This piece of writing acts as a practice statement of sorts—one through which I attempt to find an alternative foundation for creativity and practice by making sense of the materiality of my body in search of an embodied position. I will do this by attempting to conceptualize a practice of *performing porosity*, a way of enacting the material abilities of bodies, as a diffractive methodology (Barad 2007). The format of this text is diffractive as opposed to conclusive; it attempts to open rather than close, and *flows* from one thought suddenly into another. These thoughts in their simultaneous occurrence could not, alas, be written on top of one another here. There is therefore not the linear presentation of balanced pros and cons of the method. Instead, there are notes from practice and encounters with porosity, diffracting several states of water (a tear, a puddle, a river, a human and so forth) and considering how we might take them on in order to think through how our making-sense (a sense related to making that calls on our embodied knowledge) can help us imagine new possibilities of our bodies and their reach.

The institution of contemporary art is built on a canon of art history centred on European perspectives (Grant and Price 2020). It exists as a set of relations formed out of individual practices that are entangled but not without their own agency in an ecology of white-centred capitalist neoliberalism (Sholette, Charnley and Lippard 2017). This set of relations that forms the ecology of today's contemporary art and the inequality we find around and among it has complex and entangled relationships to historical projects of empire. The thick residue of colonialism present in the structures of our cultural institutions (Grant and Price 2020) indicate the long linage upon which our work now stands. While contemporary art organizations have begun to acknowledge their colonial legacies, contemporary art will always stand upon a foundation that is in fact not so contemporary.

Critical engagement begins with rendering these structures and their foundations as visible sites of intervention and interference (Barad 2007). As an artist, this

engagement is a process of creating and disseminating knowledge through artmaking, which allows us to call on the knowledge of our bodies (the making-senses). As artists, we interpret our encounter with phenomena creatively (in creation of something) as a means to make sense of it. This creation, or making, is a means to learn and be taught of phenomena. Likewise, this making offers to the world a new encounter; a perspective, a provocation, an image that in turn finds its own pedagogic moments with those it encounters. Contemporary art is thus undeniably pedagogic. That is to say that it is undeniably entangled (Barad 2007) in teaching and learning. This is the case both in the way that artists encounter the world, and in the way their work encounters its audience.

Since art has such agency in shaping our understanding of the world, how we imagine and how we create images has been intimately and intrinsically related to our constructions of worlds and their realities. Our perceptions of realties are formed along with the 'permanent marks... left on bodies', which have defined the conditions of emergence (119). My work, which manifests as various forms of artwork, has been particularly concerned with exclusionary modes of imaging, which prescribe and map imaginations of a cultural other onto my body through an identification politics installed by the colonial.

Locating our bodies

Deleuze (1990) famously grapples with Spinoza's question: 'What can a body do?' He writes: 'We do not even know what a body is capable of...' and 'we do not even know of what affections we are capable, nor the extent of our power' (226). As a compound of hydrogen and oxygen, water courses through our veins; it does not merely give us life but gives us bodies, too. Our bodies are about sixty to ninety per cent water (Guyton 1976). Water gives us substance both metaphorically and literally. It hardens our bones and seeps out in tears and sweat and blood and love. In their undeniable biological actuality our bodies are bodies of water (Neimanis 2013). To ask what can our bodies do, is to isolate and question our sets of capacities and actions, of which we are an assemblage of, and consider the potentials and possibilities of our bodies (Judith Butler in Examined Life 2008).

The semiotic potentials of performing water are apparent. A tear that has already departed the socket of an eye continues to perform emotion as its rolls down the face, unconscious of its ability to articulate and communicate what it cannot feel—a kind of inherited expression that it carries with it. Both the expression and reception of what is communicated is co-created by a set of relations between the tear, its maker and its viewer. This moment of cocreation with other bodies of water opens out into a reciprocal exchange of affect and the becoming affected by both human and non-human matter and matters in the entanglement (Barad 2007) of porous watery bodies (Neimanis 2017). Even in a photograph a tear is articulate.

Our liquids can affirm the authenticity of our embodied experience even over distance. As a former online sex worker, I have felt my liquids affirm the authenticity of my performance through the webcam. These liquid displays of visual communication are more obvious ways bodies can perform porosity. In these performances to the camera our liquids align performance with reality through fluids mediated by pixels, triggering entangled bodies across the world to react with their own leaky bodies, oozing other bodies into the world. The potential to trigger a synesthetic response leads to a mapping of pleasure and trauma from one body onto another—a pedagogic encounter leaving permanent marks (Barad 2007: 119) on bodies and territories. Synaesthesia (Martin 2018), an experience in which one sensation (the visual, for instance) provokes another subjectively experienced sensation (ecstasy or pain, for instance) allows us to map onto the visual a cognitive response that exists as the assemblage of crossings between what we imag(in)e, what we feel and what we see. What we see is both informed by our cognitive tools (ones developed from previous encounters) and informs that cognition going forwards. It is through specific intra-actions (Barad 2007), such as the visual analysis that occurs when we encounter images, that bodies like particles under observation take on the properties they do. These crossings form a pedagogy of the making-senses, which through the cognitive process of making sense forms a teaching and learning relationship between sensation, intelligence and the matter(s) of our bodies.

