

Paths of Precarity: Reflections on Fractured Passages

Darla M. Crispin, 26.05.2023

Quo vadis? - two arrivals; multiple departures:

You step off the tram...

You are in Oslo city, where you have taken the tram to a busy district called Grünerløkka, with a bridge named Ankerbrua. The air smells of good coffee and cinnamon, and hums mournfully to the sound of passing electric cars. You start on a wide path, walking towards the green forests to the north of the city. You hear the lyrical chattering of a nearby river. So beckoning - those wild green and cool spaces and gently melodious sounds - as you walk away from the centre. The way seems clear...

You step off the train...

You walk out of the train station, past a rank of idly waiting taxis, towards a junction with a busy major road, lined with leafy trees. Down a slight hill, and under a railway bridge that carries a different line from the one on which you arrived, is the road crossing. As you walk toward it, you can smell freshly-ground but mediocre coffee, cigarettes and greasy petrol. So much traffic: Range Rovers, Jaguars, Audis and Teslas drive north towards the City of London, or south to the channel coast, east to the market towns of Surrey and Kent or west to the Hogs Back and the medieval ponds of Frensham. But you have arrived at the Crossroads - the moment, the site, the time of choice. Which way will you turn?...

In every choice there is an acceptance, but also a refusal and, between these, a rupture. One connection is made; another - or, perhaps more than one - is broken. Sometimes, we feel that, before making our choice, we must first have explored all the pros and cons; sometimes, we may dream wistfully of what might have been if our choices had fallen out differently; but sometimes, we are happy simply to surrender to the serendipity of spontaneity – to lean into whatever our inner voice tells us promises to be the better route. Woven into the very fabric of all these kinds of choice – and the countless others that doubtless exist – is precarity. We may try to minimise precarity by research and planning; we may decide to embrace it in a spirit of risk and adventure; but to eliminate it totally is to become frozen in paralysed stasis – almost literally, to cease being alive. And what is true for everyday life is even more acutely and fertilely so for artistic creation.

The Break:

We all experience ruptures in our lives and we often seek to find the means of repairing, or at least of understanding, the wounds these cause. Even in its most harrowing manifestations, art has the dual capacity both to depict these wounds unflinchingly and, nevertheless, to reconcile them with a sense of wholeness that, within its own frame if not in the world at large, restores balance, hope and meaning:

- A war artist paints the bloody battlefield, but the vision is whole and the composition carefully considered, despite the subject-matter of severed limbs, wrecked ordinance and devastated landscape.
- Picasso's *Guernica* depicts horror in a way that deliberately resists aesthetic consolation, but its brilliance at tapping into our darkest despair, fear and anger leaves us dizzy with admiration at the way the artist gives visible form to these feelings.
- Artemisia Gentileschi tropes her own rape in her paintings of biblical and mythical atrocities committed by men on women and, in some cases, vice versa. We sense something more than artistic impulse in the dark intensity of these images, but their excellence as examples of a certain pictorial genre enables us to apprehend them aesthetically as well as viscerally and, thereby, to gaze unflinchingly at scenes which, otherwise, would turn our stomachs and shame our consciences.
- The murals of the artist known as Banksy superimpose strange and whimsical images on the damaged fabric of war zones and poverty-stricken towns. His quirky additions confer a strange but almost poetic validation upon the ugly, damaged or neglected public spaces that he uses as his canvas, but does the muted inward smile that his imaginative creations elicit fuel our impatience for change or anaesthetise it?

Is the residual wholeness detectable in each of these examples viable? Does an artwork need some vestige of coherence and internal integrity in order to retain its validity as art? And, at the other end of the spectrum, do certain works of art – of which *Guernica* would be a prime example – become inviolate to criticism through being made canonical? Even in such cases, what of the huge tidal changes of taste and criticism that run through the historical continuum of art-making and art appreciation, meaning that works can fall out of, as well as enter, the Canon? The great nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideal of symphonic wholeness – the ‘world within a symphony’ – may still stir and inspire us. But we can see its relationship to a Eurocentric, male-oriented view of society and its destiny; we recognise with increasingly uncomfortable understanding the equivocal nature of a tradition that ignored and excluded voiceless minorities – and even majorities – while singing the virtues of unity through dialectical dynamism and the teleological exhilaration of achieving a pre-destined apotheosis. As we begin to ask deeper questions about whose unity, whose pre-destined apotheosis, is being hymned, it can cause us to question the universality of principles such as those enumerated here as attributes that are reliably indicative of artistic excellence.

Decades ago, Theodor Adorno asserted that the wholeness that Western art perceived in itself had ruptured, its viability denied by the need for a greater freedom. “The whole is the untrue”, he wrote.¹ Yet even Adorno saw this as a rupture inside the fabric of Western culture and one requiring solutions from within. Now, there is a recognition, at least in principle, that remedies might need to come from outside. Perhaps we regularly need to divest art of its institutionalising tendencies: its customs, its stories and its propensity to turn style from a living energy into set of do's and don'ts. To recover the missing, perhaps we must first let go of the residue and, most importantly, of our control over the ensuing

processes. Only by opening ourselves to the possibility of change or loss brought about by agencies other than ourselves can we avoid repeatedly re-making the same orthodoxies.

This state of being beholden to other forces in respect of change or outright loss was one of the earliest meanings in English of 'precarious' and, hence, still lurks in the etymological DNA of the newer 'precarity'. One might almost say that precarity is a pre-condition of art, although its presence has ebbed and flowed within styles and movements. It could also be argued that art is one of the areas of endeavour through which re-invigorating doses of precarity are injected into society at large. In particular, the concept of an artistic 'avant-garde' reifies this relationship, in which art is the outlier, the pioneer, more agile than the lumbering main forces and therefore impatient of their sluggish progress that can often feel like stasis. An avant-garde's agility is inseparable from its readiness to take risks. For such an advance scouting unit, precarity is a more or less permanent state.

The avant-garde art movements of the early twentieth century produced revolutionary works, and also introduced innovative approaches to performance. But "the shock of the new"² is a phenomenon that it is fiendishly difficult to maintain. Over time, the provocations of Modernism became its 'style-tics' and the avant-garde movements produced their own Canon of masterworks and their own histories, complete with specially customised perfection myths. Such myths gloss over the doubts, the false trails, the faltering beliefs and the threats of rejection which accompany any actively evolving movement during its most dynamic - and most precarious - phases. In recent years, interest has grown in these, on the face of it, negative aspects of artistic development, seeing them, not as a gruelling rite of passage through which to pass as swiftly as possible, but as the locus for some of the most important lessons that art can contribute to society.

Working overtly with concepts such as precarity may 'feel' contemporary; and yet it is merely a recognition of the messy vulnerability that is art's perennial condition. In debunking some of the myths of creative genius and transcendental virtuosity, artists who acknowledge precarity neither diminish their art-form, nor undermine their own status. Rather, they allow us to see both as all the more remarkable for the way that such miraculous achievements can be forged in the unforgiving crucible of risk, doubt and potential failure.

In their project, *Performing Precarity*, Ellen Ugelvik, Jennifer Torrence and the other artists with whom they work study questions such as those outlined above through their art-making and their reflections upon it. Their performances explode the boundaries of their own, deeply-anchored virtuosities and let us enter spaces that are normally off-limits for those on the other side of the performative 'fourth wall'. This response of mine aims for a similar self-exposure and candour. In place of a traditional essay-style exegesis, it is conceived as a collection of thoughts inspired by, and repeatedly returning to, the outputs of the project. Non-linear and episodic, it takes the form of a kind of bricolage of elements, some obviously linked, others less so. In the spirit of the project, it does not shy away from the personal, while seeking to avoid the solipsistic. It ranges widely, and often strikes off tangentially, taking the motif of the crossroads as one of its central ideas. Crossroads can be places of extreme precarity – as was the one where Oedipus had his fatal and unwitting

encounter with his estranged father, Laius. But they can also be junctions of opportunity and invitations to unexpected but fruitful risk.

