Open
Articulations

Matthew Bejtlich
MFA Graphic Design Thesis, 2021

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Matthew Bejtlich
Rhode Island School of Design
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Abstract

Open Articulations invites an exchange between human and environmental worlds through cycles of improvisation, reflection, and rebirth. It is a study of how exchanges emerge, what forms they can take, how they are mediated, and how we can sustain them with each other and with our surroundings. Through our coordinated immersion in landscapes and our spontaneous creation in them through frameworks encouraging play, we channel the spirit of a jazz drummer riffing with his midnight quartet, exchanging rhythms, images, sounds, movements, and textual fragments. A gentle breath, a flickering sensation, a gesture: expressions of a specific time rooted in a specific place.

The thesis is a window into how we experience and perceive landscapes in our own way through places that are often geographically separated, and how we find a sense of belonging in place through our improvisation and mindful presence in these spaces. Through a call and response with each other and with our own environments, we become motivated to explore new directions in our spaces, to take creative risks, and to nurture a more forgiving atmosphere, embracing our own and others' mistakes. In making participatory archives of our experiences, we open a collective space for multiple voices to be heard and explore a shared history of a territory, thus offering new ways of understanding a place and each other. Together, our voices find new resonance points, commonalities, contrasts, and tunings, and our expressions take on new meaning as a result. This in turn shapes our next engagement with the world.

Movements

Matthew Bejtlich, *Early morning in Acadia National Park*, 2019.

01
Opening

Dear design and music lover,

Thank you dearly for your time and interest in reading this book. Whether you are holding it in your hands now or viewing it on your desktop or mobile screen, I hope it conveys a sense of warmth. An important aspect of my work involves the many deep conversations with professors, researchers, fellow collaborators, friends, and acquaintances that have helped to shape and inspire my interests and way of thinking. This thesis captures my journey in life to this point, my perception of what design, photography and sound are, and how they can be used together.

I like to think that my role as a designer is to ignite a series of playful and open articulations. An articulation is a creative expression, a jumping off point, a conversation starter, a connection. Open articulations are feelings, flickerings, observations, movements, beliefs, sensations, reflections, sounds, photographs, and gestures. The exchanges I am talking about are produced only in the moment through improvisation and persistent nurturing. They are site specific, and they depend on our close attention and immersion in environments.

Nature inspires us to play. When we allow ourselves to fully immerse in a space that gives us comfort, whether it is in nature or of human design, we often feel rejuvenated, even healed. We observed this as children, when we felt free to play without the pressures of social norms or expectations. We notice a different sensation, a sound, a vibration, a connection. We listen not through our ears, but through our body, through our feet and pores. By improvising in our environments mindfully, we acquire knowledge about a place, which prompts reflection and further play. We return with familiarity to the location, which becomes a place of creative capacity. I have noticed this too — it is a feeling of bonding — when sharing an experience with someone else, whether it is walking, kayaking, or another activity. These initial

engagements, sensations, sounds and shared experiences, I believe, are the building blocks for connection and community. Immersing ourselves fully in landscapes sparks us to play and create together.

When we get older we tend to forget how to play, and playing can become more difficult. Through this erosion of play, our connection with landscapes and the values that have shaped who we are also erodes. How do we regain our ability to play? How do we allow ourselves to interact with spaces in a way that is more natural, fluid, and organic?

I am interested in building frameworks for participative play through which people are inspired to immerse and engage with the world and create spontaneously — and to feel nurtured by others while doing so. We live in a fluid, constantly changing world, and through our daily encounters we develop unique ties with places. All of us may have a slightly different viewpoint on the same place or activity. I recognize each of those experiences as valid and true. I want to build the capacity in the design process and its outcomes to reflect this dynamic and plural state of living, and to make sure that each voice is authentically represented.

Through the exchange of creative expressions (via sound, movements, images, and text), I am interested in how we can explore a shared history of a territory, thus offering new ways of understanding a place and each other. We can consider perspectives that may be different from our present view of the world. We can become more elastic in our mindsets. My vision is to represent something not as static or fixed, true or false, good or bad, but as of the moment — as direct, incandescent, immediate, growing, and changing. To build the capacity for randomness and spontaneity. To give people the tools to help develop an active presence, and through this presence find new modes of creative expression and dialogue. It is through the looseness of play that interpretive innovation can begin and that productivity can emerge from ambiguity. When we share our experience of place together, this creates a new elevated zone where we can revere a place and honor what it has offered us. It sparks future engagement through play.

My attention is on *how* the articulation is performed.

To articulate openly is to build a sandcastle. I was at Sagamore Beach on the Cape last weekend, where I noticed two children playing in

the sand doing cartwheels. The first child said, "What are you going to make today?" The second child said, "I don't know." The first child exclaimed, "You can make anything you want!" The implication here is that the sandcastle is going to wash away anyway, so be in the moment and just make something.

This experience hit me in the gut, for it reminded me of myself. As a 10-year-old I would move like a gazelle through the shadowy pine trees of my backyard, covered in mud as I played a game of tag with my friends. As a 29-year-old, I still am very much like this. You might see me in the forest jumping in red fishing pants amongst the pine and rock. This is the action captured in the cover image. As children we learn to engage in the essence of play, by exploring new affordances of our environment through touch, taste, smell and hearing, and by practicing our technique through repetition. And through that grounding comes a sense of energy from the Earth. Practice and improvisation rebound off of each other in a call and response. For me, improvisation is the impetus for practice and reflection.

As I have grown up, sport has been the structure through which I channel my play, develop my affinity for movements, and nurture relationships. Sport, much like jazz performance, is a form of communal improvisation. We learn to connect with each other through doing, through listening and responding, and through having an invested shared interest. Nearly every Tuesday since the pandemic started, I have gone down to the tennis courts at 8:30 pm to hit the ball with friends from my old college tennis team. It has been my secondary abode, a place to unwind and be fully myself.

The sport has six qualities of playful exchange that resonate with me.

(1) Tennis is physical: The body is the material object. The exchanges are site specific, and how we play depends on sensed environmental factors (e.g., wind and sun).

(2) Tennis is incredibly improvisational: We keep the point alive through spontaneous adjustments. Each point deserves a positive and fresh mindset. It requires us to be locked into the moment, to be grounded, and to trust our own intuition.

(3) Tennis is reflective: Through regular practice and incorporating learnings from improvisation, we tune our technique and acquire understanding.

(4) Tennis is nurturing: We create an atmosphere that embraces each other's strengths and weaknesses, and we can go with the flow together. We share an agreement to be intentional, open, honest, and patient.

(5) Tennis is synergistic: The whole of our experiences is greater than the sum of their parts.

(6) Tennis is mediated: The air provides a channel, a bridge, for connections to be made physically, directly, and through sound in real time. The medium defines the nature and the timing of exchanges. We put aside small differences in favor of the major common interest of the group.

Whether I am setting a stage on a tennis court or a large-scale photography lightbox for my own performance of play (see *Kinesthetic*) or orchestrating a group walk carried out by participants dispersed across continents (see *Walk Journals*), my childhood instinct for improvisation and my structural learnings from sport remain at the heart of my design practice. The exchange of "open articulations" lays a structural foundation for further creative outcomes, carried out across multiple media.

My thesis book exists as a series of nine deliberate and improvised conversational exchanges. I saw the interview form as an opportunity to speak with people that have inspired me on my creative journey as a designer and engineer. I was interested in studying the conditions under which some of the creators I most admire produce their own work. I spoke with a graphic designer, a painter, a dancer, a musician, a cultural coordinator, a photographer, a DJ, an architect, and a theoretical physicist. Often I invited my partner in conversation to respond to a previously discussed concept, producing a chain-like connection among the exchanges. At other times I juxtaposed a quote from another interview that I saw to be related or relevant, even if I did not share it directly during the conversation. This network manifests itself in a nonlinear fashion in the book. While I carried out the interviews in one sequence, in the thesis they are presented in an order corresponding with my projects. These conver-

sations are also paired with short anecdotal references or quotes (both in green type) that appear throughout the book. These are meant to provide bridges between my research and the theories and practices of others. I invite you to enter and find your own pathways through the conversations, my accompanying projects, and the sources I cite.

My thesis consists of five main projects: *Kinesthetic, Open Articulations*, *Walk Journals*, and *They Sink*, and this thesis book itself, which carries out a mapping of conversations. Within the book, too, sub-projects are provided that show my design process and progress during my time at RISD. I invite you to use the glossary of principles (p. 14) to help understand these projects and the nature of the exchanges in them. I experiment with mediums of exchange (sound, image, text), different latencies of exchange, whether physical or virtual (0, 0.2s, 1 day, 3 months), different intervals of participation (daily, monthly, and irregular), and different geographies (beach, forest, and urban landscape).

Each of my projects in this book is paired with an interview or interview series. The work is in direct dialogue with some of the exciting projects of my contemporaries. As these conversations were occurring, my projects were in various stages of completion. The dialogue exchanges served as a form of critique and generation of ideas. Through them I received multiple interpretations of the same work from people of far-ranging backgrounds. Everyone who spoke with me is intrinsically a component of the end result of the projects, and I am grateful for their perspectives. The conversations are a core part of my thesis, and I view them as the fifth project. I look forward to sustaining and growing these relationships after graduate school.

I have found that I have my best ideas when playing alongside invested collaborators. Together we make our strongest work. Embodied within this book are the traces and tonal accents of these exchanges. Breathless acts. Careful watchings. Open and conjoined articulations. Here is my side of it. What is yours?

After each conversation I asked each contributor to share a song that had been resonating with them at that moment. As you read this book, I would like to invite you to listen along and contribute your own song(s) if you would like.

lnk.to/openarticulations

Glossary

1. Nurturing

   Building an open and forgiving atmosphere in which all participants may explore a living relationship to themselves, each other, and the Earth.

2. Sensing

   Inviting continual immersion in environments and attunement to their changing conditions through mindful presence.

3. Orchestrating

   Coordinating a stage and mindset through which participants can play.

4. Improvising

   Playing spontaneously, intuitively, and with a sense of immediacy to explore divergent ways of being.

5. Arranging

   Witnessing and tuning arrangements of shared artifacts (experiences, knowledge, and creations) together to discover new connections and build critical knowledge.

6. Reflecting

   Distilling major learnings from the group or self and adjusting play accordingly.

7. Mediating

   Understanding the role of the temporal delays intrinsic to the medium of exchange and their effects on maintaining connection with each other and the Earth. Seeking superordinate objectives.

8. Repeating

   Sustaining activity and engagement by bouncing between improvisation and reflection.

9. Synergizing

   The whole of our experiences is greater than the sum of their parts.

Foundational Work
2017–2020

Arlia Jacket, 2019. A billowy jacket created from my father's 50-year-old spinnaker sail. Made in RISD's In/On/Between, a class exploring the intersection of apparel, sustainability, and technology. Instructor: Catherine Andreozzi.

Arlia Jacket: Album Cover, 2019. Album cover made from photographs of the upcycled jacket. Made in RISD's Graduate Form II as part of a daily form study. Instructor: Keetra Dixon.

Arlia Jacket: Installation, 2019. In the audio-visual component, visitors are invited to try on the jacket, and their gestures are superimposed back onto archival sailing footage in real-time. While moving around, the visitors learn of the rich historical and cultural significance of the garment through audio recordings about upcycling practice and other personal maritime stories. Collaboration with Misha Gehring, a student at Brown University. Frame from video (01:00). Instructor: Catherine Andreozzi. Link: https://vimeo.com/431274014.

Series A, 2019. A study of gesture and human movement through stroboscopic photography. Image 1 of 10. Class: RISD Graduate Form II. Instructor: Keetra Dixon.


Series A, 2019. Image 3.

Series A, 2019. Image 2.

Series A, 2019. Image 4.

Magnet, 2020. A short film depicting my perception of space while moving and from fixed positions. It invites the viewer to draw associations and juxtapositions between the synthetic and the natural materials encountered along the way. Made in Graduate Studio II, the prompt asked me to respond to the word "magnet" and to generate a narrative from that starting point. Frame from video (00:33). Link: https://vimeo.com/415366035.
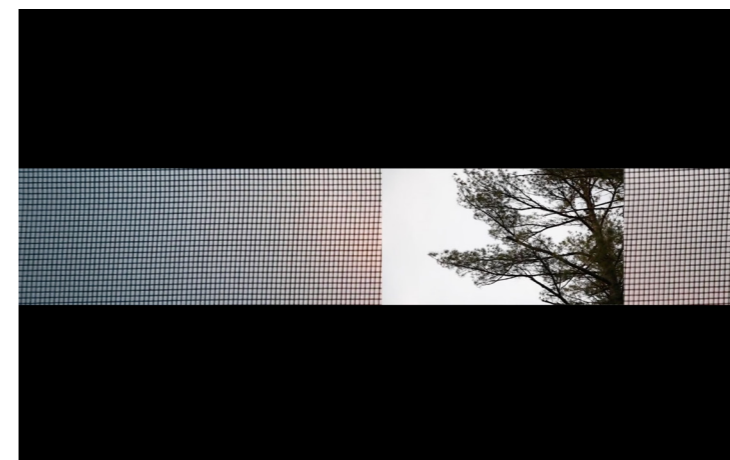
Magnet, 2020. Frame from video (01:19).

Lightness, 2019. Poster design.

Lightness, 2019. A short animation evoking the feeling of lightness through type immersed and filmed in natural environments. Frame from video (00:05). Made under the guidance of Doug Scott in Graduate Type III at RISD. The assignment asked me to generate several square posters and a type animation responding to the word "lightness." I used Italo Calvino's work *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* as research and inspiration, where the subject of lightness is discussed and analyzed. Link: https://vimeo.com/549759960.

Spatial Percussion Through Movement, 2019. An expressive musical composition tool that uses hand gesture to enable the real-time positioning of percussive sounds in spatial audio (ambisonics format). The project was born out of the desire to compose a spatially-located percussi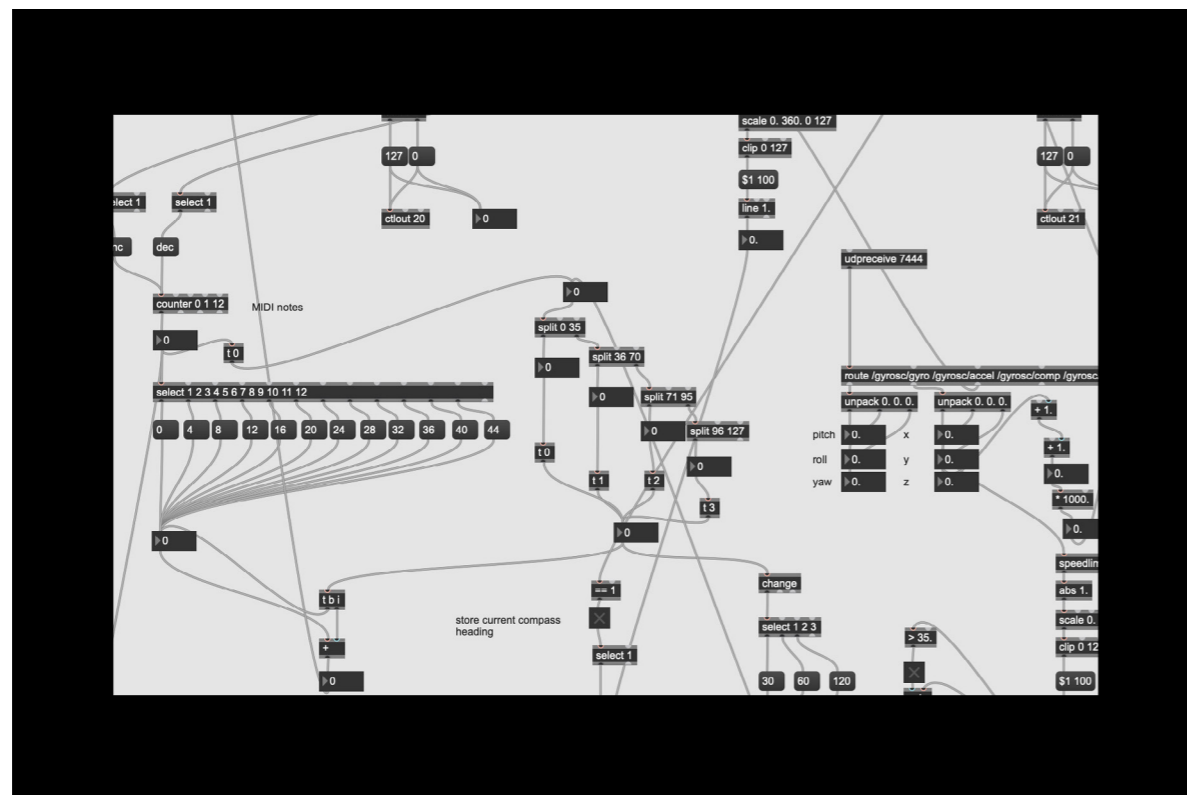ve beat through movement. All drum sounds were recorded manually using a tabla drum. The project was programmed in Max/MSP and in collaboration with Arjun Shah. Instructor: Shawn Greenlee. Frame from video (01:35). Link: https://vimeo.com/549752585.

Spatial Percussion Through Music, 2019. Schematic created in Max/MSP.
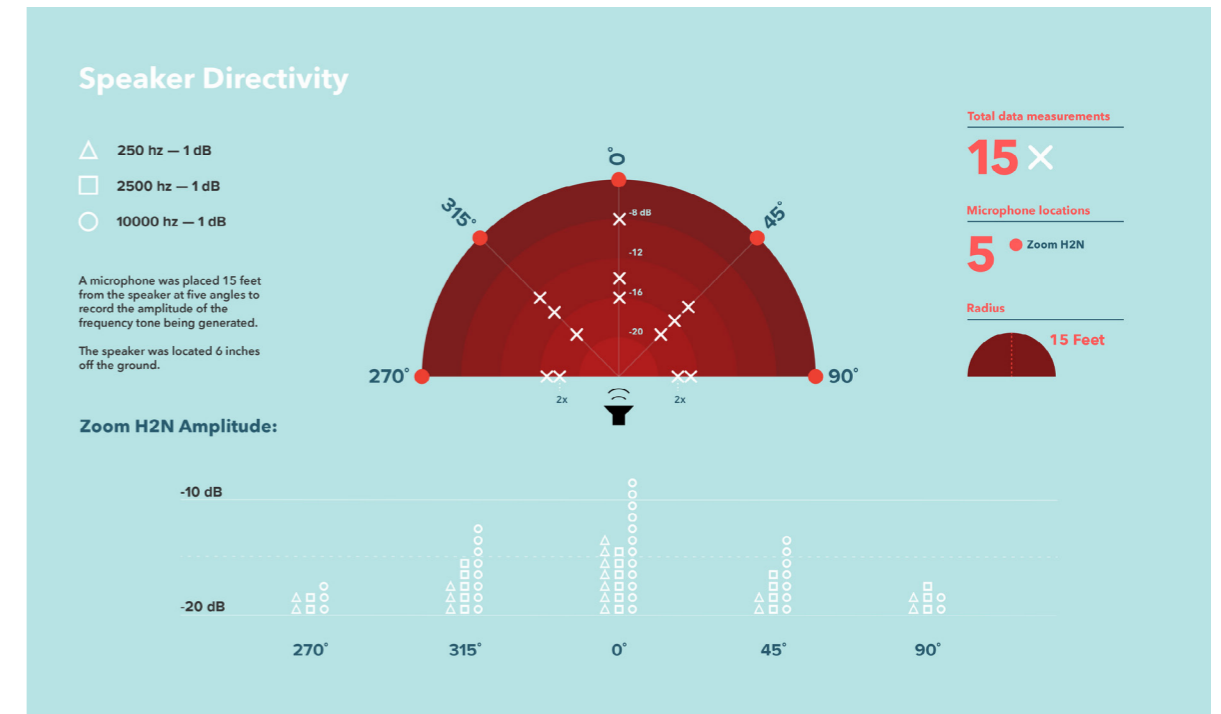
Speaker Design and Visualization, 2018. I designed a speaker from scratch with my collaborator Jorge Tonelli. I then created an experiment to test it and visualize the acoustic data. Directivity is the measure of how directional a source is—in other words, how good the loudspeaker is at transmitting sound in a specific direction. The final performance results indicate, as expected, that the speaker is more directional at higher frequencies. Sounds were produced using a frequency tone generator source at constant amplitude and recorded at five angles using a Zoom H2N microphone.
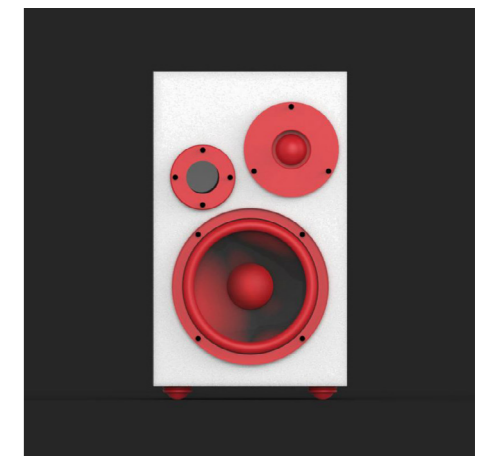
Speaker Design and Visualization, 2018. Front view, rendered in KeyShot.

Speaker Design and Visualization, 2018. Exploded view, rendered in KeyShot.

Nature's Egg, 2018. Frame from video (02:00). The final project in my RISD Design Studio class challenged me to make a video (two minutes or less) showing how to make the perfect hard boiled egg, without using text or voiceover. I completed all shooting and editing in a span of two days. Instructor: Tom Wedell. Link: https://vimeo.com/549752613.
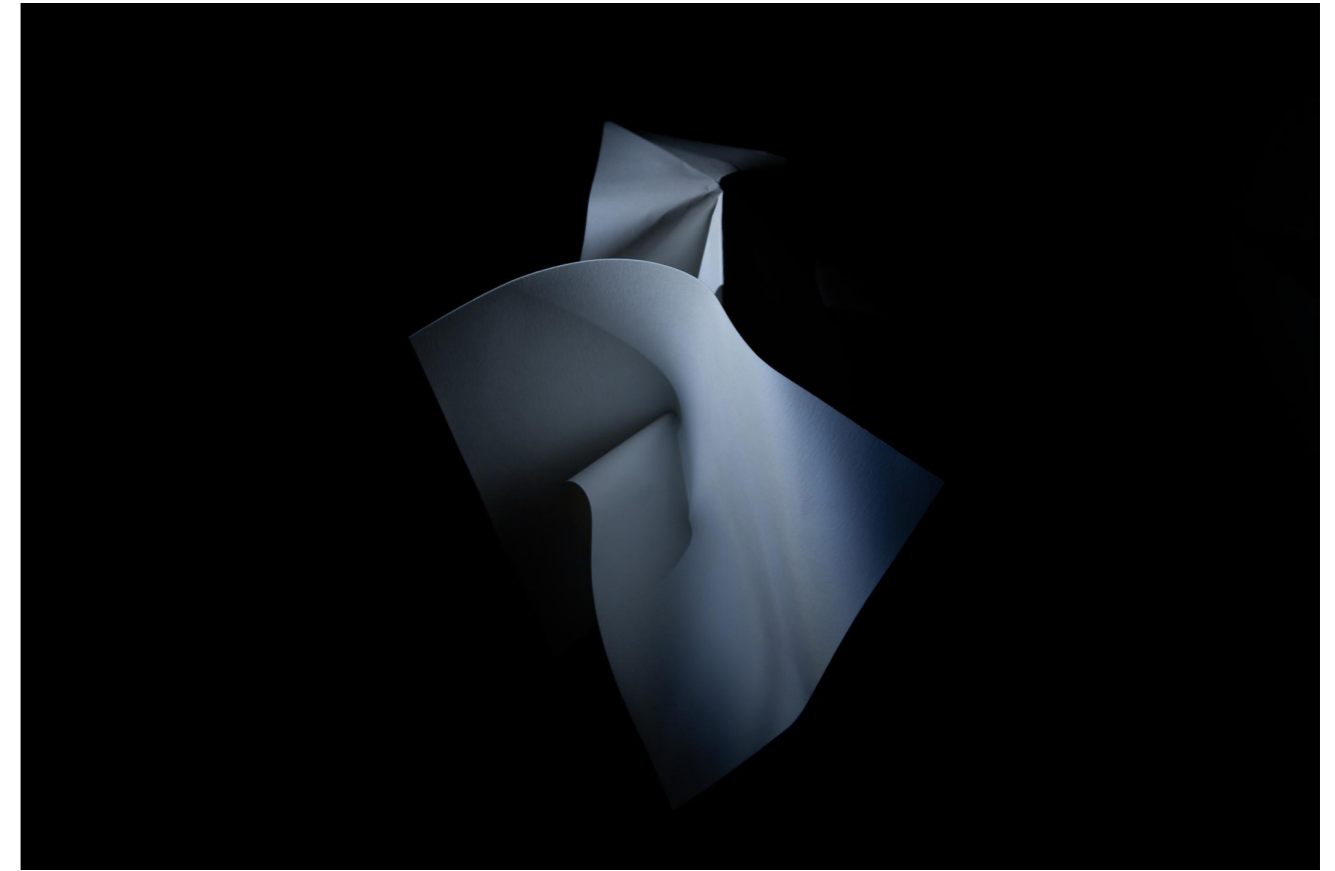
Sculptural Audio, 2018. Visualizing my song, "It's a Secret," using paper folding and photography. The project, born out of RISD's Graduate Form I, challenged me to capture the feeling of a musical composition using a folded paper sculpture. The images shown here were created using a wet paper folding technique, set overnight to dry in abstract forms, and then arranged and photographed. Instructor: Tom Wedell.

