to  
[on] a rock to watch planes from



I'm taking full advantage of shredding, unlearning and re-collating knowledge and information inside of the academy where ordinarily information obscures processes of unknowing. Is epistemic disobedience ethical inside of the institution? Is what I am doing epistemically unruly? Perhaps performing these experiments inside the system re-produces the neoliberal ouroboros I claim to be critiquing while simultaneously eating its own intestines through its own asshole.

I make to discover what I know, trying to understand myself and the surrounding world by doing something I don't understand. And in the making I have a plan to have no plan and really try sticking with it. Decolonial ethics come into this, I think. Settler mind creates boundaries, makes something a thing, names it, categorises it, archives it, historicises it. During an interview with Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2014), Walter Mignolo says:

Decolonial aestheSis refers in general to any and every thinking and doing that is geared toward undoing a particular kind of aesthesis, of senses, that is the sensibility of the colonised subject. What decolonial artists want is not to create beautiful objects, installations, music, multimedia or whatever the possibilities are, but to create in order to decolonise sensibilities, to transform colonial aestheTics into decolonial aestheSis.

Being both surgeon and patient, it is an experimental operation on my own body, in relationship with that which presents itself. In *The Moving Body*, Jacques Lecoq writes, '[t]he fundamental reality of creation is **solitude**' (2000, p.153). As living in Stockholm allows me a sense of anonymity and invisibility, the research offers a sanctuary of solitude for a while, as opposed to the ensemble-based creative theatrical processes I've engaged with for most of my professional life. In a way I've been trading in my professional identity as a performing artist to activate or facilitate other kinds of voices. It has meant attention to my virtuosity as a performer has diminished while inviting in other modalities. I have used the experimentations as an invitation to destabilise the centrality of my position as a performing artist, which is a paradox since in the presentation of the work, this body still occupies a central position in collaboration with whatever audience transpires for that encounter. But in the doing of the research, little attention is paid to rehearsal, to developing routines, character, worlds, all the regular trappings of theatrical apparatuses.

Through it all I'm exploring poetry in expanded performance forms. Filmic and animated images, photographs and drawings as transitory sites, fleeting moments where experience, perception, idea and impulse are momentarily stitched together. These ephemeral moments emerge from the moment of the instant encounter, the all-that-is given. Through all experimentation the questions: what does to *encounter* mean and what is an impulse? Is it possible to train a readiness for uncertainty?

The project iterates through inter and intra-actions, through encounters (both documented and not) with so-called others, always already operating on a spectrum of intimacies. A dance of outside and inside forces. The indeterminacy of the encounters ensures a clash of uncertainties. Every day I make witnessing (or *with-nessing*) a part of my methodology in the hope that, as professor Rebecca Hilton says during a supervision session in 2018:

[i]n the research realm, the measurability of these 'narrow' encounters, in terms of giving and receiving information, responding with particularity to each radically subjective situation, would generate much less generic, more specific useable data.

As performer, being both the material and organiser of the material, I try to be committed to allowing the evolutions of material without this being yet another imperialist enactment. Although there is an element of capture at play here, I attempt to simply witness, to be with that which arrives. A white balloon on the side of the road, a trash can's plastic packet whipping around in the wind, a dying wasp. Perhaps what I can offer here are fragile methods to attune capacities to GIVE attention, as opposed to the capitalist-laden notion of *paying* attention, in the hope of cultivating peripheral awareness, activating a sense of responsibility and an okay-ness with incompleteness and uncertainty in the mess of it all. It could be called explorations of complexities and uncertainties, with openings and willingness to enter polylogues and varying scales of intimacy.

If clowning demands vulnerability and that word derives from *wound*, how can clowning engage close listening, being both a revelation and acceptance of pain and trauma while being entangled in space with others? If etymologically character is an engraving, and impulse is a push, performing in all its expanded spontaneous forms has all to do with impressibility in all directions.





In the Linnégatan studio I attempt a non-humxn dialogue with co-workers in the building, developing a practice I call Temporary Hallway Encounters (T.H.E.). Outside my door in the corridor is the perfect spot to interrupt colleagues on their way to the kitchen. Everyone needs coffee, at least several times a day. I insert this unexpected moment as a playful penetration, a stirring or poking. There is a sign: 'Feel free to change, add and mould,' and a large envelope with the words: SUGGESTIONS, COMMENTS, CRITIQUE, with paper and pens provided.

These miniature parodic spectacles are a queering of monuments, they double and distort the heyday of Stockholm's Great Art and Industrial Exhibition of 1897. They're diminutive sites of resistance to the sense of fixedness this building – Garnisonen – exudes.

None of the bodies or phenomena I encounter are fixed entities that can be studied independently from the apparatuses I impose on them. The mediums in which I work shape me as a searching subject as much as I shape them, and the sensorial experience that arises has the capacity to induce a state of wonder I associate with the state of clowning. I propose an aesthetics that starts from everyday encounters and scenes in which the interaction between humxns and their environment plays a central role. I argue that the rejection of dualisms between doing and thinking, reflecting and acting, creating and knowing, opens up a horizon for embracing a research logic 'where discourse and matter are mutually implicated in the unfolding emergence of the world' (MacLure 2013, p.660).