What follows is an attempt to honour Ellen and Jennifer's research by tracing paths, both metaphorical and literal, that variously diverge from and intersect with it. Their journey through the project has clearly been a stimulating one – for them and for those invited into the world of their explorations; I hope that something of this stimulation may be reflected back onto their work through the nature of this response.

A Theory of Disaster as a Theory for Artistic Research:

What role might precarity have as a concept within the wider discussion of the arts, particularly when referring to the performing arts? In many ways, it feeds into a broad range of long-standing arguments, including questions concerning who an artist is, who is excluded from such status and why, what counts as art and whether it is relevant whether those included are making so-called 'high' or 'low' art. And, perhaps most importantly of all, who gatekeeps these categories? While these questions may not be new, the Covid 19 pandemic has made us consider them afresh.

The ongoing uncertainties of art and the self-questioning of its practitioners may seem at first to lack the urgency that the appellation 'precarity' implies; yet, at their core are aspects of identity that are fundamental to surviving and thriving in specific social and cultural settings. 'Look!', say the artistic leaders and ambassadors. 'That which seemed stable is now edging toward the precipice. And that which was already on the brink of the precipice is clinging by a thread for survival. You must look. Pay attention! Take a test, if you are coughing. Get used to being uncomfortable.'

Many involved in artistic research are facing these issues head-on; indeed, they have become the very matter of the artmaking, part of the impetus for making, for doing. This stirs up new questions concerning the loss of art through potential social instrumentation. In a world needful of healing, where ecologies are being destroyed, poverty is increasing, wars are ongoing and medical care is affected by post-pandemic scarcity, should art be protected? In particular, should it be funded as a 'requirement' of a fully-realised life? Should support be graded according to its capacity to address social ills? 'Why, in short, does art matter?'

Within *Performing Precarity*, Ellen Ugelvik and Jennifer Torrence seek out the fissures and cracks in their art that, contrary to expectation, may be precisely where some of the answers to these questions lurk. In the process, they subject their own skill and accomplishments as artists to questions of de-skilling, decolonisation and even decline. The pandemic has thrown their questions into sharper relief and, potentially, greater relevance, but their artmaking was already enmeshed with the questioning of order in art even before the great shut-down struck, as they developed their many roles as performers of contemporary music. Precarity, for them, has become a set of practices involving self-abnegation, the willingness to begin again, a distancing of oneself from skill, the questioning of one's status and a readiness to make manifest one's doubt. In these practices and their rationale, we see the beginnings of a theory of disaster- which may be the only logical response to the 'distracted tymes' in which we live.³

The Crossroads and the Practice of Moving on Foot:

As we search for identity in our contemporary world - or seek to lose it - there is another way, that may be traced back over the centuries. The way of the Path. The way of the pilgrim.

Beside a busy modern road crossing, with its multiple carriageways, its cars, its lights, its steamy noise, its oily exhaust smells, is the unprepossessing beginning of the North Downs Way. On the side of these streams of traffic, this cosmopolitan current ceaselessly roaring back-and-forth, is a dusty, muddy path, commencing where thousands may have picked up the pilgrim trail. The River Wey flows beside it, a scarcely discernible stream, but leading eventually to navigable water courses.

Do you intend to walk for just a day? Are you carrying the heavy pack of the long-distance hiker? Are you lighter in attire and planning to run? Do you carry the pilgrim's scallop shell, committing yourself to continuing on the path all the way to Canterbury? What is it you are looking for? Escape? Quietude? Redemption? A new beginning? What is your practice?

The true pilgrims will have already begun their journey before the start at Farnham of the modern North Downs Way trail, officially opened in 1978. They who seek the full historical route to Canterbury and the tomb of Thomas Becket make their start further south and west, at Winchester. The trackway goes back in time, past Becket and his bloody murder, its archaeology dating back to the Stone Age.

But our origin point and our journey are in the here-and-now. This is the North Downs Way. Go ahead, into the precarious future it holds out to you. Or, if you prefer, find another starting point.



The North Downs Way at Blatchford Down (Credit: Crispin 2023).

Start to walk, Oslo style:

Walk up the path, beside the Akerselva River, to the shiny new buildings of Vulkan. The factory dirt and grease has gone underground, replaced by gleaming apartments, eco-

friendly energy production and trendy places to eat. Here, you can learn to move at Dansens Hus, where bees are kept on the rooftops. Cafés are all around and you can hear scraps of electronic music and hip hop floating from them. But the red bricks are steeped in ghosts; where beer now flows, molten metals used to pour. Graffiti art is splashed on the walls; the observer is beckoned indoors and out. Curated modernity. The glass windows and cladding of the new buildings shine: they protect – and divide. Rich and poor, housed and homeless, Sick and well...

Reprieve - Glass walls as protection:

August 1991. I am encased in glass, draped in sterile curtains. Outside these medical barriers, the wraith-like men and boys are lying in rows of medical beds. Sometimes, when the curtains are open, they get up and come to the glass, looking in. I cannot get out of bed to draw the curtains for privacy. The nurses are watching – making sure my fever is controlled, my intravenous drip keeps working. Stay awake. I see the wraiths, draped in their hospital cotton.

Malformed blobs have replaced my white blood cells. Infection and bruising increase. The fingernails on my pianist's hands have become filled with pus. My skin is angry and I cough up green sputum from my scarred right lung. Vaguely aware of these matters, I gaze through a slick sickness-fever haze while the ghostly men look at me through the glass, from the other side. I think they feel sorry for me.

My glass room was in the midst of them, although they could not come in: I was an infected, white-gowned apparition foreshadowing their future deaths. They waved gently - and were gone. Our separate scourges divided by glass.

A young man frail as Belsen
Walks slowly down the corridor
His pale green hospital pyjamas
Hanging off him
It's very quiet
Just the distant coughing
My jugsy eye blots out the
Young man who has walked past
My field of vision
This illness knocks you for six
Just as you start to forget it
A bullet in the back of the head
Might be easier
You know, you can take longer than
The Second World War to get to the grave.⁴

Finally, someone draws the blinds. I am alone, but not alone. It becomes worse. My blood counts collapse. All who come into my glass cell wear gloves, masks, gowns. The visits are strictly limited. I am vulnerable to infection, to breathing in bacteria and viruses that could kill me. A paper cut does not heal. A scratch is poison. My skin is a raw landscape of unhealed wounds. My lungs are a moonscape of infective scars. Everything hurts.

Malignancy has infiltrated my bone marrow and caused a fault in white-cell production. Neutrophils die before they can do their work; skin infections and pneumonia follow. I lie in my glass cell, dazed with fever, plugged into drips of saline and antibiotics.

Only months later do I understand.

I am in a small non-specialist hospital, waiting to be transferred to a leukaemia ward. This small hospital has placed me in the only sterile room they have, adjacent to a ward full of HIV patients. We all share in the catastrophe of failed immunity.

This is 1991. For the young men in the ward, AZT treatment had started – but the combination retroviral therapies for HIV were in the future. These boys would probably die. I would never know for certain...

Sometimes, when the blinds were open again, the boys would wave hello. 'Bye, 'bye, the lost boys. But I remember them.