Kinesthetic is a photographic project depicting my inner experience while performing routine athletic movements in and around Providence, RI. Flowing through the movements of biking, ping pong, tennis and soccer, sports that are dear to me, the spread arrangement is inspired by that of a musical passage or score, a photographic mapping of my felt emotions.

Conversation with Daryl Smith

Boston, MA
14:00

I like to think of myself as both an orchestrator and performer in a larger system. At its most simple level, I like to work by setting up a stage or event in which I am limited to a few key tools to use expressively. In the case of *Kinesthetic*, the tools were a tripod, camera, landscape, and my body. The outcome is me improvising in a landscape and documenting that movement. I am after a response that is intuitive and flowing, through which I can explore spontaneous and divergent directions through my body's natural movement. The photos in *Kinesthetic* convey my inner experience of playing tennis, biking, ping pong, and soccer from multiple perspectives and angles in time. In the other participatory projects that I will show you, I have extended this concept to a larger group (beyond myself), where we are all making intuitively and in a similar way under a fixed set of conditions.

There's something about me wanting to generate my own source material and allowing others to generate their own source material. What I have learned about in music production is that the quality of sounds that you're working with is incredibly important. If you start with something that's not so good, there is only a certain range you can go to transform it. And I think it works this way with photography as well—if you start with rich, honest, authentic material, you can transform it in many ways, or maybe you decide not to transform it at all. I have come to appreciate graphic design as a force for transforming. I am becoming increasingly sensitive to the power of transformation: the types, the intensities, and their effects. What is the cost of this process and to whom? Where is transformation not needed? Preserving the rawness and pureness of the source material is of great importance to me. It gives agency to the creators.

DS
How did the idea for your thesis book come about?

MB
The idea for my book is that it is completely conversation driven. I have realized that my whole experience at RISD has been this spontaneous network of conversations with my professors, with my classmates, and with people outside of school. Maybe the best way for me to weave together my projects is through conversation. My projects emerge from the conversations, as has always been the case in my life. So, I have this idea. And I've already done three interviews. You will be number four. They form a sequential kind of network—I want to think of all of you together. First it was Bradley Zero, Nejc Prah, then Zoé Le Voyer. And I'm actually feeding one of Zoé's statements into our discussion. I like to think of my thesis book and website as an album that we are building together. And every conversation is a song or movement of that album. It is about me curating the sequence of movements, much like a DJ would. I often think about design through the lens of sound.

Matt Bejtlich, *Algorithmic Quilt*, 2019. A quilt made from upcycled fabric from my grandmother's unfinished collection. Utilized Houdini 3D animation software to iterate on algorithmically generated patterns in order to find a desired composition. Link: https://vimeo.com/432351085.

DS
I am fascinated by your range of interests. I had figured that you had taken the photos on the *Kinesthetic* book spreads, as well as your upcycled quilt project on your website, but I wasn't sure. Can you speak to this?

MB
Thank you. I did take the photos in the *Kinesthetic* project. I have always been a curious person who likes to participate in many activities and move between them quickly. I am interested in how things work, maybe to a granular degree. This is what has moved me between athletics, electrical engineering, design, photography, and music production. Noticing the connections that emerge—that's what's really interesting to me. You see something from an athletic, kinesthetic point of view, and then you see how that translates into photography. And vice versa. You hear how a sound can leave an impression and then how that's moved into the visual space. Data is what binds all of these creative forms together. It is about finding those interconnections in the space between them that fascinates me as a designer.

DS
Do you remember when you were young? Was it important to you that you felt connected? Do you have any siblings?

MB
Yes, I have a sister, Emily. I was raised in a house in the woods in the countryside. It had always been important growing up that I felt connected with others and part of something bigger than myself, sharing in a larger vision. Right now, during this pandemic, I am playing tennis indoors a few times a week, which has kept me sane. This past year, the ability to go down at 8:00pm and hit with my friends is something I look forward to throughout the day. You know, in some ways, it's just having that infrastructure, much like the projects in my thesis, where it's kind of like holding each other a little bit accountable within the participatory exercise. And there is an excitement that comes from sports. That's really it. You know, it's motivating. It's a challenge to improve yourself. Tennis is naturally an improvisational activity. You come to a match with a skillset and mental approach, but every single time you hit the ball, it's at a slightly different angle, velocity, and direction. It is about trusting your intuition, committing, and quickly responding to the ball.

DS

It's a team effort, right?

MB

It's often a team effort. I mean, tennis can be an individual sport, but it can also be a double sport. I enjoy playing doubles because of the comradery of it. It is the energy your partner brings and their actions that inspire your own performance. And vice versa. It is this support system and nurturing spirit that I want to bring into my design practice. I tried to do that through projects like *Open Articulations* and *Walk Journals*.

DS

There is something you're doing, Matt, that I wrote down. Participation is really important to you. And participation is not a solo activity by nature. Participation means multiple individuals, right? So that's interesting, this idea that you're working off of play. At the heart of everything is that it matters to you that there is participation. And the reason it matters is because the human family is not solo. It's inherently participatory. Even before modern technology, the world has always been agrarian. Societies were surviving because they helped one another, right? Through farming and gardening together.

MB

I think that "participatory" is the best word to describe my creative approach. A driving motivation for my thesis is to help present a multitude of perspectives or personal experiences in a multi-modal fashion: the plural narrative. I have this book in front of me, the *Power of Narrative in Environmental Networks* by Lejano et al. (2013). It is about connecting people in communities through more intangible modes, such as through memory, values, stories, sensations, and beliefs. This is what inspired me to want to start mapping my day-to-day experience with others. What can we get when we put all of these perspectives together? Can there be an alignment? Can there be consensus? I wanted to talk about your magazine, *RE:KIN*. I love the main themes of soul, home, and community. How did the publication come about?

DS

The purpose of the magazine is to help all of us just be better to one another. That's it. That's the only reason why it exists. The "Soul" focuses on practices that we can do individually that help us be better to ourselves. For example, reading a little bit every day, an attentiveness to what you eat, or taking time to stretch — things that are a healthy part of any start of the day. These are usually solo things we do to regroup, but they can be with others too. The natural thing that would happen after that is typically in the setting of our homes, wherever we are. If we're living alone or with others. How do we treat one another in the prosaic? How do we treat the mundane and the quotidian, if you will?

If I'm taking time to stretch, read, and write in the morning, then that puts me in a good spot, and I just am feeling better and more grounded. Then, whatever circles I'm in, in the home setting, I can be more helpful. I can listen better; I can laugh more. In the "Home" we can participate together, and whatever the day holds, we can do it together. The natural thing after that is to look at what is going on in your streets, the "Community." The best people to help our neighbors are ourselves. It's not the government. It's the people that we live by. It's the people that we know. There are other things that can help, but the best help is found in those that we are the closest to in proximity and in our hearts. So that's what *RE:KIN* is set up to do. If we can all do this in our small corners of the world, and if we're all doing it, then eventually we'll all interact.

MB

I am curious to hear what your next steps are for the magazine. I think it's beautiful that you started it with the help of your brother. I think it can grow.

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That's really thoughtful of you. Thank you for asking those questions. I have to say, working on it with my brother Dave, he embodied this way of being: he would drive around in his truck and look for ways to help people. That's just how he was. He was living here in Cambridge and would walk into Harvard Square and spend time talking to the homeless because he wanted to. He just did it. He taught me so many things. It was such a blessing to live together as adults. David would always say, "we have what we need, we have what we need. We have each other."

DS

The ordinary and quotidian is life. That is what becomes inspiration to me. The bigger events, if we look at birthdays, holidays, something like graduation . . . there are so few of those, and what I have been interested in over the years is how we can find unity together and happiness within the prosaic. Since that is really where life is lived. My observation is that our life ends up being some total of the prosaic moments. It really matters how we treat the ordinary. I can give you an example: laundry. I find it therapeutic. I see the purpose in it. For example, my brother is not here now with [me], but when it was our turn to assist in that, it enabled us to have clean clothes to sleep in and to wear the next day. The higher purpose became sacred in a way. That means we can help others and feel better ourselves. How do we be content in the prosaic? All the happiness you need is there.

MB

Can you speak a little bit to the idea of giving attention to the ordinary moments in life?

MB

I wanted to share a quote with you from my interview with Zoé Le Voyer. She is talking about her project, Out.of.the.blue.map, exploring the liminality of border regions in the Mediterranean. It reminded me a little of your project, because your work is also about capturing qualities that are not always tangible, but felt within a people and place. Zoé said: "What's very subjective is the maps that we are given to see. It depends on who makes the map. And it also depends, when you speak about knowledge of a territory, who makes the archive? What does the archive say? What happens to knowledge of a territory when it's not included in the archive? Where does it go? Like, does it disappear? Where does it go? Well, it's kept in people's memory and habits. And it's shared for generations, but at some point, like some languages, it just disappears because it's not passed on anymore" (Le Voyer 2021, 140). Could I get your reaction to it? I am specifically interested in how you went about capturing some of the human stories, rituals, and memories that are often considered forgotten or maybe even "mundane," but are worth sharing. What does it mean to give life and voice to these moments (or place them on a map), and for these stories to live on through people?

"Relationships are like plants." *RE_KIN magazine.* 001 (02.3.2020) Print issue: page unknown. (Displaying photography by Scott Webb and Josefa Holland Merfen, text by unknown).

"What's very subjective is the maps that we are given to see. It depends on who makes the map. And it also depends, when you speak about knowledge of a territory, who makes the archive? What does the archive say? What happens to knowledge of a territory when it's not included in the archive? Where does it go? Like, does it disappear? Where does it go? Well, it's kept in people's memory and habits. And it's shared for generations, but at some point, like some languages, it just disappears because it's not passed on anymore" (Le Voyer 2021, 144).

— Conversation with Zoé Le Voyer → p. 140

DS

Working on *RE_KIN* magazine the last several years has brought an unexpected paradigm shift in what the phrase "sense of place" means for me. "Place" has become less about a physical space—though that is important—and more about the concrete reality that "place" is: our individual person or self "having place" (belonging) with those we are closest with. In short, our living (active) attachment to those we hold closest to us is our "sense of place."

The activities we take part in, the objects we keep for long periods of time, the rituals we practice most frequently all find meaning and life through the relationship they hold between ourselves and those we participate with in those activities. Through continual listening, interaction, helping, talking, arguing, working, laughing, understanding, we become connected mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. *RE_KIN* magazine's purpose is to have a gathering place of these binding, quotidian, one-on-one exchanges that happen at different points of any and every day and that in time become the literal core of our present self (experience) and our overall happiness.

Another reason for "mapping" (through a print magazine) these mostly mundane exchanges is to help uncover the obvious resource that the present provides all of us in understanding ourselves, others, and togetherness. We are unable to change what has happened in the past or solidify what may happen two months from now. We only have right now. So yes, we can rest any worry of the past or future and slowly, deliberately dwell with and in the present together.

"Do you see what I see? Can you sense what I sense? As part of perceiving together, we build collective knowledge of shared experiences. Collective sensing is creating history by acknowledging our common sense. It is reality-building, the way we define truths. But beyond sharing the exact same experience, it is also accepting that other experiences are valid. Collective sensing asks us to build tolerance for diversity in how we perceive the world. [. . .]. Collective sensing invites individuals to partake in empathy building. Creative tools [. . .] can provide new ways to sense and perceive outside of our narrow notions of perception. The natural step after sensing collectively is acting for the collective earth" (Sheri 2019).

"Sensory design interventions can happen at many levels: government (rules and codes), environment (design navigation), transit systems (networks and placement), objects (interfaces and affordances), behavior (community, empathy and incentives). To intervene and to design new experiences around senses is to question the thresholds of irritability and desire, boundaries of public and private, and requires decision makers at any level to [. . .] design systems that do not leave sensory experiences unconsidered" (Sheri 2019).

"The challenge is to clarify the 'why' of networks. Why do they emerge? What does belonging mean to people involved? Why do networks endure and gain influence? As a participant joins a network, what specific physical, cognitive, and emotional elements are significant to creating and maintaining links? Critically for our endeavors here, we seek to understand how people associate themselves with different environmental elements such as endangered species, an individual animal, a particular piece of land, microbes in soil, or water running in a nearby stream" (Lejano, Ingram, and Ingram 2013, 31).

How can we nurture a forgiving atmosphere to allow improvisation to thrive?

Kinesthetic

These spreads capture my natural and fluid expressions as I play four sports that are dear to me: biking, ping pong, tennis, and soccer. Exploring the physical spaces and territories afforded by the sport — a straight biking path in East Providence, a shadowy tennis court at Brown University, a sunlit ping pong table in my backyard, and a vacant field — my body becomes layered onto the environment, a cycling shadow on trees. I am both photographer and performer in these scenes. Using a camera, a tripod, my own body, a hitting partner, and the tools intrinsic to the sport (e.g., a racquet), I set my own stage for play.

Kinesthetic depicts the exact moment when I am reacting to changing environmental stimuli, documented from multiple shifting perspectives. Inspired by a musical score, the sequence of spreads exist as a continuous movement, flowing between sports, as is my natural progression through different athletic seasons. Through a photographic treatment of magnified cropping and scaling, I tried to capture the feeling and quality of participating in the movement from my own perspective: the meditation and vigor of playing tennis, the quickness of ping pong, the flow state of biking, and the spacious quality of soccer. This work tries to address the question of how photography can act as a dynamic, temporal, and expressive medium. How can the boundaries and changing conditions of a territory shape how we improvise within it?

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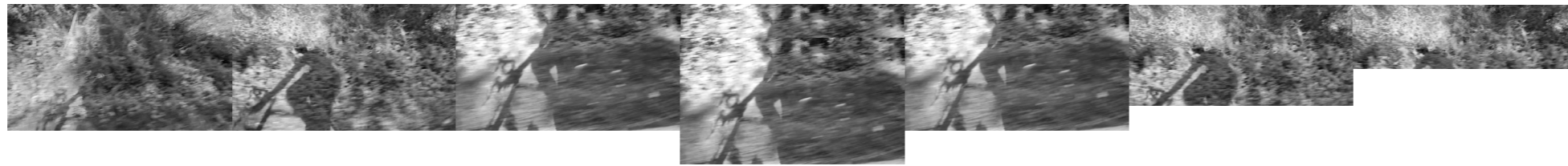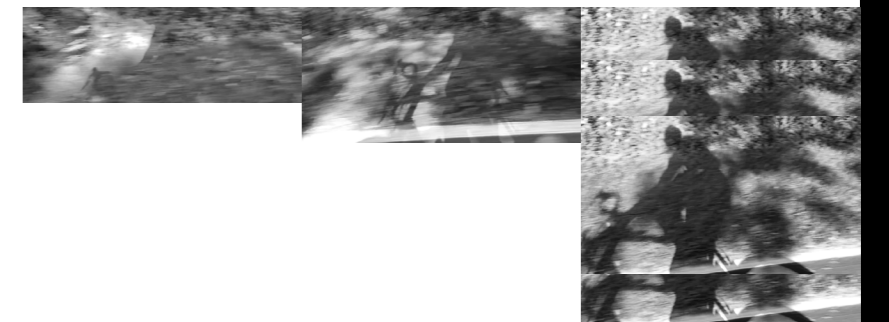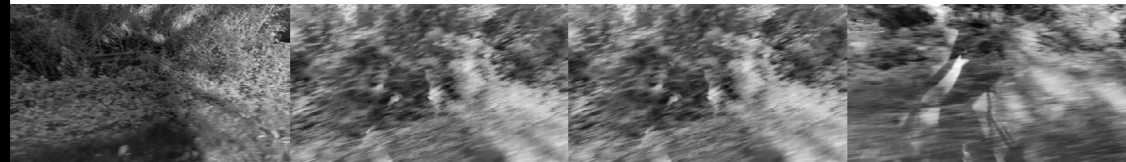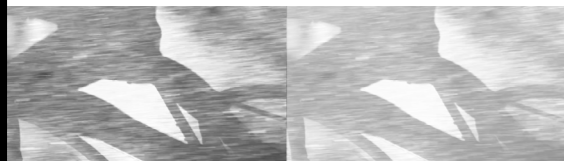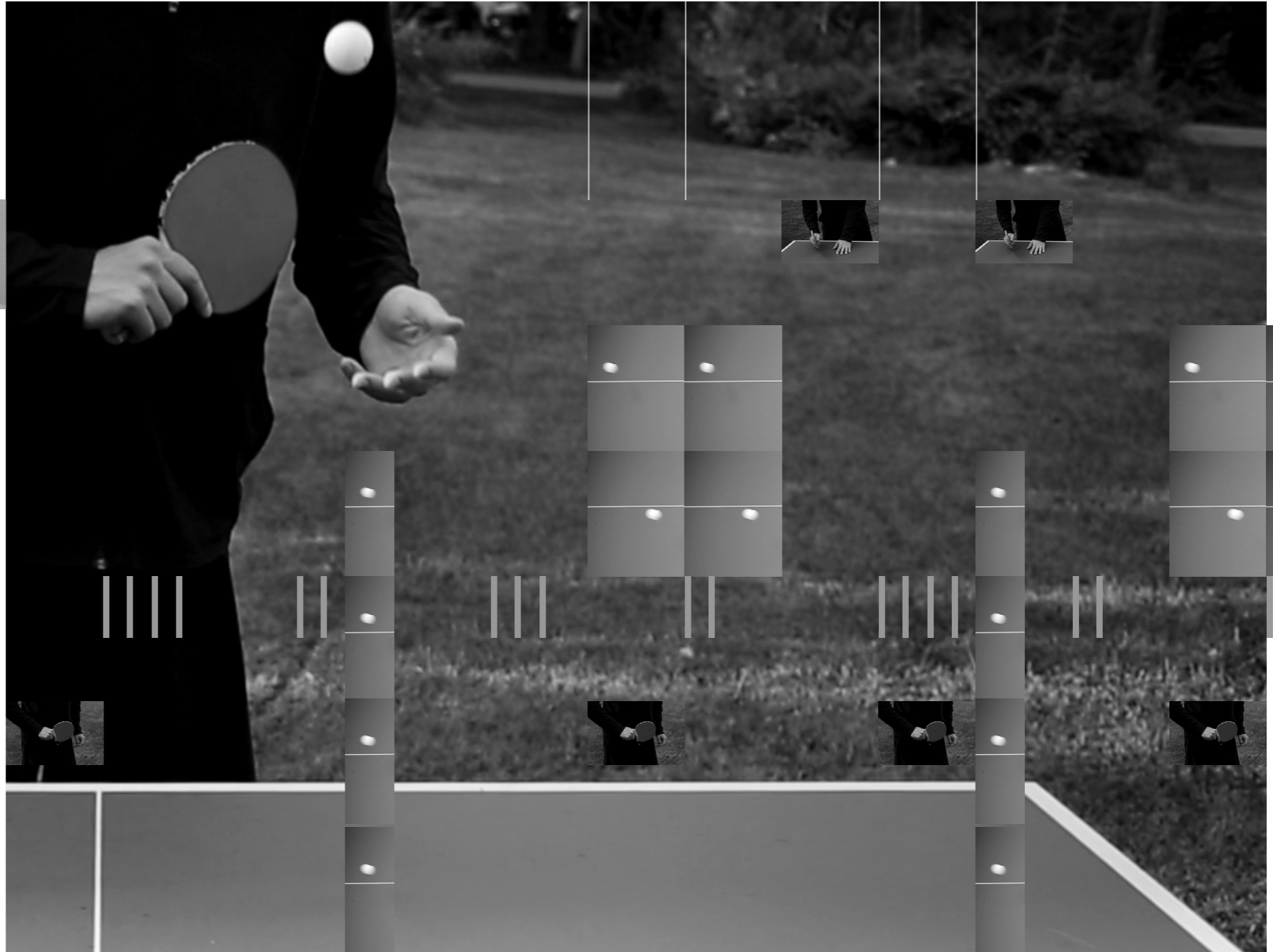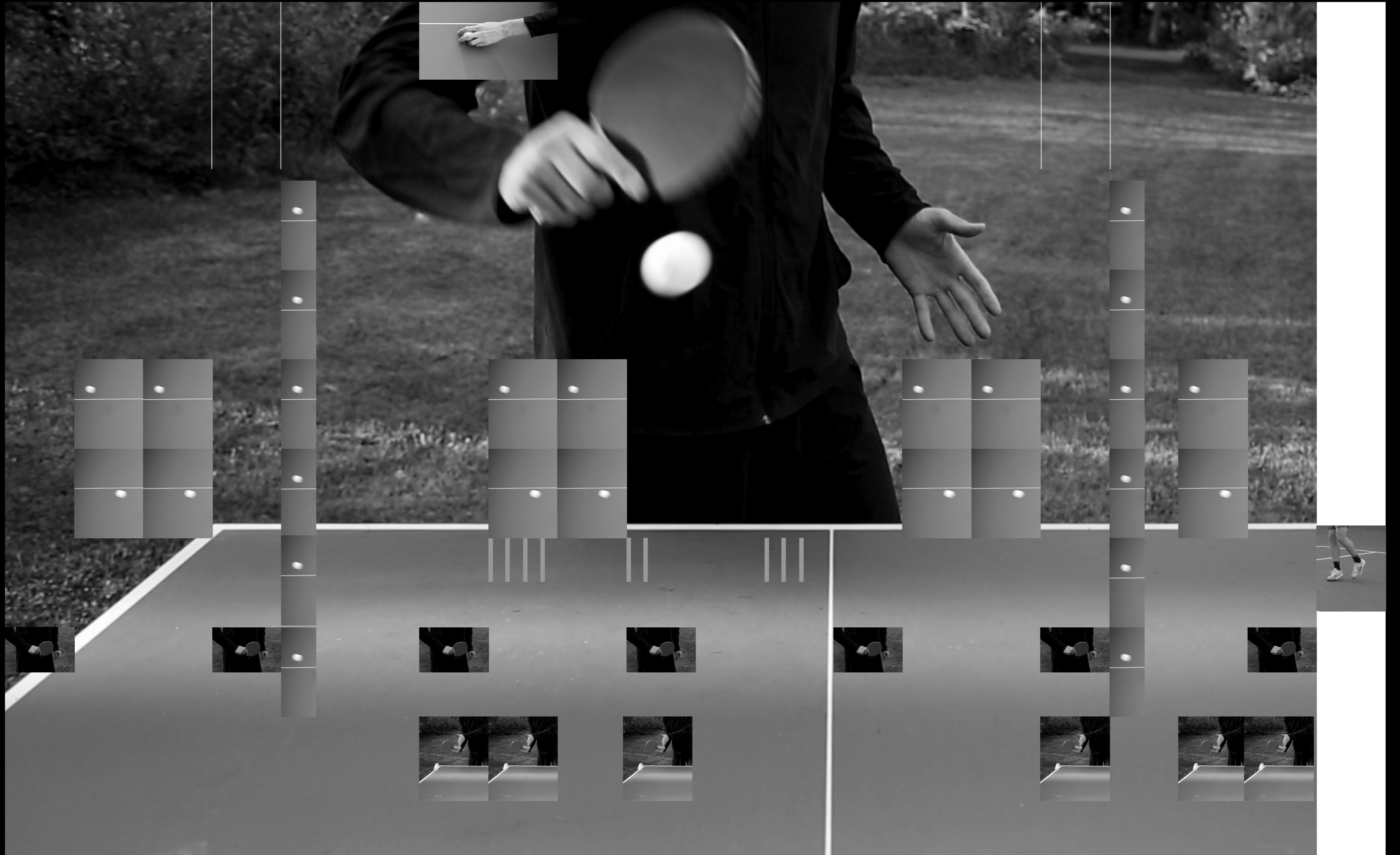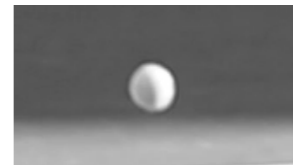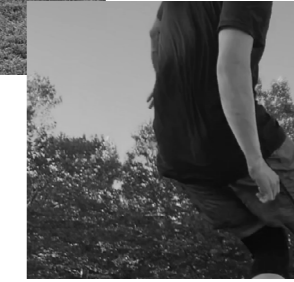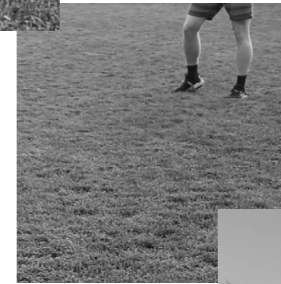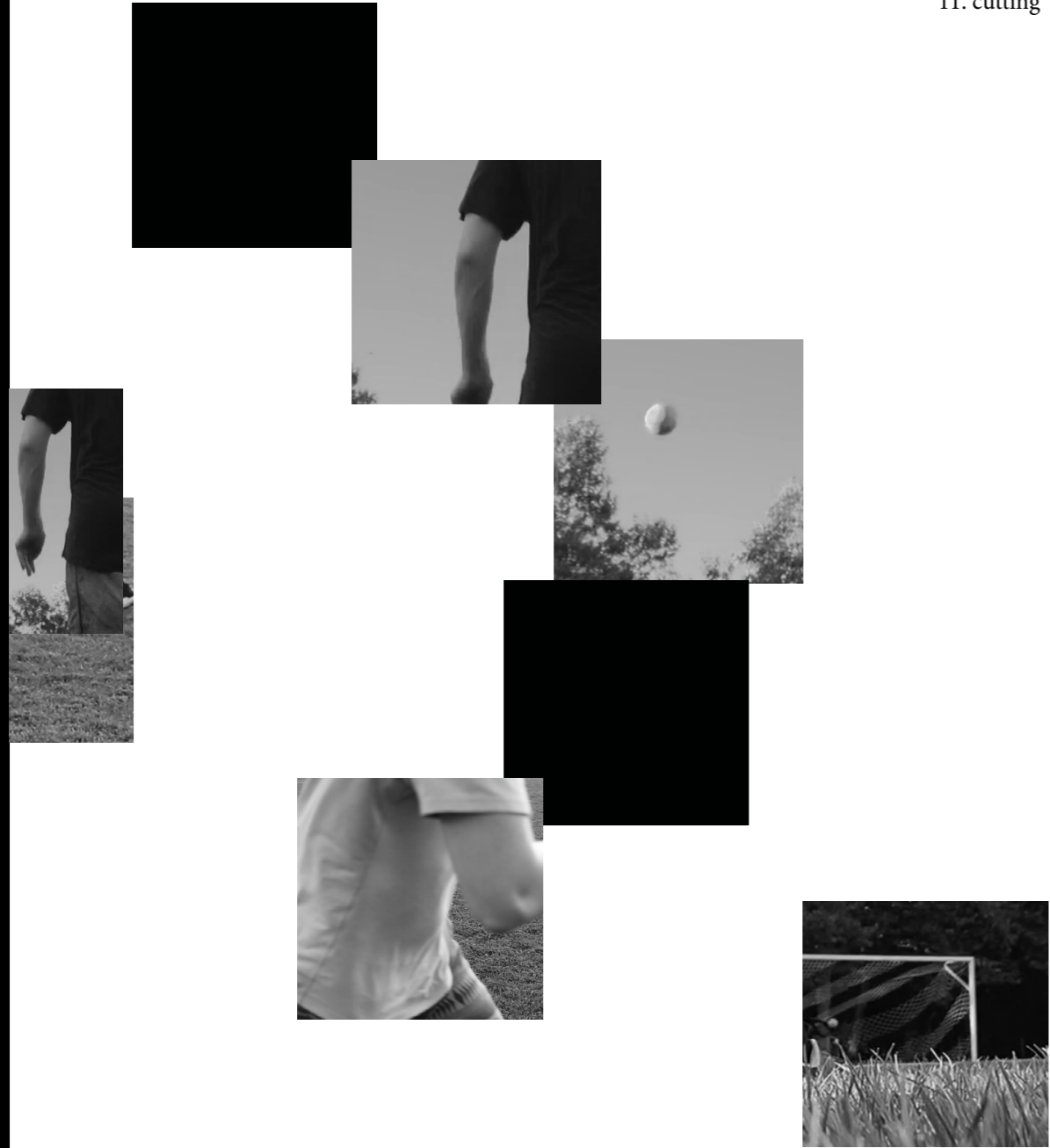
Matthew Bejtlich