My interest in exploring indeterminacy through impulsive doodling, animating, filming and drawing started long before a serendipitous meeting in 2016 with political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett at a conference at Stockholm University. During the conference 'Presumed Autonomy: Literature and the Arts in Theory and Practice' (Stockholm, 10-13 May 2016), Bennett delivers a keynote address entitled 'Figures of In-Fluence' during which I take feverish notes and now can't find them. At the coffee break I introduce myself and the two of us end up sitting together at the next keynote. I spend the whole lecture watching her doodling in a notebook, doodles very similar to the ones I tend to create with small dots and spirally turns and unexpected lines, though one could always argue they're laden with patterns of habituated repetitions. After that keynote, which, perhaps, neither of us heard, she promises to send me an article she's written that includes an exploration of Kafka's Odradek in 'Cares of a Family Man'. She does so, it's entitled 'The Shapes of Odradek and the Edges of Perception', an essay included in *Textures of the Anthropocene: Grain Vapor Ray* (2015).



And I'm intrigued by the nebulous character that is Odradek, a strange spool-like thing sitting unused in the drawer, the thing that'll outlive us all, the archetypically useless.

This is a few years before the words 'Sixth Mass Extinction' are on everybody's lips; Greta Thunberg was only 11 years old, the climate crisis and accompanying sense of impending doom isn't yet fully occupying mainstream media, the kind of dystopic horror and panic that has me running to the forest to doodle in my journal has not quite taken hold. In the face of the unknowable, the doing of the doodles is a site offered to the unknown to find its own means of expression. As emergent encounters of potentiality, doodles are intimately enmeshed with the so-called real-world, and removing the responsibility of making sense allows impulse to take over.

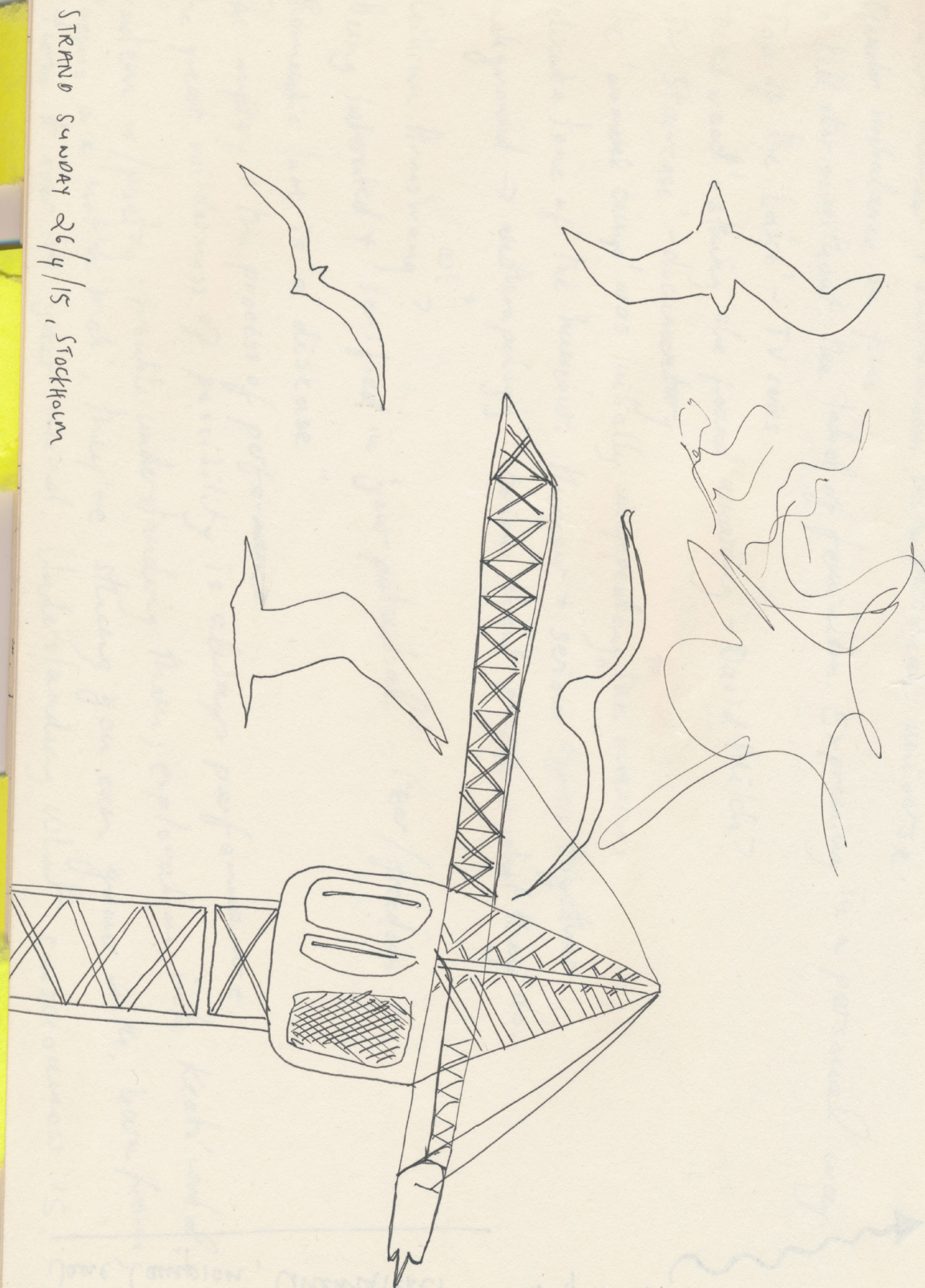
In the studio, alone and with audiences, I am attempting through these experiments to dismantle and re-arrange hegemonic boundaries, attempting to challenge ideas that I am the do-er, testing my own boundaries of surrender and acquiescence. Can I allow the encounter with the object, image, mask, material or experience to *do* me? When I wear a mask, I am called to action. With filming, photography and the objects of animation, I'm exploring how to resist the imperialist in my own imagination, to quieten the 'cop in my head', as drama theorist and political activist Augusto Boal would say in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1993). The studio of play becomes an emblematic space for addressing bigger questions of agency and responsibility while experimenting with praxis and contingency.