Astrida Neimanis (2013) in her fleshing out of watery bodies sought to locate herself in the world by looking to Merleau-Ponty and an onto-epistemology rooted in

embodied experience. Watery bodies, Neimanis (2013: 36) writes, are 'specifically situated in relation to specific waters... in ways that cannot be dissociated from politics, economics, coloniality and privilege'. The implications of these leaky performances thus mark out our profound implicitness in the storm, while our ability to affect upon one another also suggests an ability to escape.

Such a storm is also determined by the wetness of other bodies, the wetness of our environments, the architecture that holds such bodies, the systems of apparatus that keep it all in the suspended tension of being held. This forms a puddle, a microcosm of the aforementioned ecology in/with which we practice, and since reality is always 'greater than the sum of its parts' (Golding 2010), matter is generative in its intra-activity (Barad 2007). The location of the puddle as a site (such as contemporary art), continues to manipulate the way 'we' and it operate, generating the worlds that we inhabit.

Increasingly we are forced to become more aware of our entanglements. Covid-19 has made us hyper-aware of our edges and our unavoidable wet and porous bodies, one body spewing into another. The impact of this has emerged not only in loss of life, but also in our politics, economics, coloniality and privilege. The social reality of our entanglements has revealed itself in these patterns of interference. Relations are not derivative of bodies, insomuch as bodies (and their identities) are derivative of relations. That is to say, 'we' have intra-actively (Barad 2007) been written by one another. We co-create the realities one another live.

This 'we' is a complex 'we' formed of individual I's, which are each entangled and existing in plurality. This is not *only* to say that they exist in any given moment as consisting of more than one body (collectively transversal (Braidotti 2019: 145)) entangled with other 'I's' (Chan 2020: 28-29) or bodies within bodies (Neimanis 2013), but also that reality exists as more-than-individuals (the sum of its parts) (Golding 2010) and that they are existing in multiple modes and states at once (Bayley 2014).

These relations are not only principal to what they are relating to but are essential to their existence; such relating made the related what it has just become, and what it is becoming. All things are constantly in influential interfering exchange: in co-creation. The plural 'I' then, which makes up complex 'we's', is the matter (and radical matter

(Golding 2018)) of the puddle (the who), making up what matters (the what) and what's mattering (the why).

To perform porosity as we intra-act (Barad 2017) with our juices, our waste, our kisses, our love and our waters, to be in touch with the non-humans and our habitats, to be in tune, attuned (Golding 2010) is to first acknowledge that we are implicit: that we flow through all entities materially, as much they flow their course through us (Neimanis 2017). To understand that each and every provocation acts like a drop of water, that freely flows towards other bodies of water, diluting or transforming, freezing or boiling, breathing or speaking; to understand that our bodies of water are a collection of such drops of water, that our flesh is water, and our minds are water, is to acknowledge our commons in the puddle.

Locating the site

A puddle of water is a locale that holds these ontological and material temporalities[{note}]1 and all their possible constellations.[{note}]2 In this suspended state of tension, the surface of this body is shiny, seemingly so because of an apparent homogeneity and blissful stillness. But such a surface is never still, nor is it homogenous. It is restless and ungraspable. If I attempt to touch this surface, it withdraws into its body. The possibilities of this body's arrangement appear infinite.

Yet, when water emerges (say from a spring, or the tap) it does not, and cannot, move haphazardly in any and whatever direction, but rather it chooses the quickest pilgrimage back to itself (a larger and more established body of water: a pool, a puddle, a river, the sea and so forth). On that journey we find out that someone has tiled the banks of the River Anthropocene and this architecture now splashes back at us, intra-acts with us, while all the while we are implicit in the geography of that landscape. We are implicit in the way we move.

The niggling problem for a diffractive methodology is that often there are strict and rigid frameworks within which one is expected to move. This has inevitably given more voice to some than others. Zakiyyah Jackson (2015) called our attention to critical perspectives of normality offered by Race and Gender scholars, pointing out its

overwhelming lack of acknowledgement by the New Materialisms, at the expense of an inclusive intersectional overlapping of diffracted readings that acknowledge a multitude of points of entry and departure. The past is alive in the warmth of the present tense, not merely as an affective experience of the individual or collective but as a result of that experience at once living and becoming; the water will remember and remembers in the now.