K i n e s t h e t i c

"My parents live an hour away from the city. There's a road that is less frequently trafficked, and somewhere along this road, there is a tree stump and a bunch of rocks. This is where a few people walk. A few years ago, during the summer on that tree stump people began to stack up rocks. So, it was an improvised, collaborative sculpture between the people who lived in the neighborhood. They didn't exactly know what was part of it. It's kind of cute, right? It's like a fun exchange to do with your friends. It's not commodified; nobody's marketing it [. . .] the wonderful thing about the improvised rock sculpture is that somebody could just come by and push the whole thing over" (Citarella 2021, 158).

— Conversation with Joshua Citarella → p. 154

Conversation with Stephon Alexander

MB
Can you talk to me a little bit about the conditions in which improvisation may thrive? Or how to channel it?

SA
Whatever the medium is, there is a notion of being prepared to improvise—preparation. So, yeah, what's the simple version of that? Navigating through daily life requires improvisation. Do I cross the street now? Do I cross then? What if you don't prepare for that day by sleeping well? That's a simple example of how preparation, how practice sharpens some level of virtuosity. Before there is improvisation, there is this notion of optimizing the conditions for the improvisation. An ideal improvisational environment is one in which you feel so welcomed and comfortable to play and to improvise and do your thing, in interaction and in communion. Especially when you talk about group improvisation with others. Or even if you're doing simple improvisation and there's an audience, you're still in communion. So, you need to be in that . . . what do you call that space? I just want to call it an enabling and welcoming space that enables the improvisation at the highest level. That's number one. But to do that, it's a dance between improvisation and, as you call it, practice and form.

MB
In my project *Open Articulations*, I am doing quick improvisational performances in remote environments and then recording them. I notice that the recording is motivating me to reflect on the performances and integrate that reflection into my practice of the hang drum. I've realized that by going out in these environments—and they're kind of site specific—that improvisation can actually be shaped by where you are. Could you speak to the site-specific quality of improvisation? Say you're improvising in a jazz club in New York versus improvising in nature or something like that?

SA
Oh, big time, yeah. I mean there's something about some spaces. Let's just say I'm improvising in East London or in a jazz club in the Village of New York City, where we know the spirit of Coltrane and Charlie Parker occupy those spaces. There's something about it. We call it the vibe, for lack of a better word. When you are in that sacred space of the ancestors, like somehow that impacts [your performance], you feel like it's ritualistic. Yeah. It's like I'm in this ritual, and I'm in communion with the ancestors. So, I'm here at this small jazz club in the basement. It's like this cozy basement, candle-lit place where people are just in the meditative zone to channel the spirit of Charlie Parker and Charles Mingus and all these guys. Knowing that you are in that sacred space, with the collective memory of listening to that music, and the the Village Vanguard sessions

MB

I think you actually mentioned in your book that you played basketball right? I'm guessing sports really complimented your music performance. Do they inspire each other?

MB

This is an open-ended question, but what do you think constitutes a "meaningful exchange" in the context of communal improvisation? I am talking about person-to-person exchanges in jazz performances.

MB

A .2-second latency. I'm actually routing this on a back channel. The only point of connection is the sound that I have from a little microphone set up, and she has a Bluetooth speaker. So we've been doing this thing, experimenting with performance at different times of the day.

MB

So there's a real back and forth with it. I am thinking about Whitney's and my hang performance. I feel like if she had a heart rate monitor on, I could get a signal back — feedback. But this is a remote performance, and it is one-channel flow. Would you still say this is a form of a call and response in the sense that I'm generating something and she's directly responding to it? We are in sync, but I don't get that immediate feedback. How would you describe a relationship like that?

are a block down, and that you've listened to all that in the albums and stuff — that impacts how you interact with that space, and it informs, enables, and empowers you to reach higher heights that you normally won't reach.

SA

Basketball and track, yeah. It's kind of like a sport, man. It's a workout!

SA

Yeah. Very good. Well, I mean, that's related to the question I was gonna ask you about your thing. You do your hang drum with a dancer, Whitney, right? Yeah. The question I have there is how much is the delay? There obviously was a delay in time and in the transmission of the sounds. Or was she able to hear you almost immediately? And were you able to see immediately?

SA

One channel. Very good. I want to mention that in the jazz tradition there is this notion of, in the African American tradition, call and response. We hear it in the blues and the preacher in the church. What the preacher is doing is improvising. He's rapping. He's a rapper. He's freestyle rapping. Listen to a good Baptist preacher, right? They're rhyming. There is a call and response: "Hallelujah!"

Remember, Brian Eno's My Life in the Bush of Ghosts? Remember how they sampled a preacher and they looped it? That was the first sampling. They invented sampling. Yeah, so that call and response is key to improvisation in the group in jazz. Because, in other words, like say I am the middle of a solo — there's a rhythm section that's holding the rhythm. Someone is playing a blues song, and they're just holding, they're locking into that rhythm and the baseline, and I'm soloing. It's not just that, man. There are variations that are going on with the rest of the band, that depend on what I play in real time in the improvisation. They'll respond to it. They will answer me back.

SA

The call and responses are cognitive in a sense. I mean, when you play something, you'll probably imagine how she might react to that. And then you respond to that expectation.

MB

Do you remember when we first met over at the Bolt Cafe one late morning in the spring of 2019? I think you were writing down some math equations. And I was sitting next to you actually doing one of my design projects. Somehow we talked to each other and we immediately connected over music. What I have realized is that new music is an incredibly powerful form of connection. That following weekend we were up in your Providence high-rise apartment improvising and working on a couple new songs for my *Dayspired* music project. You recorded some improvised soprano and tenor sax, Hash Vyas was on bass, and within a few weeks our song "Schisandra" was finished.

SA

That's how I met the producer, Rioux, too. We were in a cafe in Brooklyn. He was editing something in Ableton Live. I was doing physics, and we started talking to each other and then a week later did an album together.
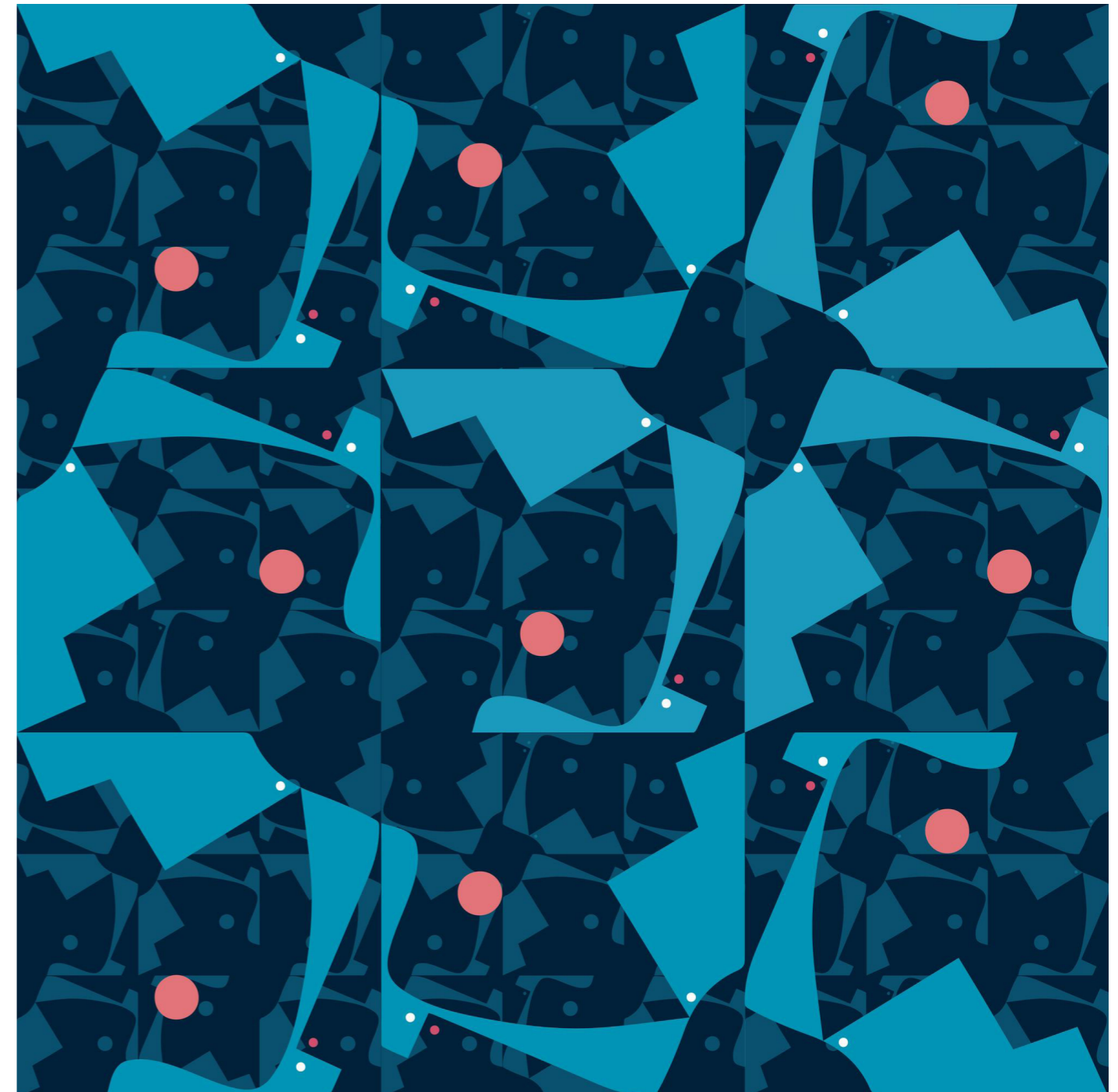
Matthew Bejtlich, Album cover design for "Schisandra," 2019.

MB

There's something about cafes.

MB

That reminds me of something. I heard this great interview from Yo-Yo Ma on NPR last weekend. He was talking about how he tries to approach each performance through the mindset of a child, the notion that you begin with a fresh start where the previous day doesn't matter. And he actually compared it to building a sandcastle at a beach. And I quite like that analogy. It's about ephemerality. Improvisation is ephemeral. I guess I just have this hypothesis that if we can create spaces where people feel comfortable to improvise, we can create opportunities for connection to happen. That can manifest in the design realm — I am thinking about systems design. I'm thinking about community. I'm thinking about growth. I think we touched on a lot of what I wanted to talk about with you, which is improvisation and community.

MB

Improvisation is about having this nurturing mindset. It's about embracing. It's about going with the flow and being open to change.

MB

Ok, last topic: You publish extensively. I think I saw 80-something papers, right? How do you manage balancing being a lead theoretical physicist with also doing music at a high level?

SA

You know Brian Eno, right? You know *Music for Airports*? One day you'll do something like a nod to Brian, *Music for Cafes*.

SA

Playing with a bunch of strangers is different than going and playing with people that you know, right? There is history, there's relationship, there's commonality, there's pattern, and there's habits that you form playing with those people. Even though you weren't in a setting where you were in real time with this person or in the same space. Just the fact that you guys knew each other. That influences how you're going to improvise. So it's also about relationships. It's also about what kind of rapport you have with that person. Sometimes I felt people were judging me when I was playing. When I play with the band Animal Face and Hash Vyas and those guys, they are so embracing with anything I do. They love anything I do. I can play noise and they are like "yeah, that's interesting." It brings the best out [in you].

SA

Now, there's a concept that you should peek at, it's called "antagonistic cooperation" by Albert Murray (2012). And that's sort of also the side of it, which is "that I love you so much" and "I accept you so much." Then I'm going to tell you, "you suck." It's not coming from a place where you feel judged. It's coming from where I think so highly of you — go work it out, go work it out, and come back next time. That's a very common theme.

SA

How do I manage to navigate being like a serious academic scientist and sort of having my music interface with that world? Yes. I'm the highest published professor in my department. My music plays a role in that because what the music does is allow me to trust my intuition, to trust the subjectivity, to trust to be myself, to be freer, to embrace mistakes, to embrace self-doubt and stigma. To weather the storm of people judging me. Because when you're an artist and a musician, right, you learn to manage that. I mean, you have to face those demons. Look, it's hard. One of the worst curses that you can have is to completely fit in "The Club" — because that [can make you feel too] comfortable. Here is my new book. I want to ask you a favor. Okay? You walk into Barnes and Noble and you don't know me. And you see this book, and then you see the subtitle. What does this evoke?

MB

Fear of a Black Universe: An Outsider's Guide to the Future of Physics. I mean, it's really provocative. Like, I would just say I'm compelled. I'm actually drawn into it. Because I think it's about race, but it's also about discovery and the universe. I am looking forward to reading it. I have your last book, *The Jazz of Physics* in front me. The way you've written it is so personal and anecdotal.

MB

Yeah, I mean, I see the connections. You were talking before about being a kind of outsider.

SA

I deliberately wanted to have a title that made me feel uncomfortable. When you pick the book up, it begins with the following paragraph: "We physicists have determined that over 95% of the matter energy in the universe is invisible. We have branded this enigmatic stuff dark matter and dark energy." So now it's becoming clear why the word black is there, right? Black universe. "The discovery raised puzzles that shook the foundations of physics. The gravitational effects of dark matter are observed in large halos surrounding galaxies. And critical to our current conception of how the large scale will matter in the universe came to be. Likewise, so far with dark energy, which we discovered with telescopes by measuring the accelerated expansion of the universe, it too has been the province of cosmologists who have written about it only in reference to extraterrestrial matters and the overall shape and destiny of the universe. This is a mistake; the dark stuff turns out to play a hidden role in the visible world, including in our understanding of life itself. Dark energy receives an all empty space, not just outer space, and permeates all existence. Its quantum effects are present, even in the spaces between the very atoms in our body." Now, I want you to go back to the title of the book. How do you read the title of the book?

SA

There are some conversations about race and science and things like that. If you think about blackness and the stigma of being black, and through that stigma you then therefore feel the pain of being black. Right? But you can be stigmatized in other ways. You can be stigmatized for having a dark idea, for having an idea that's so goddamn crazy that you're going to become the laughingstock of the crew and actually get kicked out of "The Club." That stigma is blackness too, right? Yeah. I am a physicist at an Ivy League school, and the others are like, "Why is he using the word 'outsider'?" I'm an outsider because of my personality, because I'm a musician as well. You have to perform to be a physicist, right? You have to wear the costume and the mask and the persona of being a physicist. And then how dare you come in with your sax and do the jig and all this stuff? They'll think you're "fucking up our brand!" That makes me an "outsider," yeah. You do because you can't help yourself doing it, and because it makes you better and "ups" your game. Being disruptive enables you to do your best work and to be most creative.

"The uncertainty of being able to know both where a particle *is* and where it is *going* beautifully mirrors jazz improvisation. And isn't it mind blowing that the spectrum of vibrations that were amplified by inflation, those that led to the structure in our universe today, is the same as the spectrum of noise? Fundamental to it all is the Fourier addition of waves. The harmonic structure of the cosmic microwave background emerges from quantum noise, just as distinct beats and rhythms emerge from a fundamental waveform, an oscillation, a uniform repetition, a circle" (Alexander 2016, 207).

Photographer Staurt Bailes described his creative workflow for making the collaged photographs in Nils Frahm's book of sheet music, *Eins*. Three 35mm slide projectors were set up at random intervals, producing abstract, shadowed forms. Bailes writes in an open letter to Frahm, "I was thinking of the piano and how you are limited to those notes available in front of you, the black keys and white keys [. . .] I worked in a manner not so dissimilar to your live performance, the stage was set and I had to work within this theatre [. . .] always improvising filling up that moment, trusting intuition, allowing yourself to diverge from your consciousness and in the end something wonderful and unexpected can happen" (Bailes quoted in Frahm 2013, 75).

03
Open Articulations

Open Articulations is a bicoastal call and response of improvised sound and dance in remote nature settings.

"The living of life happens in the day-to-day moments, not in the big events and things that we think are the big thing. As you said, it's a mindfulness exercise. The trick is to understand that or to recognize and to work to be open and aware of those things. Like shower time in the bathroom for me. I like listening to music and get goofy in front of a mirror. I like to make silly faces or do stupid dance things to see how ridiculous I can look. It is totally mindfulness. It's about just being present in the moment and being grateful. How lucky am I to be sitting here today or with the sun shining on my face? And what does that feel like? I think that is where the fulfillment is" (Weatherhead 2021, 120).

— Conversation with Steve Weatherhead → p. 114

Conversation with Whitney Schmanski

Laguna Beach, CA
21:00

MB
How did you feel moving on the beach today? I loved the angle you chose to film your dance, looking out into the Pacific Ocean. I was amongst the pine trees perched on a rock.

WS
I think there was a lot today in the experience of setting up, creating this ritual of how we entered into our performance, and how we are connecting with our own spaces. We were navigating that today. There were a lot of other things that we had to figure out on the fly. But, I felt like we were both determined to make it work with the hour we had. I noticed on my side the sound was cutting out at moments.

MB
Even later in the performance? So what did you do during that time? Did you stop dancing?

WS
I kept the rhythm. I either delved into the silence and took the sound of the waves or kept what I was doing, what I was hearing beforehand and the rhythm that you were playing. I kept my body moving until the sound would come back in. When you finished playing the drum I didn't know if it was cutting out or if it was the end of the performance. There was a moment of transition of still listening and carrying through something. Carrying the energy through.

MB

This is the first time we've had this cutting out. Let's keep an eye on that. I wonder if it could have been because I was deeper in the woods this time behind several trees. Maybe the WiFi signal was weaker. I am happy that you kept moving during those brief moments we lost connection. I do feel like I'm being thrown into this landscape, encouraged to go with the flow and respond to the environment's changing conditions. It can be uncomfortable at first, but I think we are both embracing it. When I reviewed the snow performance from the other day there were some interesting things happening with my hang drum rhythm. My arms felt more elastic and free. I decided to pause for a few seconds between notes and let the sounds of gentle chimes and trees fill the space, almost in a call and response. I think there is more for me to explore in the future with regards to space.

MB

If we just put the performance aside, the hour we spent preparing for this performance was important. There is a togetherness about the setup that I am finding special. It's the fact that you're texting me, you're running back to your house to get gear, and you are sending me perspectives of how you want to film the scene — we are in constant conversation. So, I think, in some ways, it goes beyond the performance and the pressing of the record button. We are each other's support system. Each time we do this, we are striving for something new. This requires patience from each other. A new perspective of the landscape, a different vantage point and scale. This is something different from radio or a traditional performance. It's not like we're performing to an audience. We're performing to each other and nature. The only person hearing my sound is you, and maybe the dog and the others at the beach. And so it does feel personal in that way. I don't know, what are your thoughts on that?

WS

I think you touched upon something that I find a core element of this project. Experimentation. Just diving into it and not knowing what we're going to do. And yeah, I agree with you. I feel like the essence of the connection is this current that we're both brought into. I do feel like it is offering opportunities for different discoveries to be made in real time. I feel supported by nature and there's so much to discover from the sensory input around me. I have in my mind that frame that I can play within. But other than that, everything else is free. But it means I also fall into habits. You described other interesting moments that happened where you found something, and then you like repeated it, and it kind of uncovered itself. That happened to me today, a little bit of doing one movement and realizing that, "Oh, that's something new." And so I would like to play with it more. Which is fun. Because I think getting out of our habits is one of the reasons why we do it. We've found that rhythm and flow together. Now it's taking that connection and being bold with choices. Lots of room to play.