A few days later, the doctors moved me to the larger hospital. My new room was a sterile cell, clean and very cold, inside a 'proper' leukaemia ward - and the consultant with the designer suit said he could save my life with a new drug. 'Sign on the dotted line – it's a clinical trial.' Ghosts in medical suits come to take me away in an ambulance to the cancer hospital. Gloves, masks, gowns – for my protection, not for theirs.

They inject me with the drug, my survival hanging on twice-weekly injections for the rest of my life. Side-effects follow, and I develop a severe fever and skeletal pain. I am wracked with shivering. This happens with each injection, but becomes less severe over months and years. It is preferable to the alternative.

Decades later, we would all become familiar with the procedures for wearing masks, washing hands, disinfecting; some would experience first-hand the harrowing treatments of which we were all dimly aware. The Covid 19 crisis was also a pandemic of fear. We went into our homes and closed the doors.

Plexiglas:

Music for two players: created by Mieko Shiomi, performed by Ellen Ugelvik and Jennifer Torrence. Symbolically shielded by Plexiglas and located at a distance dictated by performance instructions, Ellen and Jennifer are staring into each other's eyes, vulnerable to us in their performing; vulnerable to the elements outdoors; vulnerable to each other, as the Plexiglas between them (accidentally?) falls away. Liberty to one; heightened anxiety to another? Covid 19 precautions as artistic style, performing the virus. But no shield can be thick enough to offer complete confidence. It can even hurt to look at each other, from near or afar.

A few days later Ellen and I met to rehearse a new piece by Henrik Hellstenius with vocal sextet. I almost couldn't look at her.⁵

During the pandemic, the medically vulnerable, those with pre-existing conditions, were instructed to "shield", to remain in their homes, in a specified space, and not to go outdoors into the world. The collapse of the shield could mean death.

We estimated that 1.7 billion (UI 1.0–2.4) people, comprising 22% (UI 15–28) of the global population, have at least one underlying condition that puts them at increased risk of severe COVID-19 if infected (ranging from <5% of those younger than 20 years to >66% of those aged 70 years or older). We estimated that 349 million (186–787) people (4% [3–9] of the global population) are at high risk of severe COVID-19 and would require hospital admission if infected (ranging from <1% of those younger than 20 years to approximately 20% of those aged 70 years or older). We estimated 6% (3–12) of males to be at high risk compared with 3% (2–7) of females. The share of the population at increased risk was highest in countries with older populations, African countries with high HIV/AIDS prevalence, and small island nations with high diabetes prevalence. Estimates of the number of individuals at increased risk were most sensitive to the prevalence of chronic kidney disease, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and chronic respiratory disease.⁶

Moving around their Plexiglas barrier, Ellen and Jennifer perform, playing out both their alienation and their compassion. Shiomi's simple score is a complex map for the dissociated.

Circular glass:

Laurence Crane's *2-Metre Harmony: Uncertain Chorales, for 3 performers with harmonica, pitch pipe and voice* (2020), presents another score that acts as a map towards an exploration of isolation in performance. Crane's score is delicate, precise – and spare. Jennifer Torrence, Ellen Ugelvik and Anders Førisdal perform the piece in a transparent, circular room in the winter forest. The video of their performance shows viewer-altered perspectives, from the clear visions of snow-covered woods and trees, to the closer view of the three of them in the transparent cylindrical room, shivering musicians breathing into harmonicas and holding onto audio-connected mobile phones with trembling fingers. Obeying Covid rules, the performers stand apart from each other, trying to keep their performance cues, their musical orientation, while they fight the severe cold. Condensation drips down the panes of their transparent outdoor room and clogs their harmonicas as they strive to perform the gentle harmonies that Crane has prescribed. Their feet are impeded by spaghetti-coils of wires. Cold, red hands, roughly covered with knitted sleeves, grasp the instruments while showing the discomfort. This hurts. The spare beauty of the music and its placement in this distant setting brings the vulnerability of the Covid situation into sharp relief:

The specific conditions of this particular performance made the more general question of performance conditions tangible. It made me aware of how much of our practice is directed toward averting distraction and keeping the network of outside forces in which we are entangled at bay – and in extension, made me aware of how much we have naively taken for granted has been disrupted by the Covid pandemic.⁷

Another separation by glass:

Pinquins were giving the world premiere of Manos Tsangaris' piece *My Heart Is a Map*. The piece plays on the idea of inside and outside. One performer is outside

performing a solo for speaking percussionist, while at the same time two performers are inside performing a duet for speaking percussionists. The two situations are separated by a window, which the audience is occasionally able to see through. The two parts of the piece (the solo and the duo) are performed simultaneously and coordinated via subtle gestures between the performers and an assistant planted in the outdoor audience. In addition, there are several “extras” that periodically stroll across the “stage” of the outside performance, thus blurring the real and the performative. The audience experiences the piece twice: once outside, once inside.⁸

So much of the Covid 19 pandemic involved the separation of people and communities. Soon we lost our way toward one another. Now, as part of the process of recovery, it would seem that we need artistic maps to find the ways back into each other’s hearts – and, perhaps, into our own.

Falling water:



Akerselva near the National Academy of Arts (Credit: Crispin 2017)

We keep hiking forward. At Seilduken, the National Academy of Arts stands before us as we walk upstream, toward isolation and the unknown. The roar of falling water brings us back to the moment. Stop and look, or keep moving upstream, toward Mølla, where the mist

from the waterfall will dampen your face. The hill is steep here, but the course is clear. If you follow the river's edge, you will not get lost.

Disorientation:

Within the project, *Performing Precarity*, Jennifer Torrence leads us along a less-trodden trail, via her writings on the project. She becomes a cartographer – and an advocate - for the artistically disoriented. As she has argued persuasively in both presentations and writings, the surrender of past notions of mastery can allow access to new experiences and understanding, a more compassionate, participatory artmaking, and one that begins, however tentatively, to undo highly colonised ideas around a sense of constant striving – for ever-higher excellence in performance and for teleological fulfilment in compositional structures. She argues for a double merit in disorientation, proposing:

- 1) that disorientation emphasises 'nowness' through its challenge to traditional directionalities in performances;
- 2) that disorientation turns us back to the other, to relationality.⁹

While Torrence's arguments for the creative and humane potential of disorientation are strong, her ambivalence and sense of loss are also evident. The honesty of her assessment takes the discourse beyond the privileges of art and, more profoundly, into daily life. After all, we must remember, that the cost of disorientation and crisis can be high:

In the summer of 2013, Geraldine A. Largay was through-hiking the Appalachian Trail. She became disoriented as she attempted to negotiate the difficult terrain in the state of Maine. She died of starvation and exposure. Her remains were not found for two years. Largay left a journal, with the following final entry:

“When you find my body, please call my husband George and my daughter Kerry,” she wrote. “It will be the greatest kindness for them to know that I am dead and where you found me — no matter how many years from now.”¹⁰

Artistic research often creates exchanges between art-making and everyday life. But disorientation in daily life can have fatal consequences.

Compass and Map:

Sometimes, while out on the trail, it is indeed possible to lose one's way. When I am going to run, I have my map and a compass in my pack. I am performing this run by memory, but I have the score if I need it...

My map is a score, a code, a document full of abbreviated meanings, to give aid when disorientation occurs. Mapping is a centuries-old practice, but the systematic and thoroughgoing maps of today, which have their origins in conflicts of the 18th and 19th centuries, are one of the many outcomes of two world wars. An innovation once intended to give advantage over an enemy now exists as a universal benefit. A small grid breaks maps down into 1km by 1km squares, labelled by numbers and letters that allow the reader to make references to pinpoint locations.