In both animation and performance there is a kind of alchemy in motion, a poetic capacity, where the not-yet or what-if is made manifest, where composition emerges through being in the uncertainty, gleaning a kind of presence, a heightened attention to the moment, making space for a celebration of imperfection and happy accidents. A cluster of dislocated confusions emerges from the handmade, carving the opportunity for the poetry of moving image to occupy a sculptural dialogue in both the material and imaginary realms.

In the transposition from the so-called 'live' to the artwork, what is lost, what is gained? Why do I get so excited about and stimulated by drawing and animating bunnies and airplanes? What is it in the mediation from the so-called real to the sculptural and 2-D that is so satisfying?







I develop a practice I call *drive-by drawings*, which are key to this clown-ological philosophy, to be alongside whatever is near. To attempt to speak *with* and to let a body inhabit me for a while in an attempt to move out of my own way. The drawing is a copying, a capturing on some surface that has specific relationalities to other surfaces, and each surface contains its own properties, its distinct lines and features, topographies folding over and through, entangled and intra-acting all within the frame of this so-called particular thing in this so-called space, fragmentations on a continuum of so-called time. As Michael Taussig (2011, p.30) reflects:

What then of drawings? What sort of lifeline might they provide? Well, first of all they provide a welcome pause to the writing machine whereby another philosophy of representation and meditation takes over. ... Drawings add more directly to the thing-become-spirit character of the notebook as a whole. ... I like drawing, and in a strange way that I do not understand it settles me into my surroundings even though the act of drawing can be unsettling. This is paradoxical. Is the drawing something like a dialogue with one's surroundings, I wonder, maybe an argument – in the sense of a dispute but also in the sense of a theory? You are getting to know your surroundings in this strange way and, even stranger, the surroundings are getting to know you.

*Drive-by drawings* are attempting to kiss a moment as it flies, drawing an instant with no responsibility to make it interesting or a perfect representation of the original. It is using contingency as method of engagement with the everyday and as a training tool for storytelling. Other drawings in my notebooks are 'the pauses, the occasional moments of still life where the writing hesitates between documentation and meditation' (Taussig 2011, p.52). This is about spectral temporality, a splintering of the now, grasping towards life in defiance of death, a calm desperate act in the face of mortality's is-ness. It's my personal response to Odradek, and it's possible the ready-made sculptures comprising *the collection* are an attempt to do the same, to find refuge in the discarded, the out-of-place and the taken-for-granted.

In hindsight perhaps, I realise this research proposes a college of simplicity and a ministry of kindness as sanctuaries in which to ask useless questions, to undertake slightly ridiculous tasks with unintentional consequences in an attempt to unsettle settler-mind – the logic that instigates boundaries,



desires categorisation, names uncertainties, and is based on private notions of territory and containment. I propose a gentle college loosely modelled on Alfred Jarry's *Collège de 'Pataphysique*, founded in 1948 in Paris, 'a society committed to learned and inutilious research' (Brotchie 1995, p.11).

I propose the college should have a publication entitled *simplosium*. An explosion of simplicities, or a simple symposium of complexities, *simplexities*? This publication doesn't exist, it's calling out to me from the unknown future, but definitely draws inspiration from *Simplicissimus*, the satirical German weekly magazine started in 1896. By researching the world around in myriad ways, I wonder if these splintered aesthetics, the mess, can form the core of my politics and resist contemporary organisations of power, offering some form of intervention.

As the project progresses, I realise that drawing and stop-motion speak to my own theatre-making process. Each action is a discovery; incremental steps lead to the next without any idea of what follows after – it's a long slow process of doing, watching what happens, reacting to that, making choices and starting the next step. I am excited about not knowing, about witnessing the evolution of unintended shapes and patterns, about lines as bearers of information, as multidimensional things with layers of unintentional meaning, performance remediated in alternate forms. The doing maps out intuitive processes, hopefully revealing machinations of which I'm unaware.

I turn to animation to problematise notions of presence and aliveness. Must a body be living? What is aliveness? I desire to re-animate that which has been confined to objecthood, yet what does it mean to make object-hood matter in a world where particular humxn bodies don't? This question still haunts me.

Stop-motion animation is a kind of painting in motion where nothing will ever be fixed or return yet everything is captured in its entirety and reproducible as long as the technology exists. Stop-motion as the central paradox around which ideas revolve – this combination of the static and the moving, the merging of action and passivity, the manifestation of impossibilities and a righteous up-yours to so-called reality. Animations become the surfaces where viewer and maker meet. While researching what 'presence' can mean, I find myself consistently, reliably, in a time outside of time, an elastic time intensified by the ritual of making.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> These ideas are stirred by Karmenlara Ely in her presentation as part of a panel entitled 'Behind the Mask: Performance, Ritual and the Artist' at The American Folk Art Museum in New York, 7 May 2015. Her address starts at approximately 34 minutes: <https://vimeo.com/129063487> (accessed July 2018).



Still frames from the stop-motion animation *A Welcoming*.