WS

We are performing for nature and with nature. There is a big responsibility in that as well. I find it's how I approach the sand. Yeah, there we can, like, approach it in different ways. And especially for me, I am physically interacting with it. Do I see the birds in the sky? Or, you know, is it more like going internal versus my sensorial environment? It feels safe in a lot of ways, and also very intimidating at another level at the same time.

MB

It's like you're performing on the greatest stage, and you're performing in front of the ocean. There is a certain responsibility that comes with that, that can feel overwhelming. Like when I sit there in the woods by myself, I am surrounded by so many living things, and that's beautiful. And so maybe it's a matter of channeling that energy. I wanted to share a quotation from "Cities and the Crisis of Civilization" by Lewis Mumford because I think it is relevant to our performances together. He writes, "far-seeing architects like Parker and Wright, laid the concrete basis for a collective environment in which the needs of reproduction and nurture and psychological development and the social processes themselves would be adequately served" (Mumford 2014, 23). He also writes, "nothing endures except life: the capacity for birth, growth, and daily renewal." This last part really struck me. What we are doing here is heavily growth related, both from an individual standpoint and how we are feeding off of each other. It's about expanding our playability and kind of our ability to see different arrangements and forms on the spot. But also it is a daily renewal, it's almost like every day we get a fresh start, a clean slate. What was your reaction to this quotation?

MB

Yes! It is hard for me on the spot to visualize the movements you're doing because it's like you're spontaneously creating them, and I don't get that feedback signal. But I feel a responsibility to keep the rhythm, to keep the beat. It is a team in that regard. I am the rhythm department. So, you know, just as a drummer would keep the time, or a pianist. I don't want you to feel lost ever. I am happy that you are able to tap into the other sources of nature when you want.

WS

Yeah, I love it. I like the capacity for birth. I do agree with you — it's kind of ritualistic. Like, [we are] coming back to it, you know, and it can be new, but you know, we're carrying the past experiences with us. The information we can receive from the environment, even if it's the exact same, can be a totally different experience. And there's kind of this encouragement of exploration between us. Like, your [sound], the sound I'm receiving is also directly affecting how I'm perceiving my environment. And I think nothing endures but life. We were kind of referring to this earlier, I guess. This high expectation of ourselves within the performance. We take these things seriously. They mean a lot to ourselves. But those can fall away. We are bringing forth all of our experience and perspectives into a new listening experience. What does knowing that I am moving at the time you're playing feel like? How does that affect you?

How can we improvise together across different and distant geographical landscapes?

How can we build and sustain meaningful connections with each other, ourselves, and our explored environments through communal improvisation?

This work prompts the following questions: How can we build and sustain meaningful connections with each other, ourselves, and our explored environments through communal improvisation? Can we have a kind of resonance or chemistry despite this displacement in time and geography? How might that distance shift meaning?

Link (excerpt): https://vimeo.com/522472368

Open Articulations

This work is a bicoastal call and response of improvised sound and dance in remote nature settings. I first connected with my collaborator, Whitney Schmanski, through Instagram in the fall of 2020. Having never met in person, yet sharing a mutual respect for each other's artistic practices, we became curious about how the exploration and exchange of the mediums of sound and dance could help nurture a connection between us. In addition, we saw this type of coordinated improvisation as a way to explore the affordances of our own local environments and to help inspire our individual artistic techniques.

Over the course of three weeks, we threw ourselves into our respective environments (Whitney in Laguna Beach, CA and I in the pine forest of Rochester, MA) and synchronized our expressions. I would play a hang drum (a steel percussive instrument played with the hands), record it live, and send it on a backchannel of audio (0.2 second latency) to Whitney. She would broadcast it on the beach and respond to it through dance. Both of us took video recordings of our performances and shared them with each other later the same day. We did four of these exchanges, each lasting from 3 to 12 minutes, each at a different time of day, and each from different sites within our respective environments.

What is not shown in the final performances are the building blocks by which this coordinated play emerged — how we began to nurture a support system of patience, trust, and forgiveness through these exercises, with each other and with ourselves. Quick runs home to recharge batteries, text messages of advice to shield a camera from the rain, late night phone calls planning the next day's performance, a whisper into the pine trees: "can you still hear me, Whitney?"

Format: Photographs, Video (with stereo sound)
Spring 2021
Whitney Schmanski (dance)
Matt Bejtlich (hang drum)

Open Articulations. Beach videos were taken by Whitney Schmanski (Laguna Beach, CA).

Improvisation 1
Feb 22, 2021
9:48 a.m. PST
Minute 4 of 8

Improvisation 1
Feb 22, 2021
12:48 p.m. EST
Minute 4 of 8

Conversation with Bradley Zero

London, UK
13:00

MB
I didn't know it came together so quickly! It reminds me a little of Whitney and I's movement and hang piece, in the sense that you didn't see the full act until after it was all put together. I love it that you were going for a kind of diversity in energy. How did you go about choosing who you wanted to pick sound-wise? Were there certain qualities that you were looking for in the band or the sound?

BZ
I knew I wanted to have a balance of tempos and moods, a variety in performances, but it was also a chance to kind of showcase a few things off of the Rhythm Section label. So it was digging into recent collaborations and forthcoming collaborations and giving that a bit of a platform. Everyone who performed is doing a record with us, or just has. It was really just an extension of the things that I've been working on, the people I've been speaking to, and the projects that we've been planning for several months. A lot of them just happened to have these amazing places where they could perform from. It all came together organically, but very last minute. I think sometimes when you plan things too much there is a pressure of having to, you know, devise something from scratch that needs to feel epic. You know, you could have planned that for like a year, and I don't think it would have been any better. I think giving someone a really simple brief with a strict deadline is often the best way to get something good because you just get straight to work. And that's very much what happened.

MB
I absolutely agree with that point about setting a tight deadline and working quickly. One thing I noticed across all of your performances was a sense of time and place, light and darkness. It was about seeing the environment change as the light changed, and how the performers reacted to it. What was your reaction to seeing Kareem Ali's performance from out in the remote Arizona desert?

BZ
Kareem told me he moved to Phoenix in order to be away from the epicenter of this discipline that he'd thrown himself into. It sounded like he knew that you'd have the time to focus. And a lot less distractions, but also not a supportive, like tight-knit scene rather than this, like competitive struggle with everyone trying to break through in their own way [that] you have in London and Berlin and New York. So that was really interesting. The obvious place to do a live stream is in your bedroom where their setup is, or in an empty club. And having tried something in an empty venue, it just felt so empty, you know—that emptiness was amplified. You were really missing and very aware of the people who weren't there. Whereas taking something out to the desert—and bear in mind, he was 30 miles away from the nearest road, like they drove into the desert with mountain bikes and backpacks on—it didn't feel empty at all. That was just so beautiful to see. It made me think about what you were saying with wanting to bring your music into nature, and to kind of be framed by the seasons and embrace the changing scenery in a way that can kind of frame what you play. It leaves a mark on you, doesn't it? It changes the way you think. If you live in a desert, you're confronted with these extremes of space and temperature. But then also you have the stars. You know when there was a big moment in the stream when they showed some footage of the moving stars? Yeah, the moving stars, what was it called when you do the stop motion photography? Time lapse. And a lot of his music is about space. It's about going, you know, into the stars and kind of meditating on that. And it just made me think like, no wonder. He's out there in Arizona, you know, relatively isolated in this world of electronics, just staring at the desert sky. How could that not be an influence?

MB
You recently curated a full day of music for Boiler Room's System Restart online festival, a ten-day event to rekindle the dance music scene during the pandemic. You were representing your music label, Rhythm Section International. How did the idea come about for the event?

BZ
I think a lot of it actually relates to the conversation we had a few weeks ago about the "exquisite corpse." This idea that everyone is working on a separate part of the whole without knowledge of what the other person is doing, it unfolded to create this slightly harmonious but very contrasting whole. You wouldn't have known, but the Boiler Room System Restart actually came together super last minute. The idea is that we wanted to have five or six acts, with a balance of different sounds and perspectives. Moxie and I did something that was quite high energy, and then that was counteracted by MMYYKK who did a kind of grounding meditation. And then, you know, we had some stuff from Australia, which was open, free, and sunny. Then we went to the desert in Arizona for Kareem Ali. I mean, wow, the shoot that he did in the desert!

MB

I love how you put that. I came across an essay from Larisa Kingston Mann, a researcher exploring music as a form of intimacy-building in communities and a form of decolonization. I just want to read this first paragraph because I thought it was relevant to what we are saying about listening together: "Radio is still with us, although it is mutating through and across technologies. While webcasting, streaming, and other innovations call themselves 'radio' and integrate new technologies of listening, broadcasting and interacting, there is still a cluster of interrelated practices tied together by expectations of format and experience. These expectations, born of experience and history, are what keeps radio together. I'm interested especially in the experience of intimacy as it comes from listening in time: this experience is ephemeral—tied to the moment. But it is also physical—experienced in our bodies. And, it is shared—when we listen with others we know and feel them listening too" (Mann 2018).

I especially like this last part where we think about intimacy and performance. It is something that is momentary, physical, and shared. It applies to your Rhythm Section NTS shows, I am sure. I think it just reinforces what we were talking about with Kareem's desert performance, and how you curated the System Restart event. All of the artists that participated in your event had different ways of approaching their performance given their environments.

MB

With a shared sense of intimacy in mind, and the idea of play, I want to talk specifically about your back-to-back set with Moxie. I haven't heard her work before. What does performing back to back (B2B) mean to you, compared to performing by yourself? Your energy together was engaging and refreshing.

BZ

Yeah. Although it wasn't recorded live, the way that it was broadcast was live, right? There was something about knowing you were watching with people, you can see people's feedback, people's amazement, people asking questions. That brings something to it, but I guess it's one step removed from actually broadcasting live on the radio—and which I have spoken about before—it has been so kind of, it isn't intimacy, you know, certainly doing a test from home and being in, you know, pretty much locked in this house, not really being able to see many people, definitely not being able to communicate with people en masse, like I'm used to doing on most weekends, if I'm playing in clubs . . . that connection of speaking out loud to someone and hearing them back, it's super special.

It's very different from pre-recorded radio, especially with radio being more of a communicative-like medium. You know, I think there's a lot of that. The UK culture of radio is talking, it's introducing, it's shouting out. It's, you know, "bigging up." Being able to do that live and have that back and forth has been the biggest remedy to the loneliness of being isolated, which is very real when you are used to seeing so many people out of work. And that's very much what happened.

BZ

I think that also relates so much back to your project with Whitney, what you are doing is really an artistic back to back. I never really thought of it like that, but that's completely what it is. And there's two reasons I wanted to do it. I mentioned having recorded in an empty venue recently and found it very awkward and lacking. But the other thing I also found was that I felt very alone. There were no surprises. And there's no reaction from the audience. So, you know, the first thing to remember is when you're performing, it's not just you, you are really getting energy back in. It's judging what you do based on how people react and kind of maybe having a bit of a plan, but then adjusting it to fit and playing with the audience in that way. But on your own — when you're not broadcasting, when you feel that you've been kind of watched, is, obviously that's the kind of pressure that can be a bit off-putting, but then it's the in-between moments, like I just didn't, I didn't feel, I didn't know what to do, you know? I might have prepared a mix and got my EQ ready and got the cue point ready to go. And, and then I'm just kind of waiting for 4 minutes. And do you kind of dance? Do you perform? Do you pretend to twiddle some knobs? Like it was, it was just unnerving. And everything was amplified by the fact that I was completely alone in this experience. [When performing], having another person in order to be able to bounce off each other amplified that sense of play. When you're DJing back to back

with someone, it's always a bit of a challenge. You don't know what they're going to do. You're kind of thinking a few steps ahead. You are ready to quickly react to what they kind of throw in the mix. It's like a game of chess. It's adding this element of unpredictability that just makes for a more focused effort. And it just breaks down that barrier and makes it fun, you know? I feel like I'm a participant, and I'm a viewer. It was really just what I hoped for, which was to just make the whole thing relaxed and fun.

MB

That's great. I got that impression as well. I wanted to bring this back to my project, *Open Articulations*. Whitney is on a beach in Los Angeles. I am in the woods here in Rochester, MA. It is a quite challenging kind of scenario to set up because there are many moving parts. But, what's happening is I'm sending a sound through a back channel; it is nearly real-time with 0.2 second latency. She's hearing this improvised sound from my hang drum playing, and she's moving to it in her space, which changes every day, as mine does. So it's somewhat playful, because we are just playing in our environment. She's reacting to the rocks and the sand, the water, and I am reacting to the movement of the pine trees.

BZ

It just opens up about bringing opposites together, doesn't it? Like bridging a gap and, you know, the contrasts, whether it's the ice and the sand, or the, you know, the blue sky and the orange sunset, Even the way that you juxtapose the two separate channels. There is a sense of like, bringing things together and balancing things. It's a stream that is kind of asking us to slow down and to take in what is around us and to read something in a kind of slow and considered way, rather than, you know, the stream that we're all used to of just nonsense feeding. It's kind of using that platform to cause a bit of a pause, to see the breadth and the beauty of everything, you know, from one end of the spectrum or one end of the landmass to the other. And that's nice. Seeing you play the hang in the snow is one thing. But seeing you play in the snow, and then seeing how that is affecting someone in real time, responding to it with dance on a beach, or in a desert . . . it's just suddenly, like, so much more interesting.

MB

A big part of this project is that Whitney and I are doing these performances at different moments of the day in a 12-hour span, from 6AM to 6PM. The element of time is important, you know, as we are three hours apart. I am interested in the changing perspectives of the landscapes and the lighting conditions, and how those affect our performance in real-time. You know, with me being in the snow, there are actually chimes that you can hear in the background, made from the wind. Through my website prototype, I want to show how the audience can mix the two sound sources from Whitney and me (beach and forest) and control the lighting. It comes back to my role as a graphic designer.

MB

One idea for the website is to mix different hang performances with different dances. And so it would be kind out of time. I don't know if that might be interesting because it could pull up weird juxtapositions?

MB

That is a really interesting idea and something I should check out in future iterations. I wanted to talk a little about your Patreon musical mentorship program, which has brought us together this past year, and which I have been very fortunate to participate in. What are your next steps in "Phase Two"? Was your plan to bring Rhythm Section musical mentorship to underserved communities that don't have access to musical training and gear, or access to those resources?

MB

I think it circles back to my core theme of making together through play. It is about bringing together the community to connect on a shared interest in experimenting and pushing music production and sound design forward. I can tell the lessons from this experiment so far of mentoring the current Patreon class are helping to provide some insights for how it could work with a younger audience. Do you have any last reactions with regards to play on the community level?

And you begin to think of the space in between those two people and the thoughts that have been transmitted through satellites and cables and creating this direct movement. And, you know, almost telepathically that it's hard to put your finger on what it is that makes it more interesting. But "the whole is a lot greater than the sum of the parts."

BZ

It is you as producer, and the audience as DJ. There is a modular aspect to how it kind of fits together. And it's just finding the things that you know. I guess it's up to the user to see what works in which sequence and how things complement each other and how they can create a new meaning by juxtaposing different things.

BZ

You could keep your timing constant, but just vary the elements of it, you know, and to see how certain notes or certain rhythms would evoke a different response, even though the time was linked. So you could still be in time.

BZ

The plan is to get someone in to kind of manage it, to oversee it, to make sure that there's more regularity, and that there's a bit more structure. With the next phase, we want to work with local community groups, local schools, youth groups, and do some tutorials and workshops. We want to make these resources more accessible. It's going to be a step-by-step process.

BZ

I think that this notion of play can often be undervalued not only by, you know, the powers that be, but by the actual people who do it. The idea of sharing these skills, and these insights, and these, you know, values that you, that we've learned through engaging in it can sometimes seem a bit pointless in a pandemic, when people are dying or when people haven't been fed. But I think being able to maybe look beyond that initial, you know, kind of emergency reactive perspective, it's these things that really open up so much more in life. And that once you know that there's obviously things that are more important than when they've been able to DJ or to be involved in music or anything. But once you have the basic needs taken care of, it's these

"Let's just say I'm improvising in East London or in a jazz club in the Village of New York City, where we know the spirit of Coltrane and Charlie Parker occupy those spaces. There's something about it. We call it the vibe, for lack of a better word. When you are in that sacred space of the ancestors, like somehow that impacts [your performance], you feel like it's ritualistic. Yeah. It's like I'm in this ritual, and I'm in communion with the ancestors. So, I'm here at this small jazz club in the basement. It's like this cozy basement, candle-lit place where people are just in the meditative zone to channel the spirit of Charlie Parker and Charles Mingus and all these guys. Knowing that you are in that sacred space, with the collective memory of listening to that music, and the the Village Vanguard sessions are a block down, and that you've listened to all that in the albums and stuff—that impacts how you interact with that space, and it informs, enables, and empowers you to reach higher heights that you normally won't reach" (Alexander 2021, 63).

— Conversation with Stephon Alexander → p. 63

things that really, like, make living worthwhile, you know? And I think if you can, even if somebody is maybe still struggling, if it's a child who's living in poverty, whatever it is, to see someone being able to kind of, you know, exist and live and inspire and engage in it, in something fun, that gives back I think that's a really inspiring thing. And it's something I want to be able to do. It's really fulfilling. I'm not an essential worker, do you know what I mean? But we've all lived a whole year with the bare essentials, and we know what it is to be regarded as non-essential, and to have not just no income, but no purpose. So I think in this kind of step forward from lockdown from, hopefully, an end, or at least the beginning of an end to the pandemic, I think there needs to be a big understanding of how important non-essentials are, to actually living, to mental health, to livelihoods, to just like, you know, positivity

MB

Our shared purpose is creativity. That's what I'm trying to bring through with the experiments with Whitney. It's about having a structure and framework to play, one that will allow us to tune into our breath, our body and our landscapes, and to explore together.

The electronic musician Rival Consoles captured the notion of phrasing rather eloquently: "[phrasing] is the placement of an event (a note, sound, whatever) in time and how those events might be grouped. Everytime you change the placement of sounds, the sensation of grouping, and phrasing, it changes the feeling. The spaces between notes, the tension of layers, just the kind of shape of events in time. I think of it as shape and feeling" (2019). Phrasing of voices is about proximity, tension, nuance, and effect. Media is reversed, cut, rearranged, and juxtaposed with other waveforms. In some cases the slightest volume reduction of one sound will drastically affect its apparent relationship with another. This process is similar to collage in the visual realm, where a new assemblage is generated from individual materials through layering, revealing new contrasts and spontaneous relationships.

In our first call, Bradley Zero (who has since become my musical mentor) urged me in the summer of 2020 to do the following: "Figure out a routine and way of working that maximizes flow. Experiment with ways that break down your scientific method and disrupt the workflow, focusing on more immediate results — think of it like sketching as a preparation to make a big painting" (Zero 2020). These prompts have been in the forefront of my mind every day since.

Improvisation 2
Feb 23, 2021
2:49 p.m. PST
Minute 8 of 9

Improvisation 2
Feb 23, 2021
5:49 p.m. EST
Minute 8 of 9

Conversation with Nejc Prah

MB
I noticed you designed the brand identity for Boiler Room's System Restart Festival. What was your approach in the making of that identity? You made several of them, in a modular system, and the last one was for Rhythm Section International, Bradley Zero's music label.

MB
I wanted to show a little of what I have been working on in my thesis project, which is actually related to the streaming event nature of Boiler Room. I have been working on temporary, remote performances with my collaborator, who is a dancer. I am in the woods in Rochester, MA playing a hang drum, and Whitney is in Laguna Beach. Here, I will play you a little clip.

NP
It was a ten-day event with a lot of different things you could tune into and listen to, including lectures, screenings, DJ sets, and Zoom parties. Boiler Room re-imagined the whole thing [from Summer 2020], but they wanted to keep the identity or at least part of it consistent with [a previous version I did last summer]. Each of the logos for the Boiler Room took one of the letters as an origin [for the design]. The Rhythm Section logo actually was very different from how it looks right now. But since it was all paid for by the liquor brands, they had to approve everything. And the original Rhythm Section logo they thought was too childish because, you know, they sell alcohol, and they're not allowed to advertise something to children if it looks suspicious. So I had to redo the whole thing. That's why the logo has all the spikes. It doesn't necessarily fit into any of the letters in the system. It's kind of very hard to know what's childish to them and what's not. If it had a lot of spikes, I felt like it was kind of bulletproof.

NP
Have you seen the Whitney Museum in New York? Their old website had this thing where they invited different artists every month to create some sort of a sunset and sunrise animation that was just overlaid over the museum's whole website. So, essentially, at the time of sunset or sunrise in New York, the website would kind of switch through some sort of artistic intervention. It's kind of random, but it just reminded me a little of what you are doing. What happened to this circle with no snow in the middle? It's nice. It looks like it was made for this project.

MB
The snow melted that way, honestly. That's why I am in it. It's just the way it melted. I think what I'll be doing is kind of exploring the affordances of my backyard, because I am limited in that way by the WiFi signal. I can't go too far because I have to be in range. Whereas Whitney can have the phone. She is hearing what I am making. Something I have been thinking about lately: Do I allow myself to be fully free and to just literally play what I'm feeling? Or do I only play a certain number of notes?

MB
I wanted to discuss your creative process. What does play mean to you? I notice that your data visualization work for Bloomberg is often very expressive typographically, and I think that is quite unique and refreshing for data visualization work.

MB
I was also wondering if you had any strategies that you employ to kind of shake the linear thinking and play more visually. For example, this river-like composition for Bloomberg shows some annual statistics, such as consumer sentiment, price of gas, and jobless rate, things that are a bit dry by themselves, yet important. When designing, is it almost as though you're sitting down at the piano, improvising and playing? How do you allow yourself to be expressive when you know you have to also communicate specific data parameters to your audience?

MB
Bradley said this one statement regarding his Boiler Room performance, a B2B set with Moxie: "[When performing], having another person in order to be able to bounce off each other amplified that sense of play. When you're DJing back to back with someone, it's always a bit of a challenge. You don't know what they're going to do. You're kind of thinking a few steps ahead. You are ready to quickly react to what they kind of throw in the mix. It's like a game of chess. It's adding this element of unpredictability that just makes for a more focused effort. And it just breaks down that barrier and makes it fun, you know? I feel like I'm a participant, and I'm a viewer. It [was] really just what I hoped for, which was to just make the whole thing relaxed and fun" (Zero 2021, 88).

NP
Yeah, I think, to me, this was very much like improvisation. If it starts being scripted, who is it scripted for? What is the benefit of doing that? If you feel like you have an opportunity to do something in a more relaxed way, or in a way that is more improvisational, I think that's always the preferred way to go if you can.

NP
I think it's really just a way to make the work more interesting for yourself. That's how I see it. I have clients who are paying me for the job and I have to meet their needs, but I'm always looking for ways to inject something interesting into every project, some sort of satisfaction or energy or, you know—a feeling where I am kind of happy to go to the studio every day and don't just wait until when it's time to go home.

NP
It's actually very simple: It's about the writer. The writer wanted to tell a story through [data] charts. And the story was this: Is there a recession coming up or not? Basically, there were 30 footnoted charts, from 1 to 30. That idea of having something going right through the article made sense to me. I think every decision in that design was driven by what the writer wanted to say, or it was based on the content. A grid of 30 charts is not so interesting. You know what I mean? So, I think even if it looks weird, the main point is clarity and inviting the reader in.
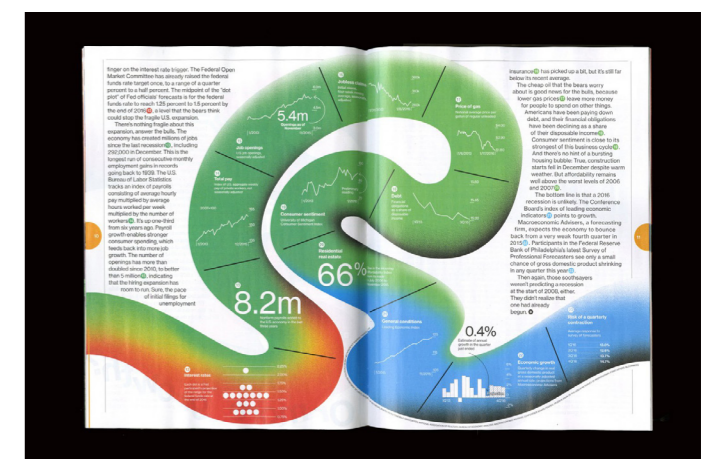
Nejc Prah, 2016. Editorial Graphic for Bloomberg *BusinessWeek*.