My compass is a reading instrument, to orientate the map and to determine the bearings. The compass is placed on the map with the swivelling bezel set to North, lined up with the

north/south map grid lines and the red house on the compass facing North. If you've done this correctly, the map will match with the topography in view. Now, you are oriented.

North is crucial. All depends upon reading and knowing where North lies. Only then can you take a bearing, go where you want to go.

But Jennifer Torrence argues for yet another way: the elevation of 'getting lost':

...as I reflect back on performances that I have loved most in my life, they are very often accompanied with some sort of crisis, catastrophe, calamity, or disaster. Perhaps it's simply that crisis is what makes the performance memorable, which is exactly the logic my family uses when reminiscing about past vacations: we strongly prefer to recount the trips that had a good bit of getting lost, minor catastrophe, strange encounters, and improvised problem solving. How boring is a vacation that goes exactly according to plan?¹¹

Perhaps there is a radical difference between 'getting lost' and 'being lost'. When we first realise we are lost, we may panic and try to re-orient ourselves as quickly as possible. But if we pause for a moment, we may start to pick up signs that can guide us more gently towards familiar ground: the way shadows fall, how the land slopes, the direction from which certain sounds come. Art can provide markers, even if we are not always certain where these are situated. With practice, we may find these more easily and in greater abundance. And, as walkers, we may sometimes stroll with no clear route or purpose, simply to experience the pleasurable frisson of becoming temporarily lost and knowing that we can re-find our path.

Artistic research proposes the dissolution of the power of 'true north'. But magnetic north will retain its mysterious power. Our resistance to history shows that we are bound by it.

Sculpture:



Sculpture at trailhead of the North Downs Way (Credit: Crispin 2017)

Since 2015, the starting point of the North Downs Way has been marked by a new, but deliberately weathering, steel sculpture, etched to produce the negative silhouettes of walkers, of a butterfly, of the distinctive acorn motif of the UK long-distance trails, the whole suggesting an interlocking outline of rounded hills and yet oddly abstract. The columns of harsh rusted metal rise powerfully but tenderly from the level ground in which they have been set: the sculptor-blacksmiths of Utopia Forge know that Corten steel defies the predations of nature. Rust is proof to itself; weathering creates strength. The long-distance walkers and runners who find this marker and begin their journey have similarly tempered their own bodies through long practice and exposure. Experience teaches us how to roam for miles, to bear our heavy loads, to eat and drink as we move. Running is our art. We are as the weathered steel columns, more resistant with more exposure. The rust regenerates, its layers shed and renew, even though it looks aged. But the rusty sculpture is already in the process of self-destruction. The snake can shed only so many skins.

Consider the poets of rust:

- Broken Obelisk – Barnett Newman
- Numbers – Robert Indiana
- Angel of the North – Antony Gormley

A butterfly in steel, two figures walking, the National Trails acorn mark. Shadows in the sculpture. Alive, but not alive.

Non-human...:

In his compositions, Simon Løffler explores aesthetics beyond the human, searching for a poesy emanating from other than ourselves. Jennifer Torrence and Ellen Ugelvik perform his piece, *animalia II* (2020) with a searing vulnerability. Crouched to the ground, their spines bent over, they float their cerulean gossamer butterfly, mothlike wings. The gestures are skittish, frail and vulnerable, but the depth of the impression comes not only from the expressive vocabulary wrested from the non-human creatures, but from the humans using the winglike prosthetics to touch the world of insect flight. We see the insect wings, but we also see the human spines and ribs beneath the bare backs of the performers – no insect exoskeletons, but human traces in the performance of the non-human. The rattling music of the piece is both flitting wing and crunching bone.

Leaving the steel sculpture, we begin. To Canterbury. Or to Dover. “Wherefore to Dover?”¹² Or to Rye. Or to Ashford and the gateway to Europe. There are many ways to go. But for now, just one lane. Happy to follow its gradual divergence from the main road, our thoughts may be fixed on our final destination or drawn to the here-and-now, and the gently persuasive way that nature begins to envelop us in its verdant calm and beauty. Slow or fast, don’t wish away the journey; live every moment of it to the full. As of 2023, a North Downs Way Art Trail has been created, featuring nine permanent art installations, placed at different points along the Way to delight us, to encourage us to pause and reflect and, in some cases, to offer us a seat where we can rest and re-gather our strength.

Up river:

Follow Akerselva, up clear streams and waterfalls. You won’t get lost. The river is the marker. The railings of Aamot Bridge are covered with locks, placed there by passing couples. Bind in your heart – forever. Love, as frail as the butterfly wings.

Simon Løffler’s butterfly wings seem to relate to another work within the *Performing Precarity* project. In Lisa Streich’s *Cadenza aus Laster* (2018/19) Ellen Ugelvik performs a duet with delicate motors, placed inside the piano, that rotate yellow slider strips. The eerie noise of the motors sounds alongside Ellen’s gentle playing of chords. For this piece, she sits more conventionally at the piano, but the effect is other-worldly, as the motors and their movements are imbued with life and, as though performing a duet, share expression with Ellen herself. In her explanatory notes to the piece within the recorded performance for Eclat 22, Konzert 05 (March 2022), Streich Torrence calls the motors ‘co-agents’, noting that it is their fragility that gives a sense of life to their motions. But Ellen is also a fragile agent here: she listens intently, carefully, generously. Her role, as the seated pianist, is being challenged by the artifice which her project has highlighted. This paradox is intrinsic to the project as a whole. As Streich Torrence writes:

‘When the chord sounds
there is a mysterious feeling that there is something beyond my understanding and control.
Within this entanglement there is a feeling that the motors voice by themselves,
that they make their own choices.
They surprise me with their chord progressions and the sensuous way they activate them.
(Or do I get mixed up? Ellen surprises me. Or, what’s the difference?).¹³

Delicate motors. Butterfly wings. Shards of tradition. Alive, yet not alive – like virus particles.

Virion:

Jeremy Stone found himself staring at a single unit of the organism. It was a perfect, six-sided hexagon, and it interlocked with other hexagons on each side. The interior of the hexagon was divided into wedges, each meeting at the precise centre of the structure. The overall appearance was accurate, with a kind of mathematical precision he did not associate with life on earth. It looked like a crystal.¹⁴

The art of the virus particle: it has a simple task, the transference of nucleic acid from one cell to another. It cannot reproduce itself, but must infiltrate a living cell and alter that cell's own replication mechanisms to do the reproductive work for it – a ruthless cuckoo in the nest.

The virus needs a host. The motors of *Cadenza aus Laster*, the wings of *animalia II*: they, too, need to work with their hosts in order to move, to sound. The difference is that their artist-hosts work willingly and collaboratively with them, but the collaboration still requires an element of surrender, of lowering of the normal performative defences.

The precarious symbiosis of virus and host is often a hazardous performance – a duel as much as a duet.

These considerations lead me to believe that the first human interaction with extraterrestrial life will consist of contact with organisms similar to, if not identical to, earth bacteria or viruses. The consequences of such contact are disturbing when one recalls that 3 per cent of all earth bacteria are capable of exerting some deleterious effect upon man.¹⁵

Artist testaments:

Jennifer Torrence writes about the Covid 19 pandemic as a performer. The virus comes swiftly and almost incomprehensively amongst us and re-shapes the behaviour of the world through its pathogenic terror. The plight of the performing artist becomes a paradigm, a synecdoche, for the spread. Empathic touch, close speech, working in a single room: these necessary habits of artistic interaction all become conduits of fear. For the contemporary performer or the artistic researcher, the innovations that come from collaborative music-making, the theatre of performance and even the definition of the performing arts themselves, all become shadowed with the taint of the pandemic. Life is arrested, and artistic expression becomes both a part of this suspension and a metaphor for it. The singer's breath expels viruses, the tubular tracks of brass and wind instruments dizzyingly channel a microbial hazard and the touch of the actor betrays unclean hands. Our antibacterial lives suppress and silence any spontaneous art: a new, mediated expression emerges only gradually, and amidst much pain, personal loss, illness and death.