On the animation table I'm operating in a different time frame from the rest of the world. I slow time down to its most miniscule beats and segments, capturing fleeting sculptures, slowly moulding transient etchings, and then speeding them up again, in the end playing tragedies to jazz. It's a kind of odd, quirky or maybe queer temporality. It's on the margins, hovering on the line in-between what can be articulated and not. This is where the trickster resides, on the edges. It can't be labelled productive or reproductive, it becomes a deviation from chrono-normative standards. Nils Claesson, former PhD colleague and founder of the animation unit at the Film and Media department at the Stockholm University of the Arts, casually tells me one day that he thinks of animation as being 'the clown of film'.

Claesson expands on this notion in his PhD thesis *Spökmaskinen* where he writes in a footnote, 'I den animerade filmens sfär är *tricksterismen* ett sorts normaltillstånd' (2017, p.56). Claesson loosely translates this sentence to mean, 'In the world of animation tricksterism is the normal state.'

In an email to me in February 2020, Claesson writes:

Animation relates to film as a trickster to reality.  
It walks backwards.  
It questions the whole concept of representation and talks the language of myths and dreams.  
Animation is a very old thing. It existed long before film.

Sometimes it feels like animation is a kind of digital ventriloquism, where the object says what its creator cannot. In this way they can operate in a similar fashion to masks.

Etymologically, the word animation stems from *animare* – 'give breath to', also 'to endow with a particular spirit, to give courage to, enliven', from *anima*, 'life, breath'. Animation is about enlivening, the making present of something that was previously absent, the jumping into being through light and shadow. On a simple level, I'm understanding movement and improvisation in alternate ways, trying to see how disparate materials speak to each other on the animation table and what kinds of unintended relational dialogues and interactions can be conjured between and through spontaneous experiments in which I explicitly attempt to get out of the way.







During circus scholar Camilla Damkjaer's 'Methods and Methodology' course at Stockholm University of the Art in December 2014, we were asking what it means to think 'through' something, realising that method and materiality, the thing through which the art happens, can't be separated. How is animation a 'doing' of theory, how is it research in and of itself? If improvising in stop-motion animation leads to the making visible of the not-yet enunciated, I can draw from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay 'Making Visible' where she writes of theorising as 'an activity' (2016, p.93):

The Greek word *theorein*, like the English word 'theory' and the corresponding words in the major European languages, signals the phenomenon of 'seeing or making visible correctly'; the word is related to theatre, to staging, to making visible as in a theater.

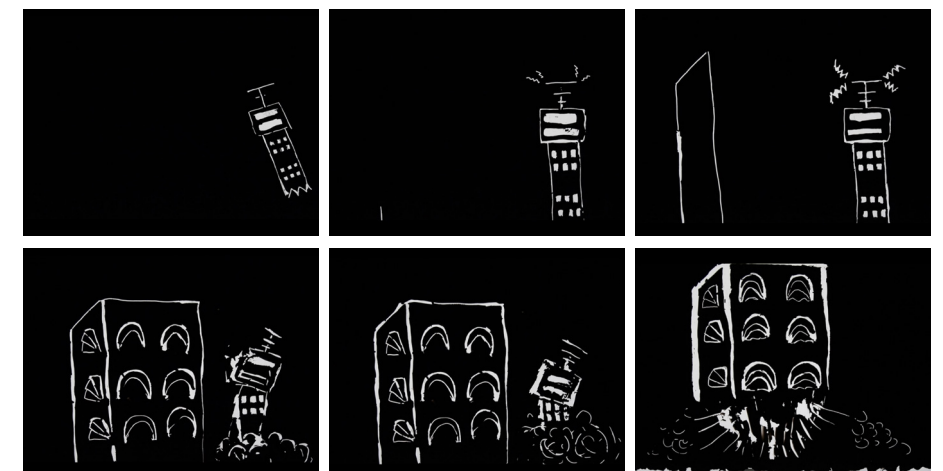
Animation is not so much a 'thinking' but embodying an idea, a 'making visible', through physical materials – paper, sand, plasticine, dry leaves or whatever else gleaned from streets and forests and memory. As South African artist William Kentridge puts it during his presentation 'Six Drawing Lessons' for the Norton Lectures (2012), '[i]t's allowing the fact that between one's shoulder and one's finger there's an intelligence ... and a reliance on that intelligence which isn't about rational, conscious thought.'<sup>3</sup>

With hindsight I can see the animations as visual poems reflecting upon or sensitising the critical and philosophical texts I'm encountering, as well as daily life, dreams and other multiple impressions. They're a series of detached and fragmented narratives, hopefully 'nonlinear, de-centering and intentionally destabilising' the way visual anthropologist Trinh T. Minh-ha's films have been described. I listen to her read her essay 'Between Dog and Wolf' and yearn for this 'different kind of hearing', the one that 'hears the social in the aesthetic'.<sup>4</sup>

If I move away from understanding the images generated by performance, animation, drawing, film and sculpture as forms of representation, what then are they? Can I think of them as dwelling places, spaces or bodies to inhabit for a while? Images and bodies inhabiting me? A tree, rubbish bin or rabbit becoming sites of refuge, but constantly shifting ones, transient habitats hinging between fiction, research and reality.