In other words, a diffractive methodology still moves within the status quo of systems of control inherited from a history of inequality. Although it is true that there may be infinite possibilities of becoming, it is not true to say that anything is possible in the same way. The tiled banks have set the course for a particular journey. An overwhelming white light shines its torch into the prism, eliminating any specific, particular, differing embodied experience from elsewhere in the puddle of socio-cultural, historic and political specificities—the surface appearing homogenous. The puddle attempts to neutralize, assimilate, melt ice into water. To decolonize is to seek difference within what is forcibly held in homogeneity of empire—the established mode of reading and being read by the colonial apparatus of its social structure. Attempts to align (assimilate) oneself in accordance to the architecture as apparatus (Barad 2003, 2007) is to still operate with a colonial mindset. That is not to say that assimilation is not an influential move; in fact it is significantly influential to that which it assimilates.

Locating the apparatus

Apparatus, as Karen Barad (2003) says following Niels Bohr, are not passive observing instruments. On the contrary, 'they are productive of (and part of) phenomena' (Barad 2007: 199). This means that there is no separation between object and apparatus; that a phenomenon is the object/apparatus relations, by which exists the world as phenomena.[{note}]3 Our bodies and their movements are both created and defined by the apparatus that observes us.

In another system of apparatus, the Chinese character for water [水], is a simple pictogram of a river running between two banks [>|<]. Land is depicted as broken lines, while water is depicted as a continuous and complete through line. Interestingly, the I

Ching [易经] depicts yang as a complete line [-] and yin as a broken line [- -]. Why is this interesting? Well, the apparatus of Yin and Yang, or [-] and [- -] are considered the binary that determines phenomena; they determine the world much like binary code, [0] and [1], determines the digital. Water and land are written as binary opposites. The underscoring commonality between the *I Ching* and binary code is the assumption that everything can be articulated (and thus understood) through a binary system, and that the simultaneity of existing opposites is not only desirable but ontologically essential.

The possibilities of our ontologies are limited by the epistemological maps from which are drawn the bounds of our imagination. These examples of reading, understanding and also writing phenomena illustrate the creative roles we have upon reality. Since these conditions of phenomena must be accounted for in the totality of the momentary situation, in order to escape their limitations, one objective of performing porosity must be to find a mutual co-creative synthesis of its theory and praxis, apparatus and phenomenon. The symbiotic relationship of theory and praxis demands a practice of unity, which due to its simultaneous emergence is unpredictable, yet might reveal what one or the other may otherwise conceal. Methods of reading then must come at the moment of practice, not predicate practice; the 'new' in new materialisms invites this as a 'leap into the future without adequate preparation in the present' (Hinton and van der Tuin 2014: 7).

Performing porosity is to seek the other possibilities, to consider what is impossible as possible, to shift what are established modes of perception, to erode and widen it, as water erodes banks. The question that remains, of course, is why might this be possible? How can we erode the tiled banks? How can we float or fly or freeze?

Locating the method

The first task is to understand that the conditions of the site and its apparatus exists as a construct, one that allows society to patch up an epistemological leak and carry on its existence. What we perceive as site is in intra-active affective entwinement, entangled with our own body, together-becoming. As bodies of water (Neimanis 2013) our edges and surfaces are brought into question. Haraway's notion of 'sympoiesis', a term that

means 'making-with', is helpful here. 'Critters', Haraway writes, 'interpenetrate one another' and form 'ecological assemblages', sites and environments of interpenetrative agents (2016: 58). Agencies mutually contaminate one another, interfering with one another's being and experience. Body to body, our saturated surfaces moisten as they go on to become another's breath, another's voice, a whisper in the wind.

While we might assume captivity in our relationship with the architecture of site, we possess the agency to interfere with its ecology, its economy and its social systems. For example, in watersports (sexual practices involving urine) we might assume a bondage of inescapable fluidity, yet our implicity in submission, our ability and our role in its continuation in fact indicates our ability to interfere with such submission. While the bondage of the ecological framework seems impossible or perhaps to some of us, undesirable to escape, agents need not participate in or perpetuate the existing hierarchy of the dominant/submissive dichotomy. To be in the site and yet not assimilate to its apparatus is to flow in ways unpredictable to the architect's plan. The aim is to express the self through a vocabulary of gestures beyond the architect's language, so that a new language might emerge with it. As agents are in perpetual reactive relation, there is agency to be reactive in opposition: *to be creative*, to spray back and destabilize the dominant. To perform our porosity is not only to 'run like water' (Swift 2020) as in to move metaphorically as though we were water, but to *'be water*, my friend' (Lee 1971)— to acknowledge our materials and thus our interconnectedness to other agents, our potential to become other affective bodies.