Improvisation 3
March 8, 2021
11:04 a.m. PST
Minute 1 of 4

"[When performing], having another person in order to be able to bounce off each other amplified that sense of play. When you're DJing back to back with someone, it's always a bit of a challenge. You don't know what they're going to do. You're kind of thinking a few steps ahead. You are ready to quickly react to what they kind of throw in the mix. It's like a game of chess. It's adding this element of unpredictability that just makes for a more focused effort. And it just breaks down that barrier and makes it fun, you know? I feel like I'm a participant, and I'm a viewer. It was really just what I hoped for, which was to just make the whole thing relaxed and fun" (Zero 2021, 88–89).

— Conversation with Bradley Zero → p. 86

MB
Can I get your reaction to this quote? I am interested in the sense of coordinated play or collective play. As a designer, how do you make together with other people in your field?

NP
It's hard to immediately react to that. I am trying to think if there is really something comparably equivalent between back-to-back DJing with my work with InDesign or something else that I do. My work is a collaborative process that just keeps evolving in depth in several steps. But what he's saying makes sense to me, and it either works out to be super fun or a little stressful.

MB
How about working collaboratively with other friends for your collective Ansambel?

NP
We have this collective of seven friends. And I'm one of the seven. We make some stuff sometimes, but almost never as a whole group: two of us, three of us, maybe four of us will make something. One is a photographer, one is an illustrator, one is a designer. And we all have our own projects, you know? And we all do what we do, but I think it's not a studio, it's more of a network of friends who share a certain sense of aesthetics or a view on the design, or the design world and art in general. Someone starts something, and then you send it out, and then ideas come back, and so on. We were just working on this exhibition, and it was kind of hard work, very improvisational. There were several rooms in the exhibition. We didn't buy or order any structures or furniture for the exhibition design. We just went to the attic and got all this junk from previous exhibitions and all the leftovers. And we were just building from that. Someone would start building something from either tables or pieces of wood, and someone else would bring a chair and just put it there. And it was a very fun process, actually. It was like, let's bring down whatever we can. If it's too heavy, we're not taking it. If it looks boring, we're not taking it. If it looks too cool, we're probably also not taking it because that's not that interesting. Then we were just building things together.

MB
I wanted to talk about one last piece: this blue concert poster for the Koordinate zvoka festival.

NP
Can you see it?

Nejc Prah, 2017. Poster for musical event Koordinate zvoka.

MB
I think it's out of an airplane, right?

NP
It's actually a toothbrush, brushing two teeth.

MB
It's funny. I see the details before I see the big picture of the teeth.

NP
This is also very abstract. It was made very last minute. I was working with Bloomberg at the time and was doing my own work after the job. And I think I had to finish this overnight—I mean, obviously, I didn't work overnight. So I think I just stayed in the office after work and put this together, like really fast, like in one hour. That's why it has all these scanned pieces of paper, because that was the fastest way I could do it. So the red, the blue, and the white are all pieces of paper. And then the type at the bottom was just some quick scribble. And then the window is part of the series, part of each poster[for the music festival], you know ? So I just put it there. I had it already in the folder. I think there were 20 of those posters.

MB
This is a stunning piece. And to think you captured it in an hour. Do you often find a lot of your projects are done in that spirit?

NP
Yes, but there is really no trick to it. I think it's just about being super relaxed. What happens with me often is that I'll send out a sketch for an illustration or an endpoint. Then I will share the sketch with the client and ask for feedback. But I'm also always going to mention that this is a sketch, it's going to get more detailed, etc. I'm going to rework it, change the colors, and spend some more time on it. A lot of times what happens is that the sketch is better than the final product. The sketch feels unfinished, but it also has some sort of this relaxed energy. When you're doing a sketch, it's always so much easier because there's no pressure that it has to be perfect. It's just whatever.

MB
I wanted to get your thoughts on the use of post-processing in photography and design. As a graphic designer, we often use post-processing to help tell a story visually. I have been thinking about my project *Walk Journals*, a participatory project where we are exchanging photographs from different places in the world. I feel like sometimes post-manipulation might alter the meaning of a photograph or the feeling of a place—the purity of the moment. What are your feelings on it?

NP
What's the pure reflection of what you saw? What if you took these photos with an analog camera? It would be smoother, feel different, you know? So it's not necessarily the post-processing that will take it further away from the truth or whatever. It might bring it closer.

"The sensing body is not a programmed machine but an active and open form, continually improvising its relation to things and to the world" (Abram 2012, 49).

Improvisation 4
March 10, 2021
4:40 p.m. PST
Minute 11 of 13

Improvisation 4
March 10, 2021
7:40 p.m. EST
Minute 11 of 13

04
Walk Journals

Walk Journals is an archive of a shared walking experience that took place between myself and three friends, three of whom have not physically met before. The group walk took place over the span of two weeks and across three continents.

Conversation with Steve Weatherhead

*Portland, ME
14:00*

MB

Walk Journals is actually an evolution of a project that I started in late 2019, called *Mapping places with sound and emotional resonance*, which you participated in. This earlier work was a purely sound-based project. At the time I was fascinated by the following questions and I still am: How do we connect to a landscape through sound? How does a place make you feel? What characteristics about the sounds resonate with you and why? What is your relationship to the sound source(s)? I asked ten friends from around the world (e.g., Los Angeles, Brooklyn, London, Vancouver, Cologne, Raja Ampat Islands, and Copenhagen) to take part in a collaborative sound mapping activity by recording distinct sounds from places they found inspirational, and to supply an additional personal reflection through voice. From these personal contributions, I made a video collecting the voices and finding blends between them. Could I get your reaction to the 7-minute video?

MB

I was blown away by all of your responses. The fire footage and ambiance was something that I used to tie together all of the environmental sounds and vocal reflections, placing them all in the same atmosphere. Is there something more that you wish you could get out of this participatory experience? Or was it purely self-reflective?

SW

I liked the choice of doing the fire [as a background visual], because the fire is a cultural kind of gathering place. It is a place where stories are told. So it made a lot of sense to me that you did that. And it was also kind of a way to unify these people that I've never really met, right? I mean, you've got all these recordings for various people and their experiences that they're sharing, and by putting them together, and then sharing that back with everybody, it's kind of like we are all becoming friends. It's your original idea for the directions for how everybody should participate in and get in tune with the sound qualities of an environment. But as it all comes together there's a virtual space that's not real, that's created as well in the sense that all of this is happening. The recordings happen in real places around the world. As it all gets put into [a digital] medium and starts to be turned into something that has a different identity. I guess that's just as real as the real environments that created the first elements, if that makes sense.

SW

It was self-reflective. And I don't even think I would expect or need or want a real connection with any of these people. But I feel connected to them just by the video you did sharing the audio stories. And, having the fire visual like that. It's generic enough that it doesn't fight with what people are saying, it doesn't attempt to try to be reflective of what people are saying, because everybody's saying very different things. But it is kind of like this glue that runs through the whole thing. And I think it's more interesting and mysterious to not know these people, because that sort of emphasizes the audio piece, you know. Just listening to them speak into what they have to say I imagined for myself what these people might look like, what their lives are like, you know, right? So I think in some ways that's stronger

than, you know, we all get together and say "we did this together." That somehow the result of the work gives you the opportunity to make these people that I've never met and are in totally different places kind of connect. I mean, they connect through the creative result of the piece that they all participated in, but also the presenting back of it. The woman, Jess Chalkley, was describing her swim in a river [in Copenhagen]. I think she actually jumped into the water. She comes out and talks about the feeling of that cold temperature and everything. Where else would I experience a personal thought like that from some random person I never met? Like, how would I get that experience?

The actual doing of the experience is probably, to some degree, more self-reflective than communal feeling in the sense that I was thinking about my state of mind walking back and forth through the city that I've lived in for 30 years now, and taking the same path day, after day, after day. And just the rhythms of all that. That was very inward-reflective of this sort of thinking, being more cognizant, and we're aware of how I feel in that space. And then I was thinking, what are the other people doing who are participating? I knew that they were from all over the world, which made it interesting as well. I guess I felt like it was certainly a part of something because I knew that you were reaching out to all these people. It is a sort of absent collaboration. It is not immediate collaboration, like you're not working toward a common goal and you don't know if it's going to be just doing a part of something and you don't know how it's going to fit in. Or, are you doing something similar to what other people are doing? Are they interpreting it a different way?

MB

It reminds me a little of Kathleen Sleboda's recent interview in AIGA's *Eye on Design* on "online archives and plural narrative." What conversations are we having? How do we "widen the narrative—to build in a capacity for voices that haven't always been heard or recognized" (Sleboda 2021)? It is not just about sharing these disparate thoughts; I want to find the linkages or allow people to explore them themselves. And I want to make this efficient and accessible. For *Mapping places with sound and emotional resonance*, I curated my own narrative sequence with the audio reflections, but for my new *Walk Journals* piece, I want to design more of an interactive interface that will allow the audience and participants to find their own relationships. What are your thoughts on this notion of bridges between plural narratives?

SW

It comes back to the orchestration. Coming up with the idea or coming up with the project is the bridge: you come up with an exercise for ten people to participate in. The virtual element of it is harder to sustain, because it's not real, you know? If I work with somebody [as an architect], I meet somebody in my work and then the project generally takes a year or two, between designing and building something. So it's the share of experience, that's the bridge or the glue that connects those people. I think it's no different in the virtual kind of space, either. As long as we are united by this project you put together, then we are all participating in its work. But once that project is done, and we go our other ways, that connection terminates. Unless, like you said, you try to make it more of an ongoing thing, like with your friend Whitney in *Open Articulations*. But even that, does that have a lifespan?

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Mapping places with sound and emotional resonance

"Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand."

— *Karl Menninger*

"Every sound tells a story, and every voice has an echo."

— *Den Sorte Skole*

PROJECT VISION

For the final project of my Graduate Studio 1 class at Rhode Island School of Design, I am asking you and nine other friends from around the world (e.g. Los Angeles, Portland, Boston, London, Vancouver, and Copenhagen) to take part in a collaborative sound mapping activity. My hope for this project is that it will be fun, interactive, and exploratory.

With the distinct sounds you collect from your inspirational (resonant) places and your complimentary personal reflections, I aim to make a digital artifact to tell our collective sonic journey and to reveal unexpected relationships and juxtapositions between our responses. I look forward to sharing my final outcome with you when it is complete in December! Thank you for your time and participation. It means alot to me, and I am SO excited to hear what you come up with!

ACTIVITY

Go to a place that brings you happiness or inspiration — this could be somewhere that you have visited before or a place that resonates with you more recently. I want this activity to be convenient for you and not too far out of your daily routine (I anticipate 15 to 20 minutes to complete it). When you have arrived to your location, please take some time to move freely around the surrounding environment, observe and listen, and think about the place's affordances. When you feel moved to, please do the following:

1
Write down the time (date, local time) that you visit your chosen site and your current location (site description, town/city, and country) FILL OUT HERE

2
Record one or more audio clips (total 3 to 5 minutes in length) at your chosen site that you feel uniquely describe the place and that resonate with you. You may capture the ambiance of the place and also highlight distinct sounds that stand out from background noise (if possible). You may also want to make your own sounds from found objects/materials (this can be helpful for percussive noises or sound design). UPLOAD TO YOUR FOLDER HERE (file format: <firstname>_prompt2_<sound#>.mp3 (or .wav))

3
Record a brief audio clip (1 to 2 minutes) describing what your place means to you. Questions to guide your reflection: How did you stumble upon the place? How does the place make you feel? How did you feel prior to visiting? What characteristics about the sounds resonate with you and why? What is your relationship to the sound source(s)? You can also tell a short story or reflect on a memory! UPLOAD TO YOUR FOLDER HERE (file format: <firstname>_prompt3.mp3 (or .wav)).

DUE DATE

Please complete the activity and submit files by Tuesday Nov 19, at 9pm EST at the latest (earlier is better). I need all of the files then so that I can start building the digital artifact which will be due a week later.

RECORDING TIPS

For iPhone users:
Open the Voice Memos app. Get reasonably close to the sound source, and point the bottom of the phone in the direction of the sound (this is where the microphone is located). Press the red record button. Save the recording and email it to your computer. Rename the file and upload it to your folder in the Google Drive (link provided to left).

For Android users:
Please record a video (I care about the audio component and will extract that later). Point the microphone in the direction of the sound source. Save the video, send it to your computer, rename it, and upload it to your folder in the Google Drive (link provided to left).

You can also use your own field recording device if you own one and would prefer!

Mapping places with emotional resonance, Fall 2019. Activity Prompt.

Mapping places with emotional resonance, Fall 2019.
Link: https://vimeo.com/520382921.

MB

That is definitely a consideration I should be thinking about. When do these participatory "campaigns" start and end? How do we sustain relationships? I was thinking about the walk that you have done for over 30 years in Portland, ME and how you expressed that feeling through sounds. I wanted to share a quote from Daryl Smith with you, who I just spoke to a few days earlier, because I think it is relevant here. Can I get your thoughts on it? I am noticing the ordinary as a starting point through which intimate and personal perspectives, feelings, and memories can emerge. These vulnerable moments and common ground could be a place for building bridges between people.

Daryl said: "The ordinary and quotidian is life. That is what becomes inspiration to me. The bigger events, if we look at birthdays, holidays, something like graduation . . . there are so few of those, and what I have been interested in over the years is how we can find unity together and happiness within the prosaic. Since that is really where life is lived. My observation is that our life ends up being some total of the prosaic moments. It really matters how we treat the ordinary. I can give you an example: laundry. I find it therapeutic. I see the purpose in it. For example, my brother is not here now with me, but when it was our turn to assist in that, it enabled us to have clean clothes to sleep in and to wear the next day. The higher purpose became sacred in a way. That means we can help others and feel better ourselves. How do we be content in the prosaic? All the happiness you need is there" (Smith 2021, 38).

SW

I would totally agree with that quotation. The living of life happens in the day-to-day moments, not in the big events and things that we think are the big thing. As you said, it's a mindfulness exercise. The trick is to understand that or to recognize and to work to be open and aware of those things. Like shower time in the bathroom for me. I like listening to music and get goofy in front of a mirror. I like to make silly faces or do stupid dance things to see how ridiculous I can look. It is totally mindfulness. It's about just being present in the moment and being grateful. How lucky am I to be sitting here today or whatever with the sun shining on my face? And what does that feel like? I think that is where the fulfillment is.

I have gone to a therapist in the past for anxiety. One of the comments that has stuck with me from her is: "All humans strive for happiness." And they think happiness is continuous, like, your best way to be is to be happy all the time. Right? I mean, if that's what we all strive for, I just want to be happy, I don't want to be depressed or feel pain or any of these other things. But the reality is that the human brain is not wired to be in this place of happiness all the time, because that's not good for survival. You always have to have agitation and discomfort that moves you to the next thing, you know. Creativity. I used to feel like, especially with vocal music, that the best people were the ones that were the angriest. Anger is such a strong emotion. You can just hear that passion in the music.

"The ordinary and quotidian is life. That is what becomes inspiration to me. The bigger events, if we look at birthdays, holidays, something like graduation . . . there are so few of those, and what I have been interested in over the years is how we can find unity together and happiness within the prosaic. Since that is really where life is lived. My observation is that our life ends up being some total of the prosaic moments. It really matters how we treat the ordinary. I can give you an example: laundry. I find it therapeutic. I see the purpose in it. For example, my brother is not here now with me, but when it was our turn to assist in that, it enabled us to have clean clothes to sleep in and to wear the next day. The higher purpose became sacred in a way. That means we can help others and feel better ourselves. How do we be content in the prosaic? All the happiness you need is there" (Smith 2021, 38).

How can we build geographic knowledge of a place through a practice focused on mindful presence and attentiveness to changing elements in our explored environment?

How can a designed interface invite a tuning, arranging, and montaging of voices (expressed in multiple media forms), providing multiple entry points into landscapes, and through those reveal new ways of seeing ourselves and each other?

Walk Journals

This work exists as a digital archive of a shared walking experience that took place between three people and myself, over three continents, and during two weeks. Prompted by a single shared random mindset each day (e.g., "We Amplify"), we were invited to engage with the world on our individual walks and capture our improvisational creations through images, field recordings, and daily journals at specific walking sites.

These expressions were gathered into a single digital space and participatory archive, juxtaposing one participant's response with another's in three sliding columns. The outer columns hold images and sounds submitted by each respective person, and the inner column contains the daily walk reflections of both participants. Upon each page refresh of the website, a different pairing and arrangement from the four participants is shown. Through moving the vertical columns, the audience and participants are invited to rearrange, tune, and contrast different sounds, text fragments and images, to provide various shifting perspectives and entryways into the landscapes, and to make new meaning from them.

This project started as a two-channel bicoastal walking experience and has evolved considerably since then. In January just two of us went on the same daily walk in our own spaces for 16 days: Whitney in Laguna Beach, CA, me in Rochester, MA. In a shared Google document, which soon grew to 50 pages and then a Dropbox folder, we collected records of our encounters, reflections, movements, photographs, sounds, and memories of the walks. During this initial phase, we experimented with different articulations of the same route and different times of day. We tried synchronous walks (she walked at 7:00 am PST, I walked at 10:00am EST) and asynchronous walks. We reflected at different times of day: once in the morning just after waking, at midday, and during the evening. We tried weaving our responses together, responding to a chosen theme or fragment from the other's reflection from the previous day. A structure emerged from this experimentation and play: we started to be guided loosely on our walks by a shared mindset that was determined by a specific verb (e.g., "We Amplify"), which we generated together or selected at random. This mindset provided us with a shared engagement with our separate spaces. From this initial prototype, Whitney and I together developed a way of working that allowed us to fully engage with our spaces and to share our expressive media with one another.

I wanted to build on the momentum of the project by expanding it to more people and opening it up to more diverse perspectives to break its two-channel, closed-system nature. I invited Tuğçe, an architect from Istanbul. Arielle is a medical student in Ireland. Whitney is a dancer in LA. Though Whitney and Arielle knew each other before, the rest of us had never met physically, but only online. For 14 days we went on a walk together, guided by the same randomly generated action word (e.g., "We Amplify" or "We Contain"). This mindset was meant to be the glue binding us and our walks together. All responses were collected in a shared Google Doc. This Google Doc was then reinterpreted for the web space.

According to wave theory, if two independently resonating bodies are put close together, they can start to vibrate at the same frequency. Can we have the same sort of resonance or chemistry despite the geographic and temporal lag separating the four of us? How can we build geographic knowledge of a place through a practice focused on mindful presence and attentiveness to changing elements in our explored environment?

Link (excerpt): https://vimeo.com/550062978

Walk Journals

Daily meditation
Time period: Monday March 15 to Monday, March 29
Repeat everyday

1. Find a walk/route that you enjoy (maybe a 30 minute walk, whatever is comfortable for you each day). Keep the same route each day.
2. I will give you a random verb each day. For example, "we amplify." Use this as a mindset on your walk and to help inspire your written reflections, photos, and audio recordings.
3. On your walk get one photo or one sound recording (of any length). You may get as many photos or sounds as you like. But get at least one photo or one sound. For the purpose of this project, let's keep the photos cropped to 2:3, 1:1, or 3:2 ratios. Log the time when you start and get back from your walk.
4. At the end of the walk, spend 15-20 minutes journaling in a notebook. Please save these daily written journal reflections for our archive later.
5. At the end of each day, by 11:59pm EST, please post your photos or sounds into your individual folder on Google drive. Please also type up your journal reflection on our shared Google Sheet page.
6. I will add all of our content to the website I am making, which will help us to start exploring all our responses.

After your walk each day, please save your photos and sounds here to your own folder:

Tugce:
walkjournals.lnk.to/tugce
Arielle:
walkjournals.lnk.to/arielle
Matt:
walkjournals.lnk.to/matt
Whitney:
walkjournals.lnk.to/whitney

Folders with everything:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1vm3Hvwza2KCnjpKZLJ7GbSwB1zRd4kld

Sounds:
https://soundcloud.com/user-821659456/sets/walk-journal-sounds/s-fS13o39l2dO

How is my energy?
What sensations do I feel in my body?
What does my breath feel like?
How grounded do I feel?
What emotions am I feeling right now?
Am I feeling any tension?
How free do I feel in my body?
What is my relationship with my environment?

Day 1: We Bounce

Tugce
Time start and end: GMT + 03.00, 1.00 p.m. – 1.30 p.m.

blow to the earth
below or above the world
the point where steps touch is the earth
the point that is not the sky
the limit of the steps
you press
or float on
if you wanna feel both
just bounce

Walk Journals, 2021. Activity prompt and collaborative Google Doc for holding daily journals. Link: http://lnk.to/walkjournals.

Walk Journals, 2021. File organization structure.

Screenshot 1:

10:31
◀ Search

Walk Journals
Arielle, Tugce, Whitney, You

Sun, Mar 14

Here is our daily routine. It has worked for Whitney and I well. It looks like a lot, but it is really simple. I just wanted to write it in detail to describe everything.

1.) Find a walk/route that you enjoy (maybe 30 min walk, whatever is comfortable for you each day). Keep the route the same each day.
2.) I will give you a random verb each day. For example, "we amplify." Use this as mindset on your walk and to help inspire your written reflections, photos, and audio recordings.
3.) On your walk get one photo or one sound recording (of any length). You may get as many photos or sounds as you like. But get at least one photo or one sound.
4.) At the end of the walk, spend 15-20 minutes journaling in a notebook. Please save these daily written journal reflections for our archive later.
5.) At the end of each day, by 11:59pm EST, please post your photos or sounds into your individual folder on Google drive. Please also type up your journal reflection on our shared Google Sheet page.
6.) At the end of each day I will add all of our content to the website I am making,

Screenshot 2:

10:31
◀ Search

Walk Journals
Arielle, Tugce, Whitney, You

2:05 AM

Arielle joined using this group's invite link

Hi everyone! 2:08 AM
I'm so exited 2:08 AM

Tugce
It's a project that excites me 🙌
2:10 AM

Can everyone introduce themselves in a short message or audio? Tugce is from Istanbul, Arielle from Ireland, Whitney from California, me from Massachusetts
2:11 AM

Tugce
It's a project that excites me 🙌
💙
2:11 AM

I would love to start next Monday if that is cool with everyone 2:12 AM
I'm thinking we can do it for 14 days, two weeks :) and see how it goes 2:12 AM
That's a good period of time 2:12 AM

Tugce
You
Can everyone introduce themselves in a short

Screenshot 3:

10:31
◀ Search

Walk Journals
Arielle, Tugce, Whitney, You

it is to help find connections between our reflections and to inspire our walk creatively the next day. 12:16 AM

Can everyone confirm that this Monday is a good day to start? The plan is to do it for 2 weeks (14 days). Once we all start, it is important that we all commit to doing it and being consistent with uploading content, since it is a group activity and we depend on each other. Sound good to everyone? 12:20 AM

You changed the subject to "we move lightly now"

You changed the subject to "Walk Journals"

Arielle
Thanks Matt for the info!! Yes Monday sounds good. Being involved in science research myself, I know how important consistency of gathering data is 😌 looking forward to starting with you all!
3:43 AM

Whitney
Yes, ready to start tomorrow! 😊✨🌱
7:42 PM

Cool I am just waiting to hear from Tugce 7:42 PM

Tugce
Whitney
Yes, ready to start tomorrow! 😊✨🌱

Screenshot 4:

10:33
◀ Search

Walk Journals
Arielle, Tugce, Whitney, You

We can set up a Zoom call this weekend to chat as a group if you all are able. Can't wait to see what we make and discover!! 🤗😌 11:50 PM

Mon, Mar 15

Tugce
Hello Matt, I was very busy yesterday. I couldnt write but the information you have prepared explains well. There is something I am curious about. can we apply the effect we want to the photo or sound. Or should everything remain natural. Maybe you explained that at some point, but I might not have seen it.
2:04 AM

You know I don't use the photos I take naturally and I want to reflect my own style in some way. 2:06 AM

this is your project of course 2:05 AM

whatever you want 2:05 AM

Yes it's fine to edit the photo :) 2:06 AM

Tugce
Thank you Matt :) 2:06 AM

Or sound to achieve the effect of what you want 2:07 AM

Yes of course :) 2:07 AM

Walk Journals, 2021. Messages of support on our private WhatsApp channel.