Through doing the research, my eyes start to perceive in altered ways. I literally begin to see differently. Experiencing the world as a series of shifting shapes in space, I watch people performing living sculptural statues every day in Stockholm's metro. Public transport is a cozy system of domination and control, surrender and acquiescence. It provides a perfect place of both intimacy and distance simultaneously. On trains traversing the city and between cities, I can be utterly anonymous while in close proximity to others. Taking inspiration from the outside, I draw in my notebook, giving space to the agency of imagination, letting the surroundings seep in, and expanding the question, what is a character? A line, a shadow, a puppet, a drainpipe, a shoe, a dog?

On the animation table I explore expanded notions of presence, action and performance. As non-linear constructions, as pleasures reflecting the non-reproductive, banal beauty of simply letting the moment be what it is, the animations are an invitation to be soft, to acquiesce to everydayness as well as a repository for associative fragments of dreams, daily life and imagination to collide. They are created in the spirit of doodling: a search for the moment's encounter, forging connections between different temporalities including a pulsation between impulse, action and its afterthought. Hopefully the animations permit viewers to meditate upon complex issues free of the pressure of structured argument, giving them space to navigate the disorientations alone but often within a community of watchers sharing the same.



In animation I can collapse towers and make buildings fly.

3 [http://mahindrahumanities.fas.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Norton%20Program\\_Kentridge.pdf](http://mahindrahumanities.fas.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Norton%20Program_Kentridge.pdf) (accessed 13 October 2015).

4 <https://soundcloud.com/oneperson/between-dog-and-wolf-trinh-t> (accessed 9 February 2016)





Azusa Itagaki and I playing for the sake of it.

## a welcoming<sup>5</sup>

### experiment in stop-motion animation and sound

In hindsight, the sonic element in *a welcoming* is what becomes most interesting to me – the sound, how it emerged, through whose bodies, in what condition? It’s an excluded history, but does something of the movement of the original collaboration remain an invisible remnant in the body of the sonic animative space? Japanese healer Azusa Itagaki, at the time calling herself *the mind and body orchestra* is improvising with me. I’m moving while Azusa plays an instrument she has constructed herself – it’s a length of gut strung between two points on the reproduction of an anatomical human spine. She plays the string instrument with a violin bow. We are playing together, not sure who’s leading or following, and not caring. Moving with and through each other. The experiment is offered as a collaborative clearing and healing for ourselves, and we feel a lot lighter and happier by end of day. I move while Azusa plays her spine instrument; our only instruction is to listen carefully to each other.

When I layer the sound of this improvisation on top of the spontaneously created animation *a welcoming*, the contexts of each creative process somehow speak to each other in unexpected ways.

With the animation experiments, I wonder how investigating shadow and light teach me about the power of fantasy and imagination. Given how both of these conditioned the colonial project, can explorations of so-called representation in these forms help me understand race more critically? Can they offer ways to think of lightness and darkness outside of coloniality?

On the light box, the act of slicing or removal is an act of extraction towards illumination. I cut away to let through the light. Interestingly, the noun *gash*<sup>6</sup> is an alteration of Middle English *garce*, ‘a gash, cut, wound, incision’, from Old North French *garser* ‘to scarify, cut, slash’, apparently from Greek *kharassein* ‘engrave, sharpen, carve, cut’, also the root of ‘character’. ‘Gash’ is also slang for ‘vulva’, dating from the mid-1700s. Interesting too is that for a project about mocking colonial logic, I sure do draw a lot from western linguistics.

<sup>5</sup> Watch this animation at <https://vimeo.com/137609285>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=gash+> (accessed 27 March 2015).





*Sunburn is Key to Demonstrating Whiteness.* Skeleton shadow puppet made in Sukawati, Bali, under the tutorship of I Wayan Mardika Bhuna, 2016.

What can noticing the micro-adjustments of shadows with the changing light teach? Is the shadow of a thing or even a reflection of a thing still the thing itself? For me, this line of questioning resonates with Walter Benjamin's (1968, p.220) musings on the 'aura' of works of art in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction': 'The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.'

Concerning questions of authenticity, if the shadow or reflection is not the original it cannot be authentic, yet it only exists as a result of the presence of the original. Which makes me question, can the original ever exist without its shadow? Does a thing ever exist without its shadow? Even in the deepest dark night there are shadows.

Is the reflection of a tree in a puddle a phantom of the tree? Is it the tree performing itself in another medium or is the reflection simply an illusion? On the surface of a puddle the ripples are wind made visible. I'm wondering, what's the difference between a phantom and a ghost?

Shadows are as ungraspable as ghosts but rather ghosts of our now, and far more dependable. Shadows have impressibility, what do shadows do to our souls? They have connectivity to so-called real things but are shadows any less real because they disappear and reappear? The reappearance of the shadow as long as there is light is one of the few guarantees in life that's hardly spoken of. What about turning attention to the shadow, to those things unseen and taken for granted? What if the unexamined everyday holds seeds for ghosting or haunting a future worth living?



*Notebook, March 2019, Årsta torg*

*Comforted by the ephemerality and certainty of shadows of trees on walls and the cobbled square, this pen and my hand find their footing as animated shadows moving across this page. I'm looking for rooting in forests but finding trees uprooted from wild wind late winter storms. As clouds pass the sun beams and retreats unintentionally creating a shadow tree disco on the floor. Although the shadow is temporary, the certainty that it will come again is a kind of comforting guarantee, as long as the sun and the tree continue to exist. Do I impress upon the trees as much as they impress upon me? I know when I stop and stare at deer they stop and stare at me too. We look deeply into each other's eyes, quite still though sometimes they continue chewing whatever foliage they're munching on.*

I'm still discovering what animation teaches about clowning, in relation to timing, gesture and embodiment. For most of my performing life, I have been immersed in time-based performing arts, and meditate often on this ephemerality. Perhaps it explains part of my desire to turn to sculpture, drawing and film, fulfilling a need to concretise and immortalise momentary intuitive impulses. But if this whole artistic research project begins as an excavation, isn't excavation supposed to be a taking away? A with-drawing, a carving of space? Sculpture is that too – a carving/cutting/filing/rubbing away of material to make shapes in space, a removal of the inessential.