Running like water is to increase in entropy; diffraction is to seek out the possibilities of how our material realities are arranged. Latour's (1988) concept of distributed agency tells us that actions are distributed across 'actants' that exist as unfixed and emerging from agential fields of networked intentionality. To perform porosity then requires us not only to become more porous (receptive) but also to make porous other bodies, to perform a porosity *into* other agencies in pedagogic exchange. It is to make receptive the bodies that oppress us.

That which is porous is usually more fragile, its structure is more precarious, yet this affords it many more possible ways of arrangement—many more ways of being. In its nature water will level existing hierarchies, erode high points of the river's bed that

then pool into the wetness of one another. Diffracting our potential as bodies of water allows us to break down normativities. In its movement, water can break down boundaries and challenge long-standing structures, first finding means to circumnavigate them, playfully dancing around any blockades and intrusive dams. Later in its progression it will erode these obstacles and barriers, to eventually set us free from the constructed banks of the river, free from the need for diversions of protest.

In arts research, diffraction can provide routes to new modes of practice that are, arguably, well placed to navigate the system with the kinds of complex spite required of the radical subversive in our contemporary moment and practice on the embodied edges of knowing. Performing porosity is to acknowledge and embody the ontology of a being-in-practice, a work-in(g) progress, an 'identity (or ontology if you will) as *in-process'* (Bayley 2014: 33), a momentary glimpse of absolute contentedness (Chan 2019) in the face of violent stasis and the aggressive pace of capitalist time, to undermine the prevailing now (Chan and Davis 2019–) and to create a 'crashing wave of potentiality' embodied by queering, diffracting, dreaming and transcending the 'here and now' (Muñoz 2009: 185). Performing porosity as research is generative of its apparatus. Its methods of reading are born in response to praxis, and praxis in desire of entropy. This disorienting process seeks to refine research questions by looking ahead of knowledge.

Diffraction can envision the same site as it shatters and sprays in excited romantic violence into new spaces of difference(s) where dappled light can find its stage (Mavor 2007). To perform porosity, to play in your own waters, to employ diffraction, is to practice with instinct, to enact theories yet imagined, theorize praxis yet in play and doing so right at the cusp of their emergence. The method is located in *in(tra)determinacy* and calls on a kind of improv' in place of postulation. In her essay, 'Troubling time/s and ecologies of nothingness' (2017), Barad describes quantum indeterminacy as 'not a form of unknowingness, nor even a kind of formlessness; rather, it is a dynamism that entails its own undoings from within… [T]he dynamism of quantum in/determinacy' she writes, 'can be found *within physics'*.

Thus, while our critical engagement begins with rendering the structures of colonialism, the architectures of empire and the spaces of our imag(in)ing as visible

sites of intervention and interference (Barad 2007) we continue to occupy them, recognizing that they are neither inapplicable nor in-affective. They occupy us as intra-active agents as much as we can occupy them. The application *of in(tra)determinacy* therefore recognizes that not only does contemporary art entail its own 'undoing from within', but that all its constituent parts are also acting agents—an institution is formed of individuals: a complex 'we'. In(tra)determinacy is not a state or a condition but a *doing*, an intra-active *undoing*—a kind of self-touching that triggers distance crossings of sense and the senses, forming new or perpetuating old perceptions, images and imaginations. The goal of performing porosity is to acknowledge our material embodied ability and knowledge, its entanglements with the conditions of the socio-political, tend towards high entropy and to accept an ephemeral and temporal location: a changing state of matter and meaning that resists being done or a *way things are*.

The question that is left is what will replace the future when the future goes away?

Notes

1 Further to describing our relationship with time, temporalities is also the name given to secular possessions of the church such as land, or nowadays stocks and shares, owned to provide financial support (Coreden 2007). Temporalities, as opposed to spiritualities, were therefore earthly material possessions required only in the moment in order to move socially and economically within the systems of society.

2 Constellations have long helped us to orientate ourselves in the world, locate us geographically (as in astronomy) and guide us spiritually (as in astrology).

3 To illustrate the object and apparatus relation, we can look to the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) as an example. The LHC produces images of particle collisions that are then articulated digitally into a decipherable and programmed language allowing scientists to understand phenomenon (CERN n.d.). The image, the mapping of performativity, is not simply or merely of the particle collision but rather encompasses

the phenomenon of the moment in totality, including the perspective, the technology, the screen, the software's coding, the coffee, the imagination and so forth. In fact, the very existence of the phenomenon (that of two independent particles in collision) is dependent on the apparatus and imag(in)ing of its possibilities before, in time and after, existing in a plural now.

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