Don't touch me, please. Write a letter to me, instead, "... from cloudy Oslo... from Melbourne..."¹⁶ Jennifer Torrence and Louise Devenish begin to develop their process of exchange in order to interrogate their work as percussionists. They spin strands of discourse on artistic research across the globe. They write 'letters' in order to be personal, to defy the

‘alone-ness’ of the pandemic, while, at one and the same time, being conscious of the unifying nature of the terror.

So, week in, week out, the prisoners of the plague struggled along as best they could. As we have seen, a few, like Rambert, even managed to imagine that they were acting as free men and that they could still choose. But in reality one could say, at that moment, in the middle of August, that the plague had covered everything. There were no longer any individual destinies, but a collective history that was the plague, and feelings shared by all. The greatest of these feelings were of separation and exile, with all that that involved of fear and rebellion.¹⁷

Orchid:

Keep moving along the gritty path. Do you walk or run? In either case, even the lingering roar of the London-bound traffic soon begins to dim. The path moves gently into the green. Turn a corner, another, into the leafy woods. Cross under the railway bridge and you will come upon a wooden carving: the Orchid Seat. You may sit if you wish. The carving is elaborate, odd, even alien – a Bee Orchid in gigantic proportion. But orchids do thrive on the Downs, including some very rare examples. We tread on the path carefully, to spare the flora, the grasses.

Increasingly, we understand that this apparently unchanging landscape is frail. Escaping from the urban traffic to quieter places that seem set back in time, it would be easy to imagine oneself in some serene and secure arcadia. But time is not being kind to the Way; its plants are challenged not only by the humans who pass, but also by blights and unseasonable heat, symptoms of climate change.



Orchid Seat Near Snailslynch Farm (Credit: Andy Scott (CC BY-SA 4.0) 2017).

Immunity:

Long before the Covid 19 pandemic spread in its tsunami-like wave across the planet, I was an expert in destroyed immunity. I had lived decades of my life by it, but also in defiance of it. All at once, my individual and atypical terror of microbes became the stuff of common parlance. Deficient immunity was our shared predicament; building resistance a delicate negotiation between the need for speed and imperative of minimising casualties. Until immunity was sufficiently prevalent amongst the 'herd', we were all obliged to disperse and shelter. My destroyed immunity was no longer an exception. In our isolation, this vulnerability was one thing that we all shared.

The Path of Precarity:

Dreamers follow the path. As they tread the soil, the mud, the gnarly roots, they walk the refrain of history. Some undertake only a fragment of the monumental trail, stepping on and off for a view or a brief escape. Others are travelling all the kilometres, completing the task, closing the circle, walking for strength, running for a record, listening to the ancient music of the breeze in the trees. Running or walking the path is the norm – but many prefer to cycle it.

A Strange Journey by Bicycle:

Carola Bauckholt's *UTFLUKT* opens as a cycle journey with the sound of a stick flicking over the rotating spokes of a bicycle wheel. Jennifer Torrence and Ellen Ugelvik undertake this hybrid journey, with music and vivid animations merging with their theatrical gestures into a form of hyper reality. The movement from cycling to marching to waterside crawling opens up to visions of the creatures within the water, both benign and malign – fishes, protozoa and creatures that are unidentified. Are we on a canal boat in Venice, a remnant of the Biennale? Are we on the River Cam, punting? And from which watery overground/underground networks do the subsequent musical gestures emerge as we move from fishing at the water's edge to scuba-diving? Bauckholt's mastery of the familiar-made-strange draws together themes as diverse as coastal ecologies and defamiliarization in performance – and, in the process, echoes and illuminates the very experience of living. Hers is a virtuosity of the peculiar, reliant upon the skill of the performers to imbue the weirdness with a sense of the everyday.¹⁸

Water – The River Wey:

The water beside this long-distance path that runs through a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to the south of London is being destroyed by the very companies charged with keeping it clean and safe. Farm waste, human sewage and manufacturing chemicals all contaminate the rivers. Heavy rains lead to 'permitted' releases of untreated material into the public waterways. Wash your hands, but do not drink.

What do you do, hours into the run, the walk, in hot weather? The only safe water is the uncertain charity of the church-side water taps. For centuries, the small churches have kept water flowing to aid the pilgrims on the road to Canterbury.

The rivers may not be fit for slaking our thirst, but they are still our maps; they define our landscapes, carving the contours of the hills and marking the boundaries of the fields. Ceaseless in their flow, they appear to be constant in their courses, but in this respect, too, they are dynamic, except to an altogether more spacious and leisurely rhythm.

If you are lost atop the mountain, find the water flow and follow it downhill, edging around the tree stands.

Water – Nydalen



Akerselva at Nydalen (Credit: Crispin 2017).

As you keep moving up the path, toward the mountains north of Oslo, you come upon the river water pools at Nydalen. Here, the water is clean enough for wading, for swimming. Man-made falls generate a rush of sound as you pass modern buildings before moving back into the forest.

The green trees – forest ecologies

Ellen Ugelvik charts a new ecology of the piano from inside the instrument. She is performing *Piano Concerto (2019) for pianist with live camera and sinfonietta*, composed by Kristine Tjøgersen. Tjøgersen is interested in the materials of nature: the trees, the wildlife, the water. She points us to what lies beneath, to the great rooted networks that make wild spaces hives of communication. Ellen ‘plants’ a miniature forest of model trees inside the instrument and we observe her doing so via a camera set at a low angle, so that we seem to be in amongst the woodland. Scale is subverted, either shrinking us or magnifying the models to full size. In this disorienting landscape, sounds and musical gestures, too, lose their normal sense of relative scale and significance.

The normal idea of ‘concerto’ is that the soloist is set off against the ensemble, but here, there is an enactment of nature reclaiming the piano, with the trees activating their own underground network of rhizomic communications.

North Downs Way Ridge:

As I run through south-facing woods below the ridge of the Downs, beside the trail I see many felled trees. They are blighted with the disease called *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, or ‘ash dieback’. This fungal infection, imported to Europe about 30 years ago, will eventually kill 80% of the UK’s ash trees. The tree sap is like water, like blood – it must flow to survive. Do the trees signal their distress, one to the other, via their roots and rhizomes?

Blood test:

A tight band around the upper arm. ‘You’ll feel a sharp scratch’. Bleeding. Dark blood flows into the tube. I watch the tube fill up and try to ‘read’ the blood from its colour, as it flows from the crook of my arm. Deeper than scarlet, a red/red-blue darkness. The needle comes out; hold the arm firmly over the entry point with a cotton pad. Stop the bleeding.

And now, you wait. Blood, sap, water. No solutions.



Blood test (Credit: Crispin 2015)

‘Staying with the trouble’:

Within their project, *Performing Precarity*, both Ellen Ugelvik and Jennifer Torrence demonstrate the influence of the thought and writings of Donna Haraway. Of particular note is the text, *Staying with the Trouble*, in which Haraway argues for the inextricable

interconnectedness of the human and non-human spheres within a world of (human-caused) damage and hazard. Only through a radical rapprochement, she suggests, may the planet and its beings be redeemed.