Bauhaus painter, sculptor and choreographer Oskar Schlemmer<sup>7</sup> is quoted as saying:

Sculpture is three-dimensional. It cannot be taken in at once, but rather in a temporal sequence of different locations and angles of view. As a sculpture is not exhausted by a single direction of view, the visitor is forced to move, and it is only the circumambulation and the sum of impressions that leads to the full experience of the sculpture.

Importantly, sculpture is also an activation of the senses in the hands and fingers, intimately connected to a sense of touch, which I believe has the capacity to engage neurological centres in the brain that could seriously infiltrate performer training in a positive way. I know this from reading about the *cortical homunculus* and the way 'sensory nerves arriving from the hands terminate over large areas of the brain'.<sup>8</sup>

Performers need to develop ways to re-sensitise our bodies, anaesthetised as they have become by colonial logic still operating within western cultures of modernity. We need to train a capacity to access sensitivity in such a way as to be affected by the world as a field of forces, as well as to feel free to act in it, even if this sense of freedom we know – given the disastrous evolutions of surveillance capitalism – is a false concept, the kind we're willing and likely to suspend our disbelief for. The performer needs more dimensions than a double consciousness, they should develop a fly-eyed consciousness, offering innumerable options of potentialities and the courage to simply choose, activate and commit.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/schlemmer-oskar/artworks> (accessed 18 April 2017).

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cortical\\_homunculus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cortical_homunculus) (accessed 5 April 2017).



Training spontaneity is connected to threshold thinking where clear boundaries are delineated yet simultaneously open up enticing possibilities. Training for improvisation involves clearing pathways for impulses to happen and to be acted upon. But not just any impulses. Ones that are appropriate for that unique moment in time, ones that evolve the moment organically, playfully, while entangled with a host of bodies and in relation to the story or narrative currently emerging in that particular space, even if the story is nonsense. Learning to cope with uncertainty could be one way of rehearsing for better futures.

While sculpting I'm using both hands, trying to get out of the way of the becoming-object, which I'm hoping has its own agency, its own desire to become manifest in the world. I notice when I desire to keep the form at certain points, not wanting to allow its evolution into another shape – like clinging to the past or resisting change, desiring capture and finality. Something of this connects to the capturing inherent in photography or film.

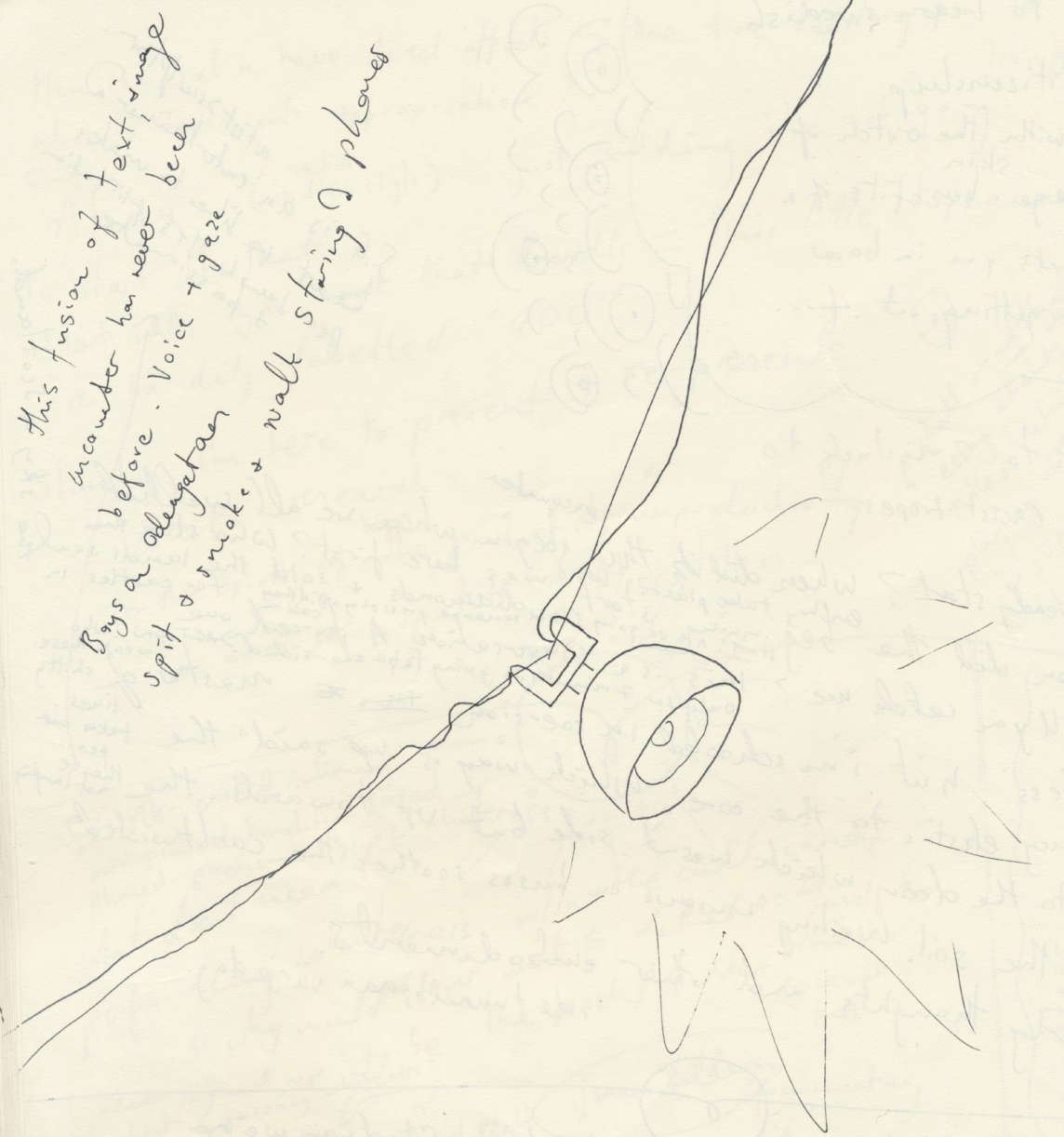
Photography moves images out of time. When capturing the same view over time, like when I obsessively make photos of the TV broadcast Kaknäs tower in Gärdet close to my Valhallavägen studio, I feel I'm learning something about temporality as well as intimacy. The camera is always intimate, even if I don't want it to be, it allows a depth of closeness, accessible as long as that image lasts, as long as there is someone to see it – on the drive or in the archive, online or in my phone. Photography is so tied to the core of how humans observe reality these days, the technology is so readily and easily accessible. And though photography is the medium of light, it is also the medium of dark matter, always connecting to the gaze, both mine as maker of the photo as well as the gaze of the receiver.