Day 1
March 15, 2021
We Bounce

blow to the earth
below or above the world
the point where steps touch is the earth
the point that is not the sky
the limit of the steps
you press
or float on
if you wanna feel both
just bounce

Tuğçe Albayrak
Istanbul, Turkey

Seeing the washed up seaweed at low tide,
all limp and frail.

Waves of Galway Bay rebounding back and forth
from the rocks.

Seeing the few odd tulips dehydrated from the rest,
all limp and frail.

All that is needed from this misty foggy ominous
day is high tide and sun to revive.

To let the seaweed bounce back, float back, to let
the tulips bounce back, grow back.

In these dire times, all that is needed is some simple
external inspiration to bounce back.

Just like the seaweed and tulips. It will come.
Spring is on its way.

Arielle Locke
Galway, Ireland

The coldness on my face was unrelenting. But I had
to keep moving forward, against the leaves which
swept below my feet in this gale. There I skipped
with a sense of urgency and caught a gaze of my
mother's silhouette against a yellow rock wall,
moving up and down like a bobber in the sea. She,
by my side. A last golden light.

Two old pine trees were swaying in the wind like
they usually do. I often sit there listening to them
for minutes, wondering where they bend and make
contact. I heard a distinct croaking noise rebound-
ing throughout the forest.

Above my head birds danced high in the pine,
zig-zagging around the pine and disappearing. It
seemed as though they were less affected by the
wind than I.

Matthew Bejtlich
Rochester, Massachusetts

My gaze spotlights and jumps
From one plant to wood reverbing back to the
variety of dancing leaves.
Moving through the winds as I accepted my
rustling hair in my frame of view.
I smell spring.
Returning to the listening of my gait, I can see the
collaboration of how my rhythms of movement,
breath, and thoughts are always synchronizing in
multitudes of ways with my environment.

A composition I joyfully witness.
A changing composition I hope to always be
open to.

Whitney Schmanski
Laguna Beach, California

Day 9: We Collapse

Tugce
Time start and end: GMT + 03.00, 6.00 p.m. – 6.30 p.m.

There was a cat in front of the apartment
Watching from afar, it was climbing the door and
Trying to get in
Either there was someone inside who took good care of its
Or hope of there is someone inside to take good care of its
When I approached the cat
It immediately sat down
Turned its back to the door
I guess it embraced
It looked like a noble cat
It didn't need anyone
I walked away quietly

Arielle
Time start and end: 4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. GMT

So majestic and beautiful, yet this tree no longer has a life. The intricacies of the branches were mesmerizing.
I was very exhausted all throughout the day on the verge of collapsing...these grey skies
are not helping.

Sometimes, I wonder if we have to hit rock bottom, to regain stamina to bounce back up. Will this tree decompose and help other living organisms in the soil prosper? The thought of surrendering to the fatigue and taking time for myself came up.

Failure and a sense of deterioration happen but there's only one way out of hitting rock bottom, it's to go back up. Hope and optimism prevail.

Matt
Time start and end: 11:30 a.m. – 12:00 a.m. EST

Unravelling.
It feels like everything is happening at the same time.
How do I manage that?
How do I maintain a sense of composure?

Who is in control?
I always come back to the quote by Alyshia Gálvez: "is efficiency a good measure of worthiness?"

I don't think so.
I think what matters is doing something authentically at your own pace. At all costs.

Whitney
Time start and end: 9 a.m.–10 a.m. PST
Surrender
By choice
By force
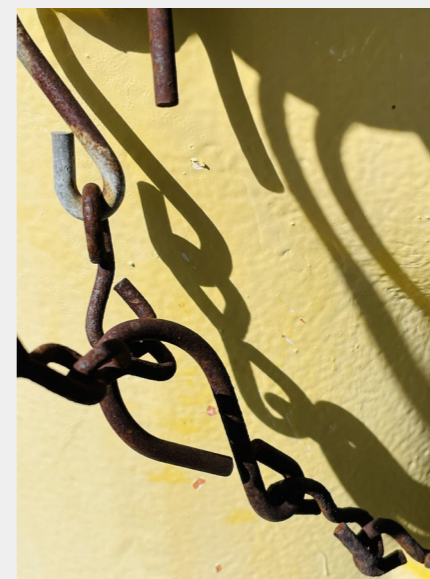When a system can no longer support the demand
Tensegrity & release

Can I collapse my thoughts?
The tiredness allows for space inside my experience
There is less thinking and more feeling
I can feel the collapsing and blooming of nature simultaneously
Can we collapse into our blooming?

Walk Journals, 2021. Day 9.

Conversation with Zoé Le Voyer

MB
I have been following your project, Out.of.the.blue.map, as part of your Calypso36°21 collective, closely the last few months. Your participatory research project brings together activists, architects, designers, sound artists, photographers, and writers to explore the liminality of border regions in the Mediterranean [fluid+solid], the experiences of people living in these places, and the governance systems shaping them. Can you tell me a little more about the origins of Out.of.the.blue.map? Is there a core issue or catalyst driving the research of the collective?

ZL
Out.of.the.blue.map is an itinerant curatorial program that was founded by the women-led collective Calypso36°21. Our approach and practice as curators is to develop participative research and productions and to act as curators but also as researchers, producers and authors, together with the people we collaborate with. Our research is inherent to our productions. It's an ongoing and never-ending process.

We have started our research with Out.of.the.blue. map, a context-sensitive, itinerant curatorial program exploring the liminality of Mediterranean border spaces. Anchored between Morocco, France, and the Netherlands, this program operates a collective critical rethinking of governance systems shaping Mediterranean fluid territories. Since its creation, we have engaged in trans-disciplinary conversations to unlearn narratives inherited from (post)colonial fictions, dominant imagery, and power systems shaping Mediterranean border territories.

Over the past years, we have worked in the Euro-Mediterranean region, alternately researching, coordinating, and curating experimental initiatives disrupting the regimes of spatiality of the Mediterranean's fluid territories. Aware of the urgent need to rethink knowledge production processes, we are committed to the creation of collective and participative archives. We envision cartography and archiving as fields for epistemological, poetic, and political investigation.

We are now finishing Out.of.the.blue.map after two years of research, exhibitions, workshops, and the production of a sound piece and of a participative publication. The research developed during Out.of.the.blue. map aimed at locating memory, oblivion, and liminality within Mediterranean liminal spaces — land, borders, and sea — through the spectrum of human movements of exile. Our research explores and experiments with

MB
Can you define what borders you are referring to and what you mean by "liminal"?

MB
Could you describe your *Collecting Voices* workshop in Tangier, Morocco? How did you orchestrate it? And what was the outcome?

alternative archival methods to imbue the (past and future) memory of Mediterranean borderscapes with the substance of human and non-human experiences.

The exchanges and collaborations carried out within the framework of Out.of.the.blue.map allowed us to experiment with new ways of sensing and making sense of the visible and invisible narratives depicting Mediterranean border territories, and to explore the dead angles left out by institutional and dominant maps of this territory.

ZL
People are criminalized and made invisible at [the border]. There are Spanish enclaves on the continent next to Morocco. So a part of Spain is still located on the African continent. Spain is the closest country to Morocco, from the northern Mediterranean. It's 14 kilometers away from the Moroccan coast. So, basically, when you were at the closest point to Spain, but in Morocco, the two feel really close to one another. We started speaking with people — researchers and artists and activists — who were working around this topic and who were physically situated on these territories as well. All border territories are liminal because your status changes as you cross the border, and you go through an "in-between," a transition, as you cross borders.

ZL
The collective Calypso36°21 came together in 2020 to discuss the project of a sound mapping workshop in Tangier, Morocco. It seemed to us particularly relevant, with regard to the program developed by the collective, to carry out a workshop that would allow us to elaborate a sound cartography of border territories through the voices of those who cross them, and who are dispossessed of their own capacity for movement, those whose journeys are deliberately and alternatively made invisible or, on the contrary, made extremely visible and endangered in one way or another. Based on this idea, we approached Reuben Yemoh Odoi, director of the association, The Minority Globe, in Rabat and Casablanca, which aims to foster the resilience of migrant communities through art and education in Morocco and internationally. Together, we imagined a five-day workshop in Tangier with two women: Jennifer Alexander and Santana Engoung Mariane Belinda, Nigerian (Edo State) and Cameroonian (Yaoundé) women, respectively, in transit in Tangier and sharing the desire to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe. They didn't know each other. They didn't come from the same country, and they don't speak the same language in the podcast (Santana speaks both French and in her home dialect, and Jennifer speaks in English and in her home dialect). They were two different human beings, with two different stories, and on two different paths. For many different reasons, they were in transition in Morocco and had left their homes to go somewhere else, in Europe.

Eventually, the workshop resulted in an 8-minute pod-cast, a soundscape of Tangiers told by Santana and Jennifer. What we hoped to do with the podcast was give Santana and Jennifer space to just say what they wanted to. And if they didn't want to say anything, then they didn't have to. It wasn't about us dictating what we wanted to know about them, but about just letting them tell us what they are doing, where they are going, why they are here, and how they experience the city.

We gave Santana and Jennifer recorders and headphones and then let them wander through the city so they could record the sounds that they thought represented the city to them. How is life in the city? What does the city mean? The goal was to translate that through sound. The women recorded sounds from the waves at the beach, from city traffic and taxis, and their own voices, sang songs they wrote and that inspired them. The podcast is eight minutes long and in two languages, French and English.

Alice Loumeau, *Mapping Liquid Traces*, 2020. Image from Calypso36°21's *On drifting* lexicon. Map of migration routes in the in Mediterranean.

I loved the transitions in the podcast. One memorable one happened at 1:50s, where you had the voice of a woman that was repeating and receding into the back-ground as the chanting voice of a man began to rise. I think the woman said: "Tangier is not always friendly to me because of the language barrier." The theme that really stood out to me was this notion of understanding and being understood. The woman understanding the people, the city understanding her. The soundscapes were very interwoven. You had recurring themes like that early percussive texture of objects dropping, a lovely texture. It sounded like objects hitting each other? Can you speak to the transitions?

That is interesting. This idea is that we want to hear their voices, but we also don't want to reveal them too much. They are kind of shrouded in the podcast. There is a little bit of camouflage, or there's a sense of not pointing out exactly where they are. On your website you wrote that "the participatory work of the lexicon allows one to deconstruct this territory, and to free one-self from imposed narratives by exploring their dead angles" ("Out.of.the.blue.map" 2017). In another section you spoke of an "echo." What are these dead angles? And is there something you did to encourage this aspect of drifting around the city to explore them?

Calypso36°21, *Harragas*, 2020. Out.of.the.blue.map., vol. 1. The video installation *Harragas*, exhibited in Marseille, FR. On a black screen, testimonies of young harragas ("those who burn the sea") scroll by, describing their crossings from Morocco to the Spanish coast. Discovered on a public YouTube channel by the collective in 2019, these testimonies are stripped of their initial staging to preserve the anonymity of the narrators. *Harragas* is a proposi-tion to navigate blindly through the mental maps of those who have crossed, and who are now on the "other side." Text provided by Calypso36°21.
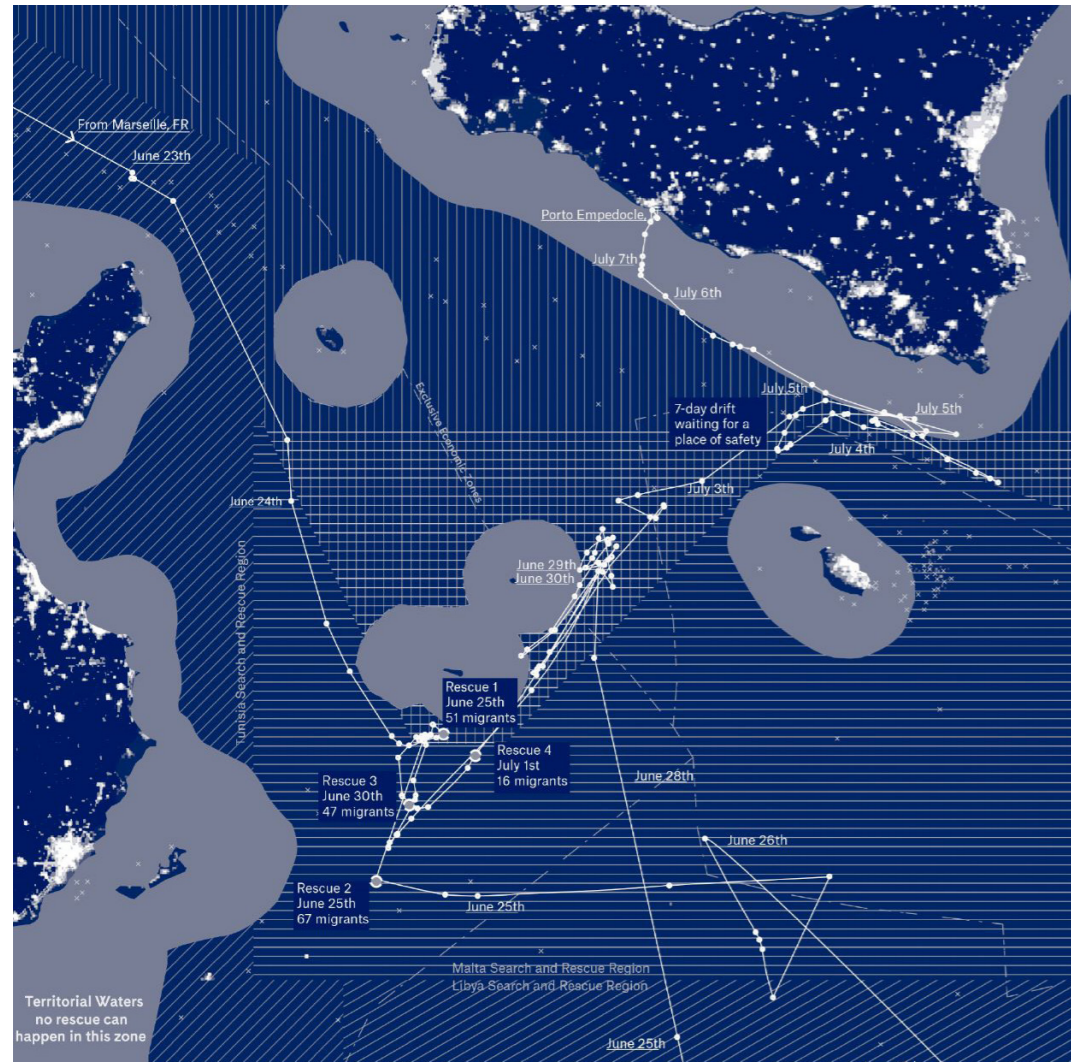
The voice of the man is Reuben. He brought some musical instrument bracelets made of empty wooden shells, small wooden instruments, and some intrigu-ing and beautiful stuff from different countries. Most of them were wooden instruments making a very soft, light sound. Then Santana and Jennifer started play-ing that and then chose what sound to keep when he was mixing. We didn't really give them guidelines, and they were really free to mix the sound as they wanted to. They choose the best sounds and noises to articu-late their stories and narratives. Ayoub (co-author and editor of the podcast) also wanted to keep this kind of liminal feeling of something that you can't really grasp. The transitions come up quickly. The sound appears, and then it fades out really quickly.

They are things that we are not given to see, things that are made invisible. People whose trajectories and movements are invisible in the city. When people are super-exposed, they feel threatened, but when they are made invisible they are just shut down. We want-ed to use sound creations as a way to explore these territories. The podcast sounds like a journey. The listener feels like they are in different places. You hear the waves, you hear the wind, you hear the city traffic. It carries you through the city and the places Santana and Jennifer are used to, the places they go to in the city, the places that are maybe dear to them. Also, the places they feel safe in, but also the places that they have to cross on a daily basis. I think the traffic sound is a bit like that. They don't want to stay in Tangier, nei-ther of them. That's reflected in the podcast, because you can feel that they are moving, things around them are moving. All the elements in this sound piece are going somewhere and you don't know where it's going, but it's going somewhere.

MB

Last week I spoke to Nejc Prah, a graphic designer, about my thesis and his work. What is interesting about his approach to design is that he often incorporates a lot of photographic textures in the end product. Using analog photography, he takes photos of rocks or city things, and he'll bring them into his work. It's quite playful. On creative post-processing, he said: "What's the pure reflection of what you saw? What if you took these photos with an analog camera? It would be smoother, feel different, you know? So it's not necessarily the post-processing that will take it further away from the truth or whatever. It might bring it closer" (Prah 2021, 106).

In hearing your podcast with Santana and Jennifer, I'm struck by how the mixing of the found sounds and how the intentional layering and sequencing of them can actually enhance the final end product. The whole is clearly greater than some of the parts. Can you just speak to the kind of sensitivity that we might have to specific tools or creative processing? And how careful attention to these tools and methods might actually amplify the voices that we hear? That they may produce a more true representation of reality?

ZL

Yeah. At the beginning, we wanted Santana and Jennifer to be present during the post-production and the mixing. It was very important to us that they could be present and say at any time, "that's not what I wanted to say," or, "this sound doesn't fit with what I want to say." But that wasn't possible, Ayoub Ait Taadouit, the mixing engineer, had to do it by himself. He spent a long time with Santana and Jennifer discussing post-production, and he knew maybe not exactly what they wanted, but he knew what they didn't want. We wanted to do an experimental sound piece. We didn't want a very realistic podcast or song creation, and we were really pleased with what Ayoub did. I think sound in this case can be a really useful way of completing what you want to say. It can translate a feeling or memory that you have from a time when you were in a city. For example, I lived in Marseilles, France for a year and a half. If I were to do a podcast and record sound and mix it as I want to, I think this version would be much truer to what I wanted to say and what I feel in the city than if I just spoke to you about it.

"What's the pure reflection of what you saw? What if you took these photos with an analog camera? It would be smoother, feel different, you know? So it's not necessarily the post-processing that will take it further away from the truth or whatever. It might bring it closer" (Prah 2021, 106).

MB

How can the narrative mode or medium that we're working with capture the dynamism or activity of a border region? You are doing something that's getting to experiences in places that are changing, subjective, personal, and even poetic. The whole goal of Out.of.the. blue.map is to harness and transform those personal experiences in a creative way by creating a publication (a map) and to allow for a multitude of perspectives to be heard: a shared meaning. Maybe it's not about consensus, but it is about providing different entry points into the landscape. Do you see your publication as this kind of moment in time? Or do you see it as something that can keep growing?

ZL

Your question is interesting. What's very subjective is the maps that we are given to see. It depends on who makes the map. And it also depends, when you speak about knowledge of a territory, who makes the archive? What does the archive say? What happens to knowledge of a territory when it's not included in the archive? Where does it go? Like, does it disappear? Where does it go? Well, it's kept in people's memory and habits. And it's shared for generations, but at some point, like some languages, it just disappears because it's not passed on anymore. What we wanted to do with the project and what we will do with the project is to establish a participative archive of Mediterranean borderscapes.

To that end, we will publish a book very soon. We are developing a digital contributive platform on our website that could be a collective and participative digital archive. Anyone will be able to submit a contribution to the archive online, which we will review and do a selection from. People will be able to submit a contribution in any language that they want. We want to make it grow. So it's an evolving process, it's not going to stop, and it's not going to stay in the past. I think what we find interesting is that the territory changes as the people who live in it change, and so you have to introduce new contributions all the time and different perspectives, habits, and sense of belonging to the territory.

MB

Are there certain impacts you are seeking for this participatory archive? Are they governmental? What action do you want people to take when they encounter it?

ZL

Suddenly it's not one expert's view on the territory, but many different experiences of this territory. And that's finally what I mean, what the territory is. It's creating and opening many new doors to learning about the territory and also experiencing and understanding and comprehending the territory. And I think that, at least for me—and that's not speaking for everyone, but for me—that's what's interesting. I don't really know if I want to have an impact. We did this project because we needed to, because this was missing for us in how we learn and know about things. It's also empowering to be able to say that's how I feel and experience territory, and so it must be true.
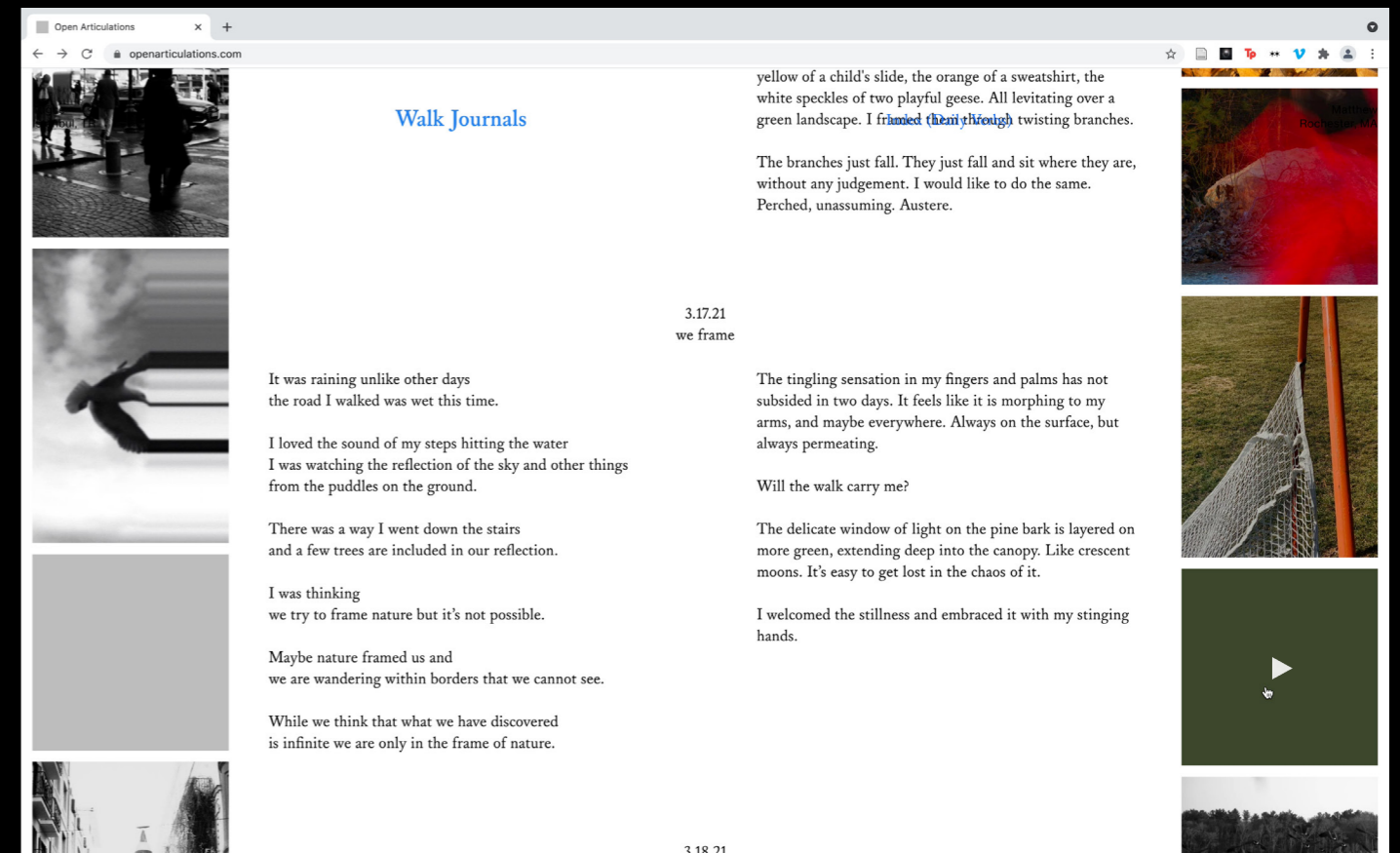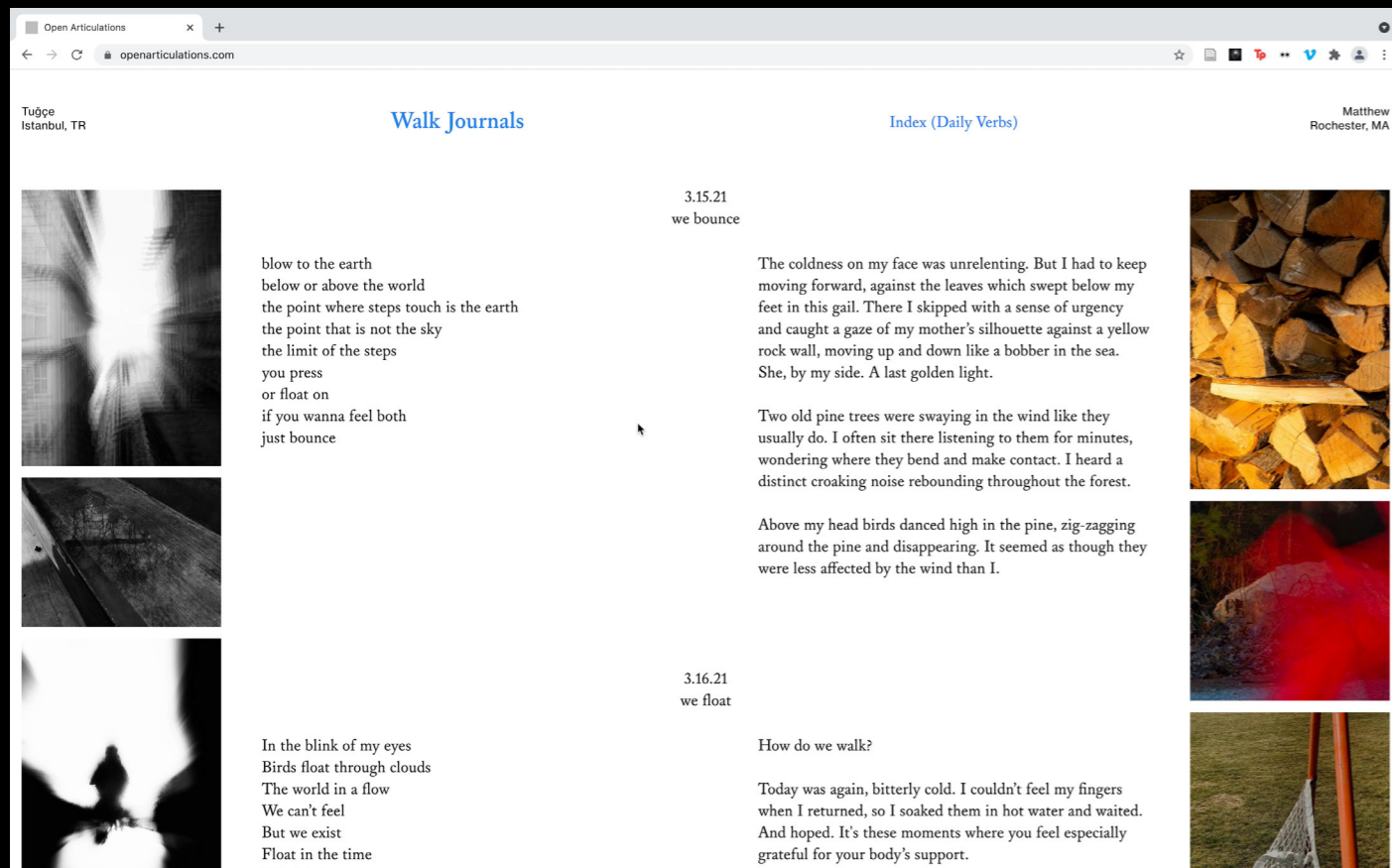
In an April 2021 AIGA interview, Kathleen Sleboda argues for a widening of perspectives in the making of online archives by introducing the notion of the "plural narrative." She states, "I find efforts to widen the narrative—to build in a capacity for voices that haven't always been heard or recognized—incredibly encouraging. Looking at and creating space for this multiplicity of perspective, a project that de-centers singular authority—that literally flattens and rolls over it—these are ideas that have been really important to me, especially in my teaching" (Sleboda 2021). Among her chief concerns are personal histories concerning identity that are eroded or forgotten over time. Sleboda is specifically interested in "how we understand the past, how the future might understand us, and how we relate to each other right now" (Sleboda 2021).