But within the context of the project, what is the precise nature of 'the trouble' that both Ugelvik and Torrence interrogate? The most obvious parallels are with the ecological themes that inform many of the compositions that the pair perform. Tjøgersen's *Piano Concerto (2019) for pianist with live camera and sinfonietta*, as performed by Ugelvik, both demonstrates the subterranean networks that link trees and forests and reveals their frailty. Likewise, Torrence's work within Simon Løffler's *Becoming Animal*, or both Torrence and Ugelvik's performance of *animalia II* (2020), with their presentation of the hypervigilance of the hunted, are poignant expression of the dysfunctional interface between the human and non-human worlds: each twitch of the butterfly wings forms a rebuke to the human audience observing the performance.

However, manifestations of 'the trouble' within the project go much deeper than merely the explicit themes of works chosen for performance. To understand this better, it is important to return to the question of what precarity might be, and how it is interrogated within the project as both a problem and a solution. One aspect of this is the pas-de-deux that Ugelvik and Torrence perform with their own virtuosity. The project actually critiques virtuosity, along with the attitudes and practices that it engenders: the adherence to past ideals and past enslavements, as demonstrated in certain kinds of labour (such as repetitive practice) and certain canonicities (such as the dominance of white, male composers). Ugelvik and Torrence 'start again' – and again and again, questioning their own, highly-realised, core practices and the institutions from which these emerge, and deliberately prolonging and deepening their inhabiting of the often-strange worlds that they create within their performances. A critical hitch, though, is that as they master each new situation, each novel technique, the communicative aspect of material resistance has the potential to be weakened. Precarity becomes the victim of mastery. Perhaps this essential yet intrinsically self-cancelling precarity is one of the more intriguing aspects of the entire research basis.

Within the meta-critique formed by these actions, virtuosity becomes almost a barrier to precarity, its facile feeding of the appetite for spectacle seeming outdated and even harmful in the context of a sincere desire to explore, in the phrase used earlier, the fissures and cracks in one's art. But the surrender of virtuosity, for all its potential benefits in terms of enabling the 'crisis that makes the work memorable', is not without cost. The uplifting wings of the virtuosic are surrendered in exchange for discomfort, non-fluency, unease, even suffering.

Stepping Precariously:

At around 25 miles out from Farnham, the Way encounters an obstacle that forces a choice. The River Mole, a tributary of the Thames, cuts northwards through the Downs ridge at this point to make its rendezvous with the larger river just upstream of the capital. Runners and walkers must either take the direct route, over stepping stones, or incur yet another detour to make a safer crossing via a nearby bridge. Either option constitutes part of the official route.



Stepping Stones or Footbridge? North Downs Way (Credit: Crispin 2023).

What will you do? You're already tired and a little unsteady on your feet. The flow of the water past the stones is disorienting – as though you've just stepped off a spinning roundabout. Keep calm; focus on each step; watch out for any slippery moisture. Or perhaps it's better to turn briefly away from the water, through the woods and down once more to the river bank, where there's a reassuringly solid structure to support you as you cross, dry-shod and free from fear.

Precarity can have its own attraction, fear its own addiction. Will you be kicking yourself if you flunk the challenge? Think of those stones like the items in a concert, and the gaps between them like those passages you practise over-and-over because they're the ones you worry might trip you up. Test the experience of stepping precariously; feel the fear, but ride it; don't yet think about reaching the other bank - just about the next stone and the next step you must take to reach it.

On busy summer weekends, there is another hazard to negotiate. Families gather at the stepping stones enjoying the water, the greenery and the dappled sunshine. Their goal is not to cross and move on; they are just enjoying the thrill and pleasure of passing back and forth. Infants cling to their parents' hands, their arms stretched up above their heads. Their foot reaches precariously out at full stretch to find the next landing point, swaying as it does so but kept clear of the passing water by gentle guidance. Teenagers sprint across, taking the stones two at a time, or crashing deliberately, in showers of droplets, into the mercifully shallow river. They are all performing precarity at the margins of their respective capabilities. They also forget that the river is polluted.

At times such as these, queues can form of people waiting to cross. Serious runners and walkers have no privileges. A detour over the ground can mean a saving against the clock. Sometimes, it may be prudent to walk away from precarity.



Stepping Stones over the River Mole on the North Downs Way (Credit: Crispin 2023)

Pain

Beyond 25 miles, the run becomes akin to a long-form composition, and 'staying with the trouble' entails a willingness to move forward in, and with, the pain. The journey becomes a choice: to accept the pain and, working with and through it, to move forward, or to stop moving and attend instead to easing the pain. The run continues, whether across the ridges of chalk and lime, or through the narrow trails and pine forests of Nordmarka wilderness.

Run for hours and hours on rutted paths. Surrender fluency, feel the likelihood of stumbling; re-group and start again.

Learning to self-inject: Renunciation

Post-instrumental artistic practice: Jennifer Torrence argues for the process of discovery that this path can entail. The path of renunciation of standard fluencies has the potential to lead to new discoveries. The (musical) artist is now also an actor, an acrobat, a clown. But at the core is the process of surrender:

What birds plunge through is not the intimate space
in which you see all forms intensified.
(Out in the Open, you would be denied
your self, would disappear into that vastness.)

Space reaches *from* us and construes the world:
to know a tree, in its true element,
throw inner space around it, from that pure
abundance in you. Surround it with restraint.
It has no limits. Not till it is held
in your renouncing is it truly there.¹⁹

It is a way of making a break for freedom. The process of artistic renunciation is a form of inoculation, a way to 'make safe' by challenging the system with carefully calibrated doses of threat and danger. Or it could be seen in terms of dialysis: flushing staleness and accumulated habit from the system and leaving it thinner but purified. Either of these medical procedures may induce side-effects, and the same is true for the mastery-renouncing artist. They may experience a negative reaction to precisely the states that they are seeking out: lack of skill, clumsiness, questioning of judgement. Accidents may happen...

Jennifer on Crisis and Presence

In her text, 'Quick Now – ', Jennifer Torrence traces connections and disconnections between crisis and presence. Her linking of the two is somehow unexpected, even novel:

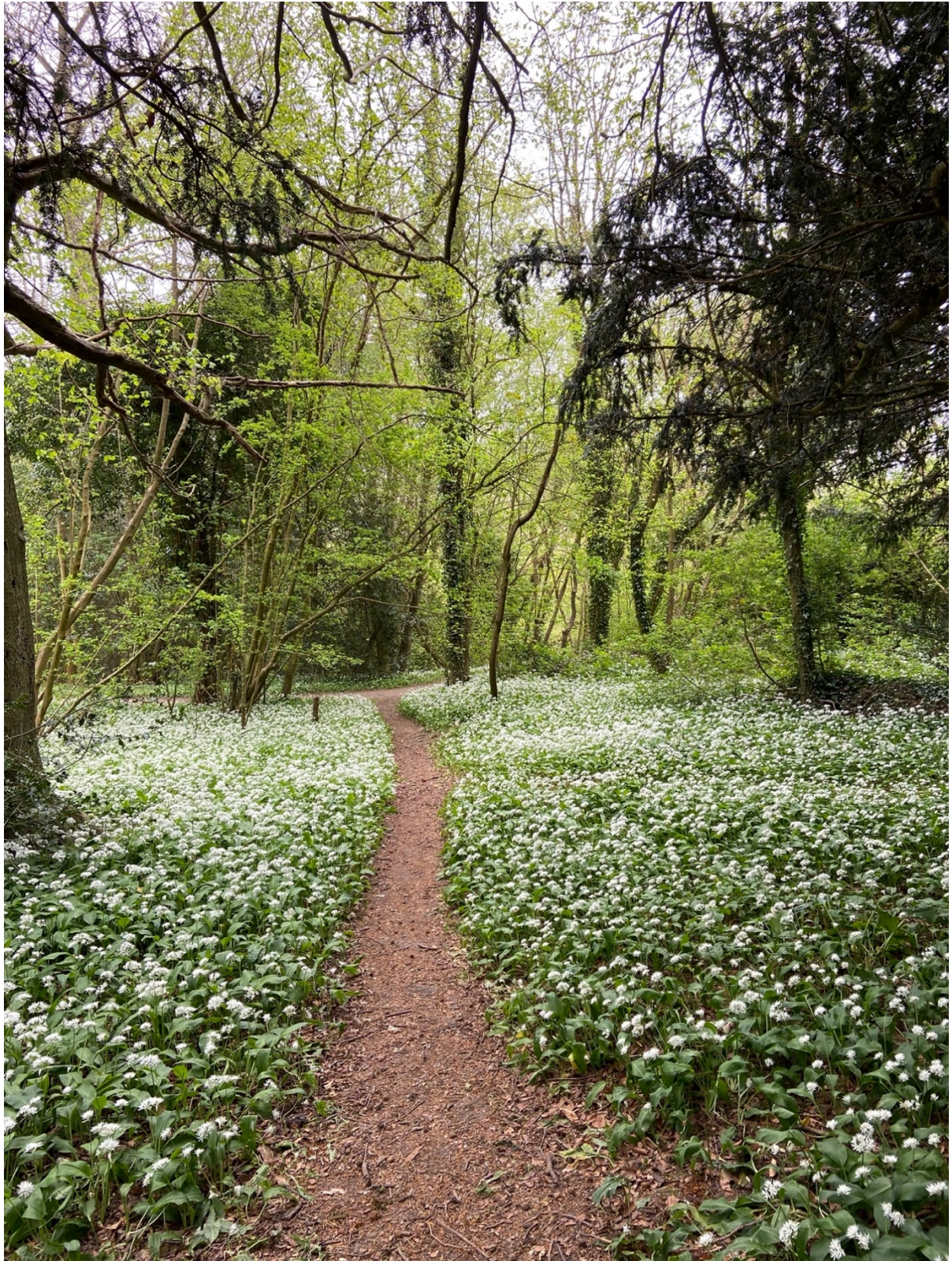
I love crisis in performance. I love it because I experience it as a catalyst for what we call presence. I experience the manifestation of presence as a certain clarity of the real moving in slow motion. Its texture is like sunlight in spring, "clear as an alarm" (as Anne Carson puts it.) Things get stuck in it too, hence the slowness. It's almost like presence has a certain thickness to its feel, a gooeyness, that small moments get stuck in, like a Ry on Rypaper, and then get stretched out into

bizarre proportions, somehow hyperreal. The mind's eye seems to buy time...

Clarity in slow motion.²⁰

Slow motion can have the paradoxical effect of accelerating our perception of time. It is over three years since we truly realised that we were in the midst of a global pandemic, and yet it feels as if the virus came upon us only yesterday...

Wild garlic



North Downs Way near Titsey Plantation (Credit: Crispin 2022)

I run the high hills of the North Downs Way in late spring. The air is thick with the smell of wild garlic. It is as strong as in any Italian trattoria or deli; I am punch-drunk with the aroma, and with the thirty-five odd miles I have already run. But the memory evoked is of the cancer-treatment rooms, where we received our transfusions, infusions. The preservative

used for bone marrow, pending its infusion into those having transplants, smells strongly of garlic, and this transfers to the patient in the course of treatment. In the enveloping presence of the smell, I remember the sickness, and the fear.

I could not have the marrow transplant, but instead was infused with blood and drugs. My blood would go through ongoing repair, enough to hold most infections at bay, but always close to the precipice of precarity. I run to be in the best health should any crisis strike, but also as a living metaphor for the constantly pumping circulation of cells in my bloodstream, just enough of which are sufficiently robust and well-formed to keep me protected.

Accidents:

Plexiglas falls, a performance costume falls apart, I trip on the trail and slash open my knee, a laboratory chemist drops a flask of viral or bacterial culture and spreads a pandemic throughout the world.

A bull in the field:

The trail takes me across a farmer's pasture, over a stile and into another, with the next exit gate in the distance. But a sign warns of a bull in the field, and I can see the animal in the far corner. I am going to take a chance and climb gently over the stile, talking to the bull to calm it. And, as I do so, I get ready to run, hyper-alert to the animal's movement and demeanour and ready to react in an instant should these change. Maybe Jennifer is right:

What I like about presence born of crisis is its speed. In contrast to counting breaths, crisis offers a good ol' slap in the face.²¹

Maybe performances should be more like crossing a field with an unpredictable bull in it....

Trond Reinholdsten and the Critique of (Music) History:

The encounter with danger is echoed in Trond Reinholdsten's compositional oeuvre, in which disparate works directly articulate an ongoing critique of music history, as written by the gatekeepers of the West. In *NO IDEAS. NO NEW PERSPECTIVE*, we see many familiar tropes: the use of humour to convey ideas, the comical ghosts, the walls of electronically-generated soundscapes. But unlike the other Covid/post-Covid works within *Performing Precarity*, which generally convey their messages through musical vocabularies that are generally subdued in their sound palettes, Reinholdsten uses the full acoustic spectrum, from roaring darkness, to a wall of sound within blazing white light, to near absolute silence. The ghosts emerge from a quiet darkness, speaking their German texts, both strange and funny ("*Kultur ist langweilig...*"); the audience laughs with an undertone of nervousness during the course of this spectral theatre. The blindness generated by the light forces us both to turn away and to begin again.

Reinholdsten's work may be seen as one amongst many contemporary reassessments of canonical works and the hegemonic traditions that generate them. Such new readings potentially give voice to those previously dispossessed: the minorities, the marginalised and derided, the culturally suppressed or overlooked, the powerless, and the societally mute. The new perspectives offered by such works challenge the mainstream and erode former certainties, creating doubt and vulnerability where once there was a confidence whose

horizons were so wide that the thought of questioning it barely even arose. But Reinholdsten's statements, and his particular whimsy, still owe something to his position as a white, Northern European, male composer. The ghosts, veiled during the performance, are Ellen Ugelvik and Jennifer Torrence, two women who are only unveiled after the performance ends. In this regard, Reinholdsten's apparently robust work is far more fragile, and perhaps more compromised, than it may seem. And this may be his point.²²

End

You are at a large lake, breathing in the scent of conifers. From here, a broad trail runs back towards the city; if you like, you can turn around and start again, re-winding in reverse the narrative of your journey upstream. You will not get lost, here at the start of Akerselva. But you may *be* lost. The water seems clean, the lake expansive. Here, there seems plenty to drink, in a world where fresh water is an increasingly scarce commodity. Maridalsvannet, the river source.

The scarred shoreline of the dramatically shrunken Lake Mead in the United States, the depleted reservoirs of Europe, the defiled rivers of the UK, the spreading deserts of Africa. Fire in the Canadian provinces, flooding in Northern Italy while Spain wrestles with drought and pulverising daytime temperatures. Climate change has made water into wealth, with all its inequalities.

You can keep walking away from the city, into the wilderness. But you can't get any nearer to the lake; the water here is guarded by a fence. Clean water is the next, terrible scarcity. Dirty water is full of – viruses.