With photography, animation, film, journaling and sculpture, I'm experiencing somehow a need to immortalise particular impressions, to STOP them in time, including processes of capture and dissemination. In the moment of making, I'm experimenting with ways to be together with the things being sculpted, animated, filmed, drawn and photographed, as well as discovering ways to be with receivers of the future.

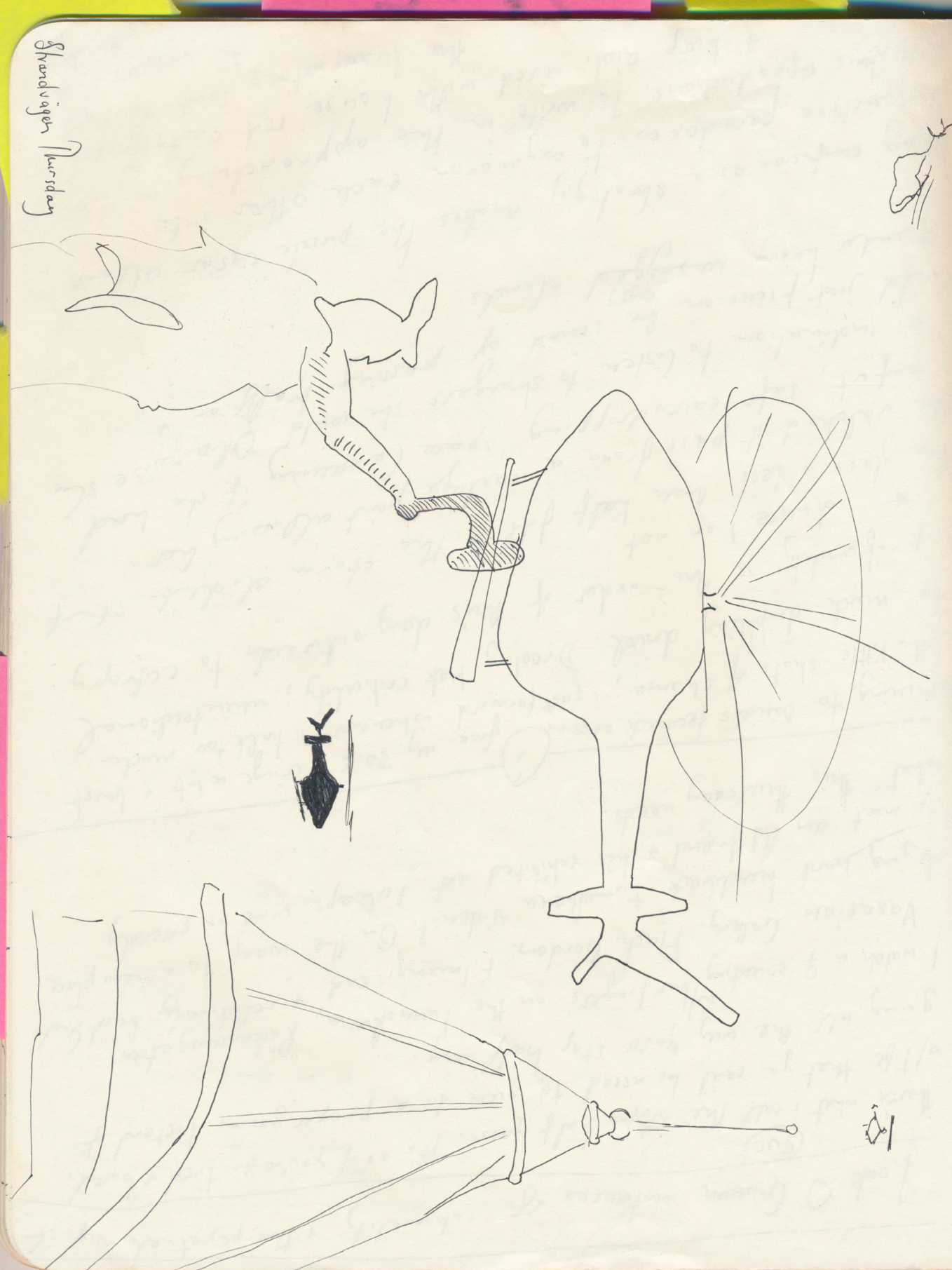
As a method for slowing down and learning to be *with*, I'm filming experiences of the everyday. Attempting to move away from film as a representational or even a narrative practice; I try to live with or alongside the present scene as opposed to being with it only through the lens.