"If we accept that geographical knowledges through which commodity systems are imagined and acted upon from within are fragmentary, multiple, contradictory, inconsistent and, often, downright hypocritical, then the power of a text which deals with these knowledges comes not from smoothing them out, but through juxtaposing and montaging them [. . .] so that audiences can work their way through them and, along the way, inject and make their own critical knowledges out of them" (Cook and Crang quoted in Cook 2004, 642).
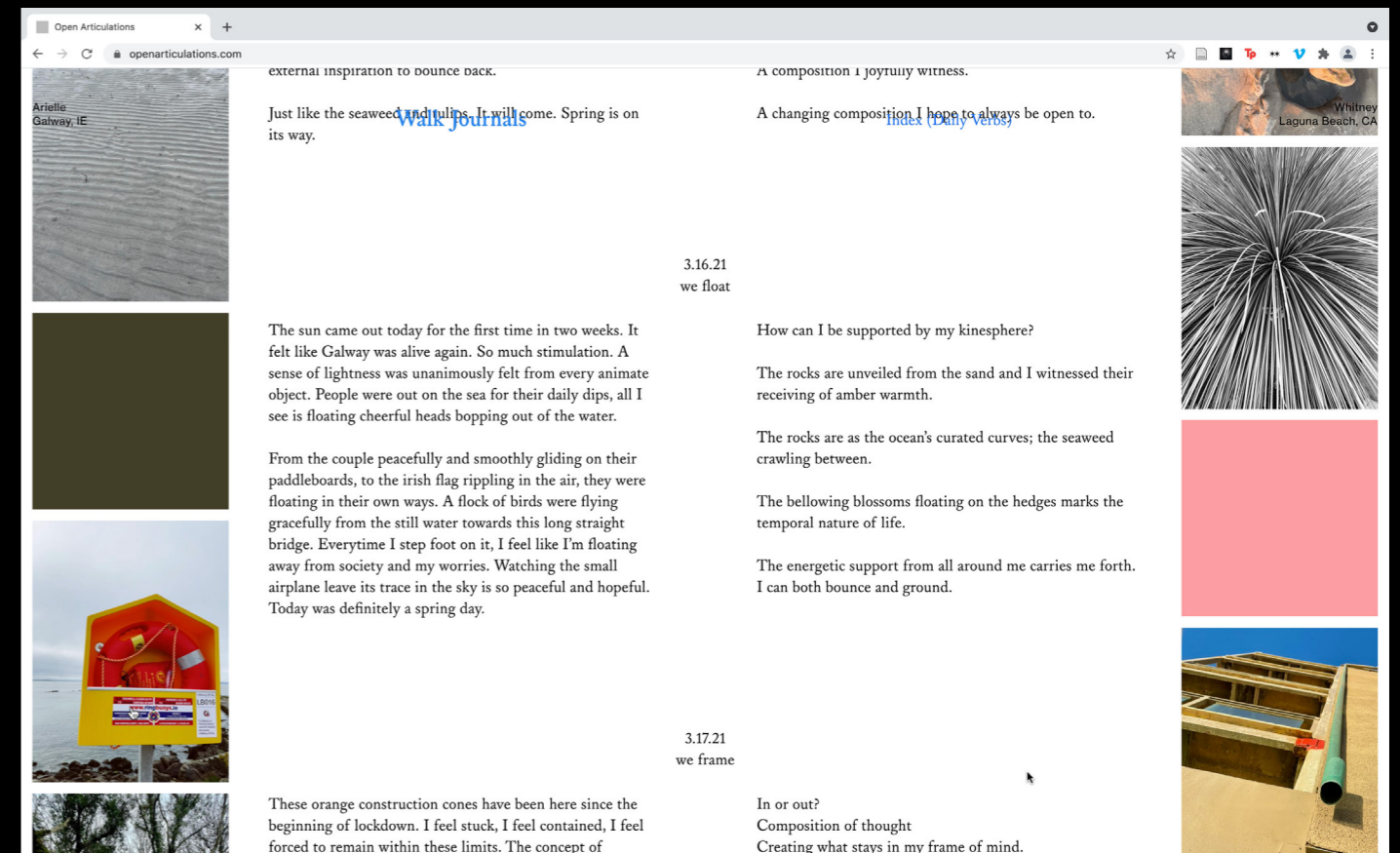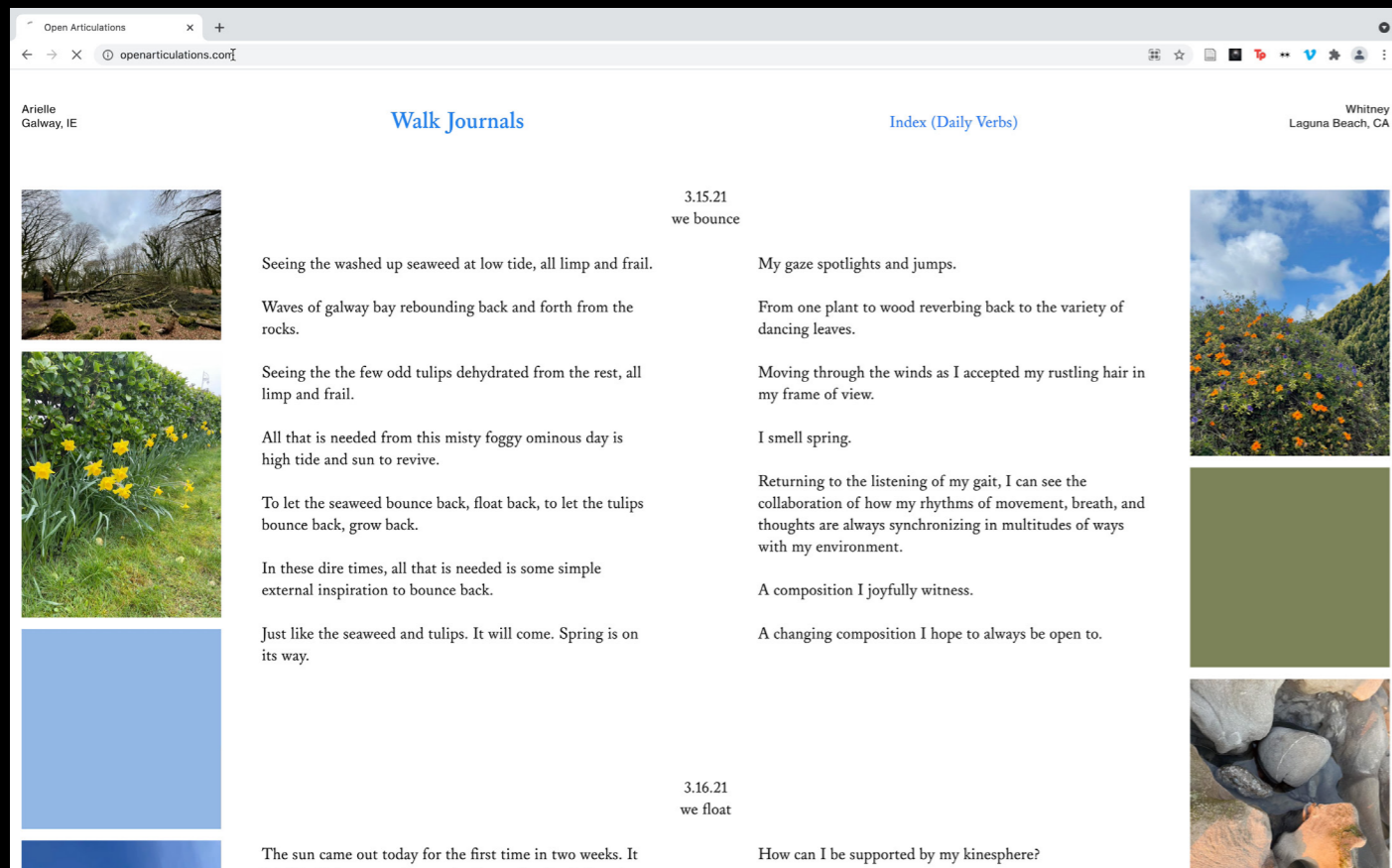
In his 2004 essay, "Follow the Thing: Papaya," Ian Cook describes the journey of a papaya from a Jamaican farm to a North London flat. Extending the narrative past the confines of the farm, Cook weaves the perspectives of multiple stakeholders and connects many waypoints (the papaya plant, farmer, foreman, packer, importer, routes, buyer, consumer, and economy) into a single textual sequence. Images compliment the text throughout in spare fashion. By limiting his own voice and writing for a more general audience, Cook places a spotlight on the assorted human perspectives in the supply chain. The stories act as a call and response for another, as Cook had previously theorized ten years earlier.

For Emma, the young London-based consumer, her own vision of the "exotic fruits" are largely based on her personal life experiences and what media she intakes—travels with celebrity chefs in magazines and on TV. The origins she imagines do not include the experiences of Pru, the papaya packer back in Jamaica, who is forced to work late into the evening stacking papayas with minimal hand protection, and how she is prevented from seeing her young children on any sort of consistent schedule. Whereas the global consumer view of the papaya is dominated by a sense of geography and exploration, for papaya farmers the act of picking the fruit "perpetuat[es] those unequal and exploitative relations between colonisers and colonised" (Cook 2004, 659). It begs the question, whose story is being left out? Who is telling the story? Cook's narrative approach of montaging multiple perspectives could serve as a model for additional research and design. It is worth thinking about whether this approach may be adapted for a digital format, which includes both photos and text.

Robert Horn's map titled *Mental Health Services Dynamics and Dilemma* (1999) was developed to aid officials in Multnomah County, Portland, Oregon to understand the problems faced by mentally ill inmates incarcerated in the region's prisons. Horn reflected on the map's use: "The map helped [the participants] find out what their colleagues know and don't know, what they can rely on each other for, and whether one person's description of the world squares with another's. All that was happening in the process of making the map. It's social learning: how we learn together to solve in this case, community problems" (Horn, 2006, 52).

Walk Journals, 2021. Website: Tuğçe and Matt. On each page refresh, a different random pairing is shown between the four participants. Clicking on a solid color square triggers a sound, as shown in the image to the right—in this example, the sound of birds singing.

Arielle
Galway, IE

Walk Journals

Index (Daily Verbs)

Whitney
Laguna Beach, CA

3.15.21
we bounce

Seeing the washed up seaweed at low tide, all limp and frail.

Waves of galway bay rebounding back and forth from the rocks.

Seeing the the few odd tulips dehydrated from the rest, all limp and frail.

All that is needed from this misty foggy ominous day is high tide and sun to revive.

To let the seaweed bounce back, float back, to let the tulips bounce back, grow back.

In these dire times, all that is needed is some simple external inspiration to bounce back.

Just like the seaweed and tulips. It will come. Spring is on its way.

My gaze spotlights and jumps.

From one plant to wood reverbing back to the variety of dancing leaves.

Moving through the winds as I accepted my rustling hair in my frame of view.

I smell spring.

Returning to the listening of my gait, I can see the collaboration of how my rhythms of movement, breath, and thoughts are always synchronizing in multitudes of ways with my environment.

A composition I joyfully witness.

A changing composition I hope to always be open to.

3.16.21
we float

The sun came out today for the first time in two weeks. It

How can I be supported by my kinesphere?

---

external inspiration to bounce back.

Just like the seaweed and tulips. It will come. Spring is on its way.

A composition I joyfully witness.

A changing composition I hope to always be open to.

3.16.21
we float

The sun came out today for the first time in two weeks. It felt like Galway was alive again. So much stimulation. A sense of lightness was unanimously felt from every animate object. People were out on the sea for their daily dips, all I see is floating cheerful heads bopping out of the water.

From the couple peacefully and smoothly gliding on their paddleboards, to the irish flag rippling in the air, they were floating in their own ways. A flock of birds were flying gracefully from the still water towards this long straight bridge. Everytime I step foot on it, I feel like I'm floating away from society and my worries. Watching the small airplane leave its trace in the sky is so peaceful and hopeful. Today was definitely a spring day.

How can I be supported by my kinesphere?

The rocks are unveiled from the sand and I witnessed their receiving of amber warmth.

The rocks are as the ocean's curated curves; the seaweed crawling between.

The bellowing blossoms floating on the hedges marks the temporal nature of life.

The energetic support from all around me carries me forth. I can both bounce and ground.

3.17.21
we frame

These orange construction cones have been here since the beginning of lockdown. I feel stuck, I feel contained, I feel forced to remain within these limits. The concept of

In or out?
Composition of thought
Creating what stays in my frame of mind.

Walk Journals, 2021. Website: Arielle and Whitney.

Left browser window:

Open Articulations

openarticulations.com/index

Whitney
Laguna Beach, CA

Walk Journals

Index (Daily Verbs)

Matthew
Rochester, MA

we amplify
we attempt
we borrow
we bounce
we breathe
we collapse
we contain
we count
we curve
we cut
we disappear
we drag
we drop
we embrace
we encircle
we enter
we expect
we flick
we follow
we frame
we glide
we hop
we hug
we indulge
we kneel
we lean
we loom
we mangle

we meet
we melt
we mirror
we pause
we peel
we press
we pull
we receive
we reflect
we relinquish
we repair
we ripple
we shine
we sink
we skip
we spray
we spread
we touch
we transition
we volunteer
we wring

Walk Journals is an archive of a shared walking experience that took place between myself and three friends over the span of two weeks and across three continents. On a daily basis we would engage our walks with a randomly generated shared mindset (e.g., We Amplify) and we would respond through sounds, images, and short journal reflections. The website collects these expressions into a single space and invites the audience and participants to play with and make new meaning from them.

Contributors:
Tuğçe Albayrak (Istanbul, Turkey)
Arielle Locke (Galway, Ireland)
Matthew Bejtlich (Rochester, MA)
Whitney Schmanski (Laguna Beach, CA)

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Walk Journals

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Walk Journals, 2021. Website: Tuğçe and Matt. View of daily verb index.

Conversation with Joshua Citarella

New York City, NY
16:00

MB

I have this project called *Walk Journals* that I want to show you. This shared walking project has evolved considerably since it started back in January of this year. It is an iterative experimental process. It began as a two-person project with my friend Whitney and myself, a cross-country exchange of images, sounds, and text journals from our daily walks. It has since grown to four people on three continents. With this information, I have made a website that gathers our experiences (through text, image, and sound) into a single digital space with three sliding columns. I am interested in how our expressions may take on new meanings when they become close to each other, and how they may offer a new understanding or interpretation of self, each other, and place. Can I get your reaction?

JC

When you investigate these questions of meaningful interactions through social media, online spaces, or whatever it happens to be, you are intractably involved in big utopian political questions of: What is a meaningful exchange? And how many people should be a part of it? And as you analogize, do you want to play tennis with a robot? Not a lot of people do. There are probably some people who want to play tennis with a robot. But most people go to have a meaningful connection with other human beings. That's, I think, actually a wonderful analogy that you should consider putting into your description for the project because it's a back-and-forth.

From my own experience in the art world, the way that I earn, the majority of my living now is essentially through online speaking engagements in the form of Twitch streaming or podcasting, speaking at institutions, universities, museums, things like this. I also make art, but nobody, nobody buys art, because art is a speculative financial asset. Framing this out, what is important is that while you're in the domain of the art world it's going to feel very much like you're not doing anything at all. You're having conversations or you're engaged in play or something like this, but the value will be captured later on if you have the correct foundation and the correct analysis. Having what seems like overly in-depth conversations now is very important so that you have a proper framework to scale and understand how these things come into play later.

Artists are good at doing creative problem solving and setting up what is the appropriate frame through which to look at this problem even if it is a graphic user interface problem, a tech problem, political problem, or an interpersonal problem . . . all sorts of different

things. Because we are not bound to a specific discipline or set of rules, our work is open to all types of innovation and out-of-the-box ideas that rigid institutional structures cannot easily accommodate.

So, the way this has worked out for me—and I think a number of other people in the past few years—is that you retreat from social media. And you go to your group chat—your group chat is, let's say, five people—and there you have a very meaningful, very in-depth conversation that can sustain a high resolution. You can disagree with each other and then find consensus later on. It's a problem of the format of social media, in that people exchange too quickly, too frequently. I think in the example I gave before, if you expanded [the post] to 800 characters that you could post once in a 24-hour window, then the discourse would be totally different. But that is the one track of discourse, and does that really result in a meaningful personal connection?

So, I think what you are verging on through this project is that you're looking to have meaningful personal connections between a close-knit group of people that would essentially be a network of, let's say, private twitter accounts or something like that. But you want to be able to share media and collaborate through a way that is not immediately built into that network. And people are basically, for lack of a better term, vibing on an idea inspired by each other, which is why you are remixing, which is kind of a silly word in this context. But that's why you're interchanging the images, the audio, the text, whatever, because everyone is resonating on a certain set of ideas. And you upload once a day in your 24-hour window, which is this daily walk. It is not the discursive problem of Twitter you're trying to solve, but the meaningful exchange problem of Twitter. Does that seem to be how you imagined the project?

MB

Yes, it does. Can you tell me more about what you mean about the word "discursive" in this context?

JC

Let's say you post something that is on a sensitive topic. And then the common thread is 40 pages long of people squabbling over the specific definitions and different studies, posting all types of conflicting information, right? People are incentivized to have heated exchanges and make bad faith interpretations of each other's words and, essentially, to fight on the platform. This spurs more user engagement, more people spending time on the blockchain.

MB

I care that we have a value system that we agree on, which can help create a nurturing atmosphere. There is a hybridity to it: I want to allow space for everyone to have their own voice to express themselves freely through these walks, but I also care that we are working towards some type of common goal, even if we are building individually. That common goal, in the case of this project, for example, could be to become more attuned through sound to our environments.

JC

Yeah, well, that. So I would say that in the scope of the time you have available, I would watch the lecture, which will get you most of the way there. The name of the book is From Counterculture to Cyberculture by Fred Turner, and it explains the philosophical evolution of various countercultural movements that emerged from the late '60s and '70s that worked their way into Silicon Valley, into the Californian ideology, and over time grew to become the networks that we know today. And there are interesting political ideas from the '68s counterculture that are present in today's Facebook and startup cultures. If you have like four people, it's relatively easy to have direct democracy. If you have a network of 4 million people, it's very difficult to have direct democracy. So your question is, do you want a CEO, dictator type of rule that just [pulls out the] "ban hammer" and uses it however he pleases? Or do you want some type of a representative democracy where people vote somebody into the Congress of Twitter or whatever it happens to be?

Say, for example, in the case of your network, scaling is vastly down? Is there one person who has editorial or curatorial authority? Where, if one of the people in this small group posts something that you don't like, that can be taken down? Or does it stay up permanently? Because these are potentially agonistic forces that can push against each other, and sometimes align. This creates a democratic consensus where not everybody, but a majority agrees. And that's what's best for the community. So what is often fun for artists is to have things that don't agree in small groups of people, you know, and "kind of hammering things out" in a rough way and experimenting, and that's very generative. That stuff really doesn't scale well because you get factions that break off and go to war with each other at a large scale.

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MB

The time span of an activity, or interval of engagement, is an important factor. Steve Weatherhead, an architect whom I also interviewed for this book, brought up the point that it is hard to sustain connection after the participatory activity has passed.

JC

This is an interesting feature. This has been coming into effect much more recently. On Twitch you do a monthly subscription and you have to renew it at certain increments. It's not like on Twitter where you follow someone and you follow them forever or when you friend them on Facebook you friend them forever, unless you opt out. On Twitch every month you have to hit that subscribe button. You can do it in advance for up to a few months or a year or something like that, but for most people most interactions are opted into every month. This is a way of essentially managing your media diet, whose content you're taking in.

MB

I wanted to talk about my final project for my thesis with you, called *They Sink*. I started this project in your class, Contemporary Photo & Research, in the fall of 2020 as a purely photographic project documenting coastal erosion on Sagamore Beach on the Cape through photographs and collected archival images. That has since expanded to include sound and a new interface to hold the content.

My question for you is, based on what we have been talking about today about participation and community, is there any way that I could make this work participatory or impactful from a community perspective? Maybe allow people to add their own experiences? I am thinking about future directions.