The Red Death

And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.²³

Finish

You cross a series of farmers' fields, to the small village of Knockholt. This is not the end of the Way, but it is the day's end. In the distance, the trail winds on, crossing more fields, the tidal River Medway and the flat tracks of the Pilgrim's Way all the way to Canterbury. Today's pilgrims will continue over multiple days to the Cathedral, with their prayers for better times, as in the ancient days. Then, too, those reaching their destination begged to be freed from war, from want and from pestilences. We sound these prayers today, at this moment. The Latin root from which the word 'precarious' originates is *precari* – to pray. Perhaps it is only fitting that this meditation on the Paths of Precarity should end at a shrine of prayer.

Certainty

Performing Precarity emerged as a project prior to the pandemic and has become a project for the pandemic. The artists involved were compelled to alter its framework in light of the global shifts that Covid 19 imposed. Their examination of the condition of precarity started with a series of artistic questions that were subsequently joined by existential ones. The project morphed into a series of contemplative actions.

The long-term consequences of Covid are as yet unknown; *Performing Precarity* as a finite project has run its course, but its themes belie the neat compartmentalisations of applications, funding protocols and reports. Just as pilgrimages are about the internal journey more than the geographical itinerary they inscribe, the questions concerning precarity and its relationship to art-making that Ellen Ugelvik and Jennifer Torrence have raised will surely continue to reverberate.

D. M. Crispin, May 2023.

- ¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (London: NLB, 1974, p. 50), trans. E.F.N. Jephcott. The German original reads: „Das Ganze ist das Unwahre“. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969) p. 57.
- ² Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New – Art and the Century of Change* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1991). Though somewhat outdated by now, Hughes’ readings of art and architecture were highly influential, and his popularity coloured the perceptions of a generation.
- ³ A reference to the ‘Sad pavan for these distracted tymes’, written by Thomas Tompkins in 1649, a few days after the execution of Charles I, and reflecting in music of enduring poignancy the composer’s despair and bewilderment at contemporary events.
- ⁴ Derek Jarman, *Chroma: A Book of Colour – June ’93* (London: Vintage Digital; New edition, 2017) p. 96. Jarman’s career as a filmmaker and visual artist – and, for that matter, his life – was frequently coloured by themes relating to precarity. His coastal home, Prospect Cottage, became the site of his well-known and unlikely seaside garden, exposed to high winds and angry seas, and located very near the Dungeness nuclear power stations. After Jarman contracted HIV/AIDS, he became one of the earliest artists to articulate the experience through writing and artmaking. Before it took his life, the disease destroyed his eyesight; Jarman wrote movingly about the heavy irony of this situation, as well as creating a film, *Blue*, that employs some of the texts within the book, *Chroma*, as a narration over a screen that remains solidly blue for the entire duration of the film.
- ⁵ Jennifer Torrence, reflecting on her post-performance reaction of *music for two players*: created by Mieko Shiomi, in [Soft to the Touch: Performance, Vulnerability, and Entanglement in the Time of Covid](https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1040522/1040523), VIS Nordic Journal for Artistic Research, #6 ‘Contagion’ (October 2021), <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1040522/1040523>.
- ⁶ Andrew Clark, PhD, et. Al, ‘Global, regional, and national estimates of the population at increased risk of severe COVID-19 due to underlying health conditions in 2020: a modelling study’, in *Lancet Global Health* 2020; 8: e1003–17, published online, June 15, 2020 [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(20\)30264-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30264-3), accessed 23.05.2023.
- ⁷ As stated in reflection text subtitles for performance of Laurence Crane’s *2-Metre Harmony: Uncertain Chorales, for 3 performers with harmonica, pitch pipe and voice* (2020), source video: : ECLAT22, Concert 5, *Performing Precarity I*, February 2022:: <https://vimeo.com/671326741/79071bc487>.
- ⁸ Jennifer Torrence, in ‘*Quick Now – on cultivating discomfort in performance*’, *oblivia.fi* (7.05.2021 *oblivia.fi*).
- ⁹ Paraphrased from Jennifer Torrence, ‘Performance as device for disorientation’, a talk given at the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln, .3 February, 2022.

- 10 'Geraldine Largay's Wrong Turn: Death on the Appalachian Trail', *The New York Times*, [Jess Bidgood](#) and [Richard Pérez-Peña](#), May 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/27/us/missing-hiker-geraldine-largay-appalachian-trail-maine.html>, accessed 05.04.2023.
- 11 Jennifer Torrence, in 'Quick Now – on cultivating discomfort in performance', *oblivia.fi* (7.05.2021 *oblivia.fi*).
- 12 William Shakespeare in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare - King Lear* (London: Henry Pordes, 1987), p. 1006. Spoken by Regan, the second of King Lear's daughters, on discovering that the Duke of Gloucester has betrayed both her and her sister, Goneril, in aiding Lear to flee to Dover. The denial of Lear's freedom and stripping of his lands becomes part of the cruelty of the two elder sisters that culminates in their own deaths, the death of Lear, and the murderous hanging of Lear's virtuous daughter, Cordelia. The play dramatizes the precarity not only of kingdom and land – since Lear had thought to safeguard his old age by dividing his lands between his daughters but, instead, created war between them for those lands – but also of the mind, since Lear becomes insane as a response to being betrayed by Goneril and Regan and stripped of his power.
- 13 Lisa Streich, Notes for *Cadenza aus Laster* (2018/19), as given in video recorded performance, Eclat 22, Konzert 05 (2022), source video: : ECLAT22, Concert 5, Performing Precarity I, February 2022: <https://vimeo.com/671326741/79071bc487>.
- 14 Michael Crichton, *The Andromeda Strain* (London: Penguin Random House, 1969), p. 226.
- 15 Crichton, *The Andromeda Strain*, p. 43.
- 16 Louise Devenish and Jennifer Torrence, 'Virtuosity, post-instrumental practice, and collapse: A correspondence', In *Contemporary Virtuosity* (Taylor & Francis, 2023).
- 17 Albert Camus, *La Peste*; in English, *The Plague*, trans. Robin Buss (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1947), p. 129.
- 18 Carola Bauckholt, Elizabeth Hobbs, Jennifer Torrence, Ellen Ugerlvik, *UTFLUKT*, for two performers and animation film (2021/22), source video: ECLAT22, Concert 5, Performing Precarity I, February 2022: <https://vimeo.com/671326741/79071bc487>.
- 19 Rainer Maria Rilke, 'What birds plunge through is not the intimate space', in *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, E-book, Vintage International Edition, March 1989, p. 246.
- 20 Jennifer Torrence, in 'Quick Now – on cultivating discomfort in performance', *oblivia.fi* (7.05.2021 *oblivia.fi*). The source for Anne Carson within the citation is: Carson, Anne, (1995). "The Glass Essay" in *Glass, Irony and God*. New Directions.
- 21 Jennifer Torrence, in 'Quick Now – on cultivating discomfort in performance' (*oblivia.fi*, 7.5.2021).
- 22 Trond Reinholdtsen, NO IDEAS. NO NEW PERSPECTIVE, for Ellen, Jennifer, emergency instruments, ghosts, floating instruments, text, rain samples, modernist-nostalgic-neoclassical-revival video documentation, the Blob, varying degrees of darkness and choir, in source video: ECLAT22, Concert 7, Performing Precarity II, February 2022, <https://vimeo.com/671327279/32e271d11e>.
- 23 Edgar Allen Poe, *The Masque of the Red Death*, Re-Image Publishing (E-book), downloaded 2023, pp. 8-9.