taking selfies on their phones → ... it's a plane ...

this fusion of text, image  
encounter has never been  
before. Voice & gaze  
spit & smoke & walk staring @ phones







I imagine the image as site of refuge. I want to re-member the feeling of the space in my body when I watch the film in an unknown future and wonder if viewers can note the feeling too. In the end, during the process of editing I also try to get out of the film's way, even though clearly I am making all the decisions.

But the question of why accumulate all this digital data remains. Why add to capitalist notions of consumption and proliferation? Can filming be non-extractive? Can these films provide strategies to work against or resist mentalities that perpetuate the logic of settler colonialism or occupation? Making film is another way of inhabiting, creating subjectivities, processing; but who do I point the camera towards, and for whom am I making?

The same questions apply to writing and drawing in my notebooks. I like to think of my notebooks as what Taussig calls 'a concatenation of events and ideas' (2011, p.119, my emphasis). Here in Stockholm, journal entries often reveal my experience in this country as an outsider, as being dislocated in 'a field of strangeness' (Taussig 2011, p.120). This immersion into northern European culture has certainly tinged this PhD journey with an anthropological slant. In the journals or fieldwork notebooks, multiple voices find their way onto the page, almost as gestations of the score of lived and imaginary experience, taking polyphonic forms. Sometimes characters, sometimes fragmented half-poems, dreams, automatic writing, doodles or images etched in fast broad strokes, attempting to concretise ephemerality, practicing penetrating the moment by scratching transient encounters onto the page, testing boundaries of clownish representations, which then remain as testimony to the moment, event or encounter. Carving the instant in ink somehow helps to harmonise a sense of alienation, and the notebooks become their own 'quiet fanaticism' (Taussig 2011, p.47). A quietly fanatical accumulation of fieldwork notebooks amasses my experience as a participant observer and, as a performing artist with one foot in the art of sensuous immediacy, I have to draw from these lived experiences that I have collected and gleaned in precisely embodied ways.

Notebooks clearly become labour made visible, artistic labour as placed in servitude to the academy and my life as a kind of documentation of being here as well as a poetic cultural and urban ethnography – ways of thinking and writing about Stockholm's culture from a standpoint of a clown trying out participant observation.



Have I turned to animation, to drawing, sculpture, film and photography as offering a vital capacity for capture in resistance to the ephemerality of performance as well as antidote to death? Of course, in the making, animation is utterly ephemeral too. Each moment must become the next, must evolve in its miniature increments but always disappears while simultaneously becoming something else. Stop-motion consists of constantly transforming sculptures. At the beginning and at the end, all that exists is clay or sand or coffee sump or paper or leaves, and the trace of their movements is the captured film.

In *Sculpting in Time*, filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky (1966, p.37) writes:

An artistic discovery occurs each time as a new and unique image of the world, a hieroglyphic of absolute truth. It appears as a revelation, as a momentary, passionate wish to grasp intuitively and at a stroke ALL the laws of this world – its beauty and ugliness, its compassion and cruelty, its infinity and its limitations ... through the image is sustained an awareness of the infinite: the eternal within the finite, the spiritual within matter, the limitless given form.

This research leads me to a question: could *fruitful* uselessness help sensitise an indifferent age? In the spirit of opening up possibilities of experimentation that otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to exist, I'm migrating or shifting between systems or modes of creation, reflection and mimicry, always seeking to be a beginner, an amateur hopping between multi-modal materialities in a somewhat hyper search for polyphonic ways of entering a moment.

This multi-positionality may hold the key for inner and outer transformations.

Or not.

While playing, for me the key is the zone and temporality of the praxis, the entering of Mbembe's (2013, p.148) 'ghostly paradigm':

in the ghostly paradigm, time is neither reversible or irreversible. There is only an unfolding of experience. Things and events roll out on top of each other. If stories and events have a beginning, they do not necessarily have a proper end. They can certainly be interrupted ... everything functions according to a principle of incompleteness. As a result, there is no ordered continuity between the present, the past, and the future. And there is no genealogy – only an unfurling of temporal series that are practically disjointed, linked by a multiplicity of slender threads.

The PhD practice keeps chopping up and chewing into smaller and smaller unique yet somehow connected parts. Sometimes the disconnection, the interruption is what's needed. It is important to resist the inner need for mastery, to be bold enough to do something badly. I'm reassembling my knowledge, trying to maintain an openness to reimagining – to allowing a different sense of my own artform to emerge.

Remember sand is fire is a road becoming itself.

It's a serious parody, making a bad joke of representation, a sad caricature of worlds and everything else. Everything is here, everything shits, and everything dies, except for that which doesn't like plastic and chicken bones.



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