JC

Yeah. That's a form and container question. So, you've got this content, right, which could be these photographs of Sagamore Beach, as a video slideshow with an audio accompaniment that could be shown projected in a museum, like your Walk Journals project. Or, what you've built is this outline for an essentially collaborative blog, maintained over an agreed upon period of time. This could be content that is episodic and is posted to the blog on maybe a daily basis. Or maybe it's on a weekly basis. But you're posting once a day in this community, to this six-person blog, right?

Let's say, for example, you had a group of people who all lived up and down this stretch of the beach, and you had a collaborative blog to watch it change over the season. And that exchange was meaningful for you. For example, my parents live an hour away from the city. There's a road that is less frequently trafficked, and somewhere along this road, there is a tree stump and a bunch of rocks. This is where a few people walk. A few years ago, during the summer on that tree stump people began to stack up rocks. So, it was an improvised, collaborative sculpture between the people who lived in the neighborhood. They didn't exactly know what was part of it. It's kind of cute, right? It's like a fun exchange to do with your friends. It's not commodified; nobody's marketing it. It's not like a social network, where you're going to become a celebrity or anything. But I could imagine that if those people found each other on an app, like what you're describing, you're essentially making the digital version of this improvised sculpture that is stacking rocks on top of a tree stump between this small group of friends.

MB

That's actually a beautiful metaphor. I like when you can kind of break it down into something physical and simple.

JC

Well, let's just separate out the two threads. So there's the one project, which is documentation of the beach and creating its soundscape. The other project is just purely diagrammatic, a blueprint of the platform or the blog. This beach project could be fit into the container of the blog, but they are actually two separate projects. The beach project will evolve or blossom in certain ways depending on if it's a projected video at the length of 20 minutes or if it's a series of blog posts. It will grow differently. You don't have to shoehorn one into the other.

The wonderful thing about the improvised rock sculpture is that somebody could just come by and push the whole thing over. Right? Which is annoying for the people who have really invested the time. But that's beautiful. That's also what makes it special, right? The way that these small communities maintain themselves is through the voluntary collaboration of everybody. At any point, someone could derail the thread.

"[The songs] are long, almost minimalist pieces. They are more like bricolage. They're quite inspired by filmmaking and a different kind of logic. Shifting through different spaces and kind of drawing the distinction between things. Then, seeing how meaning changes when things sit next to each, what that does to them, and how that alters their meaning. One piece I improvised with the hang drum was 12 minutes long. It was quite an improvised process. Then I played synths along to it and drums, and Jack did the sax" (Bellamy 2021, 167).

In *White Night Before A Manifesto*, Metahaven reveals something foreboding in the face of big data and of the increasing complexity of information systems: "Designers—either by marketing or by fiction—perpetually innovate the seductive regime of surface, which stimulates other designers to do the same thing, disconnected from the non-negotiability of the brutal material ground, historical structure and political struggles on which, originally, surface itself was premised" (Metahaven 2008). Information flows (e.g., from an analog sensor measuring body temperature) are ultimately rooted in the material world, even though information is converted to a digital signal.

While I agree with the notion of experimentation and speculation in design, I think it is also important to stay aware of context (history, place, politics) when designing information systems and interfaces. The models we build using data algorithms perpetuate a human bias (whether we like it or not) and are often informed by previous models. Likewise, decisions on setting up data acquisition systems, building a data pipeline, or selecting what to show on a visual interface all inform each other and are interrelated. These too perpetuate bias. Context and authenticity is vital. Without it, I fear we will become even more "disconnected" as a society. I think it is important to treat raw data input (sensor data, sound, photo, video) and final surface design as being related and connected.

In his book *The Third Plate*, Dan Barber gives the story of Eduardo Sousa and his more ethical, sustainable way of making foie gras, a method that has actually been in practice in Spain for over 500 years (Barber 2015). Sousa's 1,200-acre farm is a natural oasis. Barber describes how the Spanish farmer lets the geese be born and migrate freely, and he often speaks comfortingly to them often with his human voice. Extra precautions are taken to make sure that the geese aren't frightened before slaughter, using a method of hypnosis. In Sousa's view, for animals to be treated badly at any stage of their lives is a problem. It doesn't matter how good the foie gras tastes. Maintaining this way of life is valued over getting a high yield. This story is communicated through a short narrative film on the La Patería de Sousa website called "A Time for Foie." The film outlines the complex and sensitive environmental network at play between humans, geese, and landscape. This storytelling is achieved primarily through short video clips on the farm juxtaposed with Sousa speaking about his approach.

The Forests Dialogues (TFD), a discussion-based multistakeholder out of the Yale School of the Environment, aims to provide a forum for different stakeholders around the world to meet and have dialogue on current forest-related issues. As its site explains, "Structured to ensure stakeholders' concerns are well represented through a dynamic, bottom-up approach – dialogues result in agreed-upon and actionable outcomes that address natural resource conflicts" ("The Forests Dialogue" n.d.)

In "Action to Surface," Terza Rullerova states the following on the "act of living": "I understand it as constantly re-inventing, bringing ideas and actions together, contributing to the being-together web of relations; to Deleuzian assemblage. Deleuze's interest can be found in bodily capacity to make us think of the unthought. Moreover bodies have active power to affect and also passive power to be affected" (Rullerova 2015).

In her book, *Eating NAFTA*, Alyshia Gálvez writes the following regarding the practice of making tortillas (a Mexican dish) in the famous Copenhagen restaurant Noma: "But narrative capital, like all kinds of capital, is not evenly distributed, and just as with other kinds of capital, those who already command more than their share of other kinds of resources and status are at a clear advantage in getting 'their' stories heard, even when they have appropriated the stories of others. When Chef Redzepi notes that tortillas have yet to have their story properly told, he can only be referring to the food story bank of the elites, in which a small, highly mobile, and privileged global foodie set ranks elite chefs, their restaurants, and their cooking styles, philosophies, and ingredients in an ever-changing hierarchy" (Galvez 2018, 42). How then do we unpack or unflatten the multiple stakeholder views in the supply chain to offer a more authentic experience?

They Sink is a short video depicting the erosion of the landscape on Sagamore Beach, Cape Cod over time and an eroding sense of connection to the land. This is captured through the layering of voice, field recording, photography, archival maps, and postcards harvested from the site.

Conversation with Duncan Bellamy

Sagamore Beach, 2021.

MB

My project, *They Sink*, is a work documenting coastal erosion on Sagamore Beach on Cape Cod using a combination of artifacts including photographs, archival imagery, and field recordings collected from the beach site. It reminds me a little of your audio-video installation with Hannah Collins, *I will make up a song and sing it in a theatre with the night air above my head*, where you used the sites depicted in Hannah's photographs as sources for audio. Can you describe your process of making the score and mapping the territory through sound?

DB

It felt crucial to the work that the sounds, even if they were abstract, were generated at the sites in Hannah's photographs and resonated with the architecture. The work is focused around the pioneering work of Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy. It is a contrast of his modernist structures and the environment they are situated in, as well as older traditions of Nubian architecture and ancient Egyptian buildings. Hannah wanted to contrast [this architecture] with the contemporary environment in Egypt, which is a hectic, noisy place. If I just got a synth out and started noodling away, you know, it just wouldn't have any intention or any connection to the space. So, it was pretty clear that we had to go there and do it. My ex-partner had a handheld Zoom audio recorder; I had a Roland. We took both. Recording in Egypt is a little bit difficult because you can't just walk around filming everything. We had to be discrete with it. It's an incredible place though. From the flight over, in the airport, everywhere throughout the trip, I was recording things that somehow described what I thought Hannah's photographs were talking about. There were a lot of machines and electronics: air conditioning units, wind, silence of the spaces. I did a lot of that. Ambiences of spaces that all sound similar but have different tones and resonances. I was looking for anything that gives this kind of impressionistic sense of the place. A lot of the sound in the film intentionally doesn't happen at the same time as the images.

MB

Yeah, because these places are pretty vacant right?

DB

Yes, especially the ones in the desert. There are Bedouins that kind of guard them, and no one goes there. They are mostly deserted. [The buildings] describe the kind of environment. We went to go see the guys making the mud bricks. We traveled like an hour and a half in a taxi and turned up at some guy's house who was making mud bricks and I recorded it. I collated the material when I got back to London. The process was collaborative with Hannah. I created a full first pass of the whole score, fleshed it out, and then we worked on it together: talked it through, adapted things, shifted things around a bit, took them away. There was quite a lot of processing on the audio. Quite a lot of pitch shifting.

MB

What kind of post-processing did you do to the field recordings?

DB

The last passage that you hear—that's actually a bunch of car horns I recorded. There was a wedding going on in Luxor. Everyone had their horns going. That whole passage is actually just a snippet of that recording pitched down [at various levels]. I was making the sounds into drones. That was a lot of the processing behind it — taking things and stretching them and squishing them together. A lot of it is very intuitive and

that is often how I work. In this kind of context when you have a certain amount of material, and don't want to use things from outside of that material, having those structures, those boundaries, is really important. Once you have this finite amount of resources, then you've got nowhere else to look other than your own imagination.

MB

How did you go about sequencing the field recordings in time for the 20-minute piece? Is there a narrative arc to it?

MB

I just wanted to jump back to my design project on Sagamore Beach. Can I get your thoughts on sound processing and field recordings for scoring to image? Should the sound be indexical or a one-to-one mapping? Or is it okay if these relationships are more abstract?

MB

Do you have any ideas on how I can create more intuitively? Bradley Zero challenged me to "figure out a routine and way of working that maximizes flow" and "experiment in ways that break down [my] scientific method, disrupting the workflow, focusing on more immediate results" (Zero 2020).

MB

Can you describe your collaborative process when writing new music for Portico Quartet?

DB

It's definitely got a shape; there is a shape to it. There are certain sections with the architecture where Hannah wanted it to be a bit more "musical" (quote unquote). A lot of it was just very abstract. Almost all the time the sound never really synced with what was going on visually. This was my intention. In other words, the recording becomes incredibly literal: here is the sound of some mud, and some mud bricks. There is a section in the middle at the Mosque in Gourna that is more musical, for example. There are chords going on, but it is still very ambient. We did build it up in that way so that there are these two peaks, and then the rest is descriptive and impressionistic.

DB

You have got that audio of the beach, but what can you do with that? How can that become part of the work? What happens when you pitch it down? What happens if you find other ways to treat that audio? You wouldn't necessarily know that all of the sounds were recorded on the site in Luxor, but I think it is important to the spirit and intention within the work that they are. Even if I have pitched it down, and you can't recognize a sound as a car horn. The fact that the recording is from there builds up these layers of meaning. It is the same with the beach. Even if the sound is different, and you are treating it somehow, the fact is that it is from there. It has purpose, meaning, connection, and it resonates with the image somehow. It depends what you do. It is good to have some connection. There is a reason why you are doing it.

DB

It's like practice. That to me is the fundamental aspect of what you are doing. I am not someone who is a particularly great multitasker. I feel like you have to work at it.

DB

It's just me and Jack now; we write all of the music. I would make a packed lunch and go into the studio every day and treat it seriously. I am just there, five, six, or seven days a week. Maybe the weekend as well. I try to be there from 10 or 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. I feel like I have to be quite consumed by something. For Porti-

co, my process is: Trying things. Having initial ideas, maybe setting parameters. Thinking of what I want to say. Working on it until things emerge. And once things emerge, trying to structure it later. I try to build broad structures first and capture something. It could be just a drum pattern and a chord sequence. Jack and I often work very separately, and then after a month or two we will get together and go through everything. Then we will start to exchange projects, and we will get together and flesh them out. It is kind of a long process.

MB

I love that. So it could just be a drum pattern that you share with Jack?

DB

Drums and synth, or drums and a hang drum pattern. We have this record coming out in May called Terrain. It has just three long pieces of music: a 20-minute piece, and then two 12-minute pieces. For the album it was a desire for something that has perhaps a little less structure or a different kind of structure. They are long, almost minimalist pieces. They are more like bricolage. They're quite inspired by filmmaking and a different kind of logic. Shifting through different spaces and kind of drawing the distinction between things. Then, seeing how meaning changes when things sit next to each, what that does to them, and how that alters their meaning. One piece I improvised with the hang drum was 12 minutes long. It was quite an improvised process. Then I played synths along to it and drums, and Jack did the sax.

When you are working collaboratively, you have to be open to not having your ideas destroyed, but interpreted in a different way. For example, as a drummer I feel like I hear things in strange time sequences. There is a tune on another album coming out later in the year, where Jack assumed it was going to be a really fast tune. But to me, it feels like a ballad. It's slow. I just approached it in a slightly different way. You have to let go of your preconceptions and be open.

"I feel supported by nature and there's so much to discover from the sensory input around me. I have in my mind that frame that I can play within. But other than that, everything else is free. But it means I also fall into habits. You described other interesting moments that happened where you found something, and then you repeated it, and it kind of uncovered itself. That happened to me today, a little bit of doing one movement and realizing that, 'Oh, that's something new.' And so I would like to play with it more. Which is fun. Because I think getting out of our habits is one of the reasons why we do it. We've found that rhythm and flow together. Now it's taking that connection and being bold with choices. Lots of room to play" (Schmanski 2021, 74).

Hannah Collins, *I will make up a song and sing it in a theatre with the night air above my head*, 2019. Still image from video.

How can a narrative mapping of a place capture its dynamism or activity, reflecting life not as singular and fixed, but as plural, fluid, and spontaneous?

They Sink

My great grandfather Carl Burrill built our family homestead high up on the Sagamore Highlands on Cape Cod, perched near the highest point of the whole Cape. It is an amazing vista. Glancing southward you notice the entrance to the Cape Cod Canal. Looking northward is Manomet Point turning the corner into Plymouth. On a clear day, you can sometimes see straight across due east to Provincetown and catch a view of its historic monument rising like a spike from the sea. One windy fall day long ago, my great grandfather's small fishing boat was swamped with two of my young uncles aboard, necessitating a Coast Guard rescue and making front page news in *The Boston Globe* the following morning.

On a blustery afternoon walk on Sagamore Beach, I stumbled upon a resident named Marsha, who lives up the narrow footpath (built and maintained by my grandfather) that descends from the cliffs. I had my eyes fixed on a large boulder split at the bottom of the dune. I had just been taking a few photos of it. Marsha revealed that when she was younger, decades ago, she would sit with her family on the rock, which was in their backyard. It had sunk down the hill over the years. She said it slowly as if reliving those moments.

My father tells me that the "White Cliffs" have been pushed far back from where they were when he came for his first vacation in the early '60s, wracked by storm, sea, and time. He also has shared with me the irony that you can no longer catch the fish that is the namesake of the Cape (you could catch them with a bucket) now that the fishing stocks have become so badly depleted. My great grandfather and the homestead he built with his own hands has long since been torn down, proving that we are all just renting in this world — everything is temporary. Ultimately what remains is what is remembered and passed down to others, especially those who care about the past and where we come from.

They Sink is a 7-minute video depicting the physical erosion of Sagamore Beach, Cape Cod and the loss of human connection to the land over time. It explores a kind of bi-directional erosion, one source from the swelling Atlantic Ocean and another from the land, in the form of new settlers looking to transform the once sparse cottage setting into something private and residential. Through photographs and sounds collected directly from the site during two trips over a six-month period, as well as archival imagery and maps dating back to the 1900s provided by the Bourne Historical Society, this project considers the effects of erosion on the natural landscape of the beach (its dunes, sand, and beach grass) — which are the natural barriers of the territory and protect its human and animal habitats — and its effects on people. Throughout the video piece, changing imagery is in constant dialogue with a score drawn from field recordings collected from the five-mile stretch of land — the sounds of waves, blown sand, birds, and children playing — including short vocal fragments from my father, Michael Bejtlich, and aunt, Nancy Benson, recalling their memories of living there.

It raises the question: How can we express memories of these landscapes through sound and image and explore a kind of shared history of a place together? How can we rekindle a sense of hope from loss of connection to land?

Link: https://vimeo.com/547331886

00:10
Crashing of waves (audio)

00:30
Ocean building steadily (audio)

02:31
Light sound of waves (audio)

July 29th –
This is the great day on the Cape
opening of the Canal, I'm glad it does
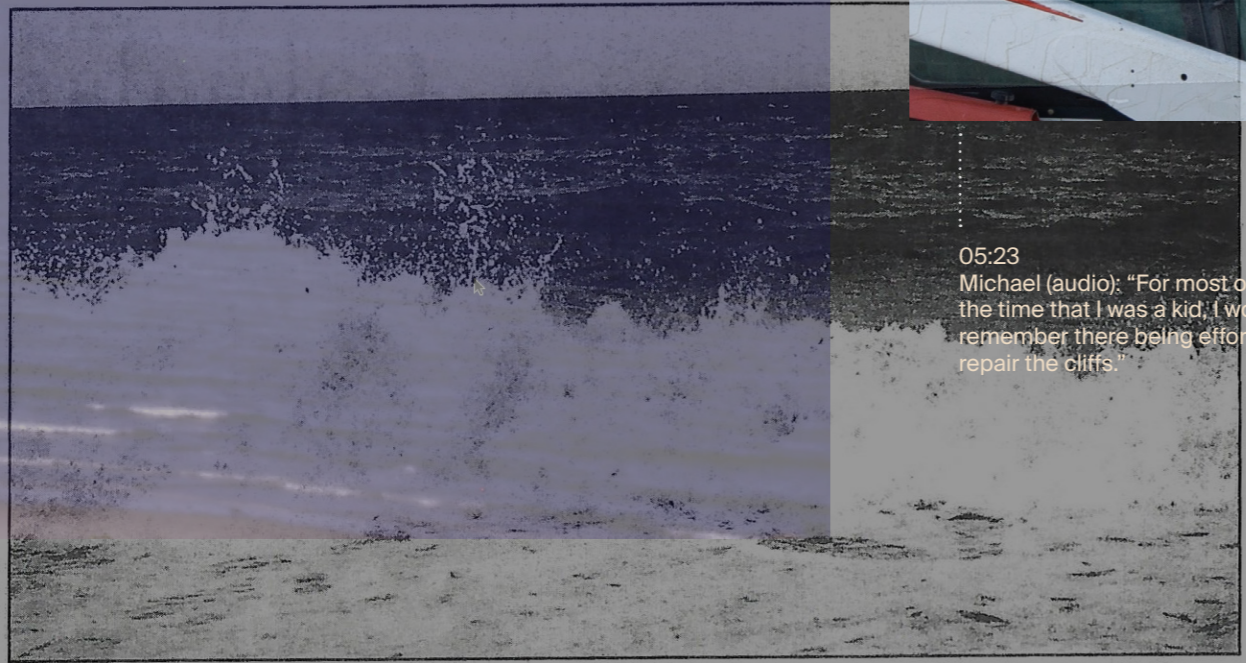rain as it did yesterday. We expe
to see watercraft that comes from
pass along in front of us into the

02:52
Nancy (audio): "They all had names."

03:43
Rain sounds (audio)

03:57
Michael (audio): "It's a place of solace for family gatherings.
It's a place of foreboding and worry."

05:23
Michael (audio): "For most of the time that I was a kid, I would remember there being efforts to repair the cliffs."

Sagamore Beach, showing Highlands in Distance.

The remains of Tropical Storm Dennis stirred up surf along Sagamore Beach last week.

B.E. 9/10/99

(Photograph by John Nicholson)

04:14
Crashing of waves (audio)

CAPE COD 04

06:21
Nancy (audio): "When it was time to go, I was ready."
Waves building (audio)

Mixing field recordings from beach and vocal reflections, 2021. Volume automation and EQing.
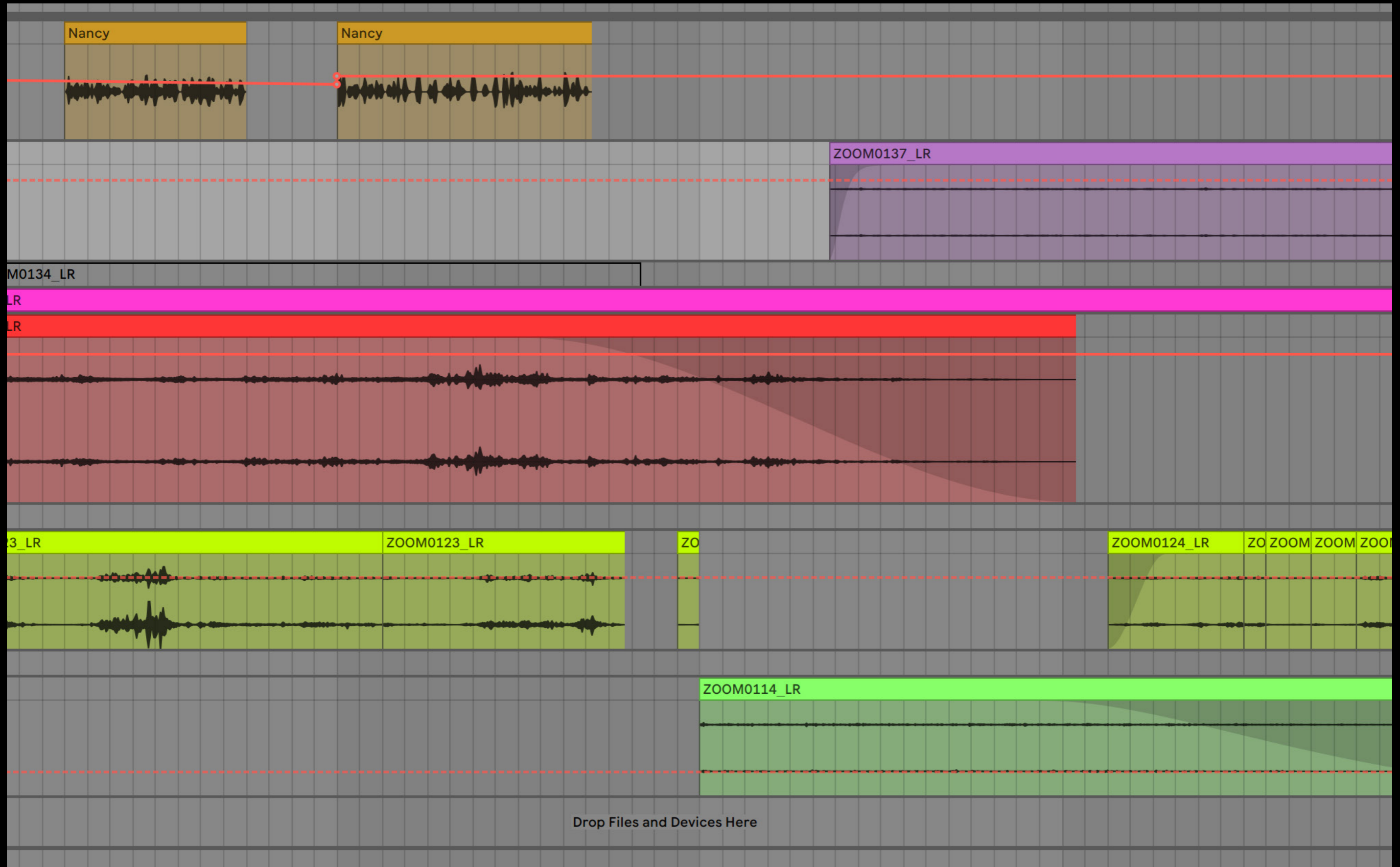
Mixing field recordings from beach and vocal reflections, 2021. Detail view.

Architect Robert Tullis asserts that a "sense of place" is "memory, emotion and meaning in architectural and urban design" (quoted in Steuteville 2021). A "new idea called 'embodied cognition' posits that physical place is less important than how people react to it. The reaction is at the heart of 'urban experience' and can provide emotional nourishment" (Steuteville 2021).

"Beaches are dynamic, living landscapes. Spend a day on the beach and you see the micro scale — in the grains of sand blown by winds, tumbled by the surf, or carried out in your shoes. Spend a week, and you see sandbars and wading pools arise and disappear. Spend a year, and you see dunes grow, shrink, and migrate. When you look across decades and centuries, you see the landscape evolving on a wider scale, but still one that humans can experience" (NASA Earth Observatory).

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....

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Associate Professor, Graphic Design
Primary Advisor

....

Keira Alexandra
Partner, Work-Order
External Thesis Critic
Thesis Advisor

....

Aki Nurosi
Professor, Graphic Design
Secondary Advisor

....

Bethany Johns
Professor, Graphic Design
Graduate Program Director

Colophon

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Dedicated to my parents, Michael and Janet,
and my sister Emily

Rhode Island School of Design