THEORY ON DEMAND

FAILURISTS
WHEN THINGS GO AWRY

EDITED BY
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& JEN RAE

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FAILURISTS: METHODOLOGIES, MOTIVATIONS AND MEANINGS

Introduction: Locating Uncertain Futures

The idea of the Failurists Collective was born out of a creative methods workshop at RMIT Europe in Barcelona in 2018. We were an interdisciplinary group of researchers and practitioners interested in how we could recalibrate the role of critical-creative methods in relation to social justice and the climate emergency context. This workshop was a window in time before the 'unprecedented' European heatwaves, the catastrophic bushfires in North America and Australia and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing our implicit culpabilities and vulnerabilities, the sense of urgency to 'do something' creatively and critically engage with this reality was palpable in the workshop.

The exercise was more than just a social innovation agenda. This workshop was about stretching disciplines, techniques, methods, and knowledge translation for new ways of knowing that allowed for vulnerabilities and subjectivities to emerge as part of failing as an act of liminality and deep reflection (see Figure 1.1). For example, the way in which an ethnographer, if one listens deeply to the field, then transforms the preconceived research questions through their failure. In what ways could 'pivoting' be framed as an iteration in which codesign and cocreation with the field is a constant process of failing, translation, and recalibration?

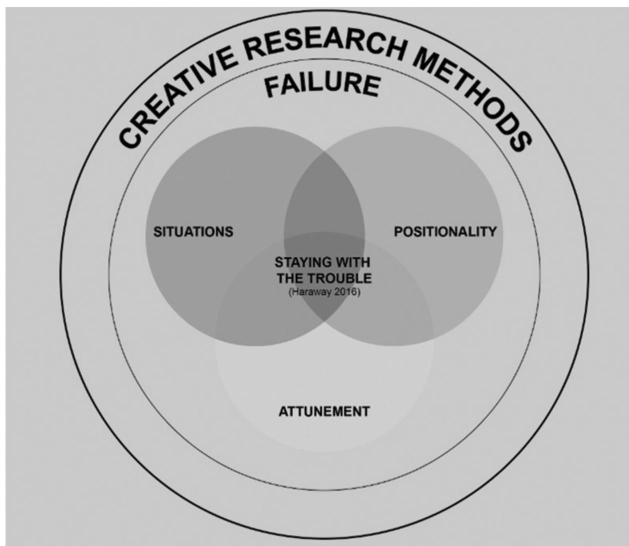

Figure 1.1: Creative Research Methods Approach to Failure. From 2018 RMIT workshop.

Indeed, just the act of conversation between the disciplines is an action of constant translation, failure, and adaptation — take, for example, how elastic the term codesign has become

across the disciplines and sectors. For some it means 'I spoke with an end-user'; for others it is a constant cycle of discussion, debate, translation, and transmission. As a collective, we explored various modalities of workshopping — its potentialities and limits to create and curate playful iteration and recalibration.

Since 2018, significant climate-related events in the world at large have demonstrated that failure is ubiquitous within and across our human systems. And, in turn, disenfranchised (unacknowledged) grief hangs palpably like a heavy cloud, a distress now coined by Glenn Albrecht as solastalgia – an ill feeling one experiences when they are powerless and impacted by significant environmental changes and impacts.[1] David Kessler, who with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, explored the initial five stages of grief, defined the COVID-19 pandemic as adding another layer of grief — that of uncertain futures.[2]

However, for many, this uncertain future in a time of climate urgency has been a long time coming. So much so that when we hear of heat waves in London of 40 degrees Celsius and the heat dome in the Canadian town of Lytton (which led to unprecedented temperatures of nearly 50 degrees Celsius before a wildfire ignited and razed the community to the ground), we know that it's more than just a climate emergency. Climate change has always been more of a communications and engagement crisis than an environmental one.[3]

The Unprecedented Precedent: Care, Worlding, and Different Ways of Doing

Figure 1.2: Megan Cope (2020) Unprecedented 2020. Courtesy of the Artist and Milani Gallery.

1 Glenn Albrecht et al., 'Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change,' *Australasian Psychiatry* 15 (2007).

2 David Kessler (2020) cited in Scott Berinato, 'That Discomfort you're feeling is grief', *Harvard Business Review,* March 23 2020, *https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief*.

3 Jen Rae, 'Interpreting the World: Creativity in Dealing with Disasters', From Risk to Resilience Summit, Sydney, Australia, 2022.

Indigenous Australian Qunadamooka artist Megan Cope's UNPRECEDENTED (2020) is a wooden board sign in old English script. Made from ochre, burnt Bundjalung country (charcoal), and glow mineral, the word initially reads PRECEDENT. This work is a powerful statement on what has now become precedent — unprecedented. With the increasingly climate change-related natural disasters of fires, floods, and pandemics, the word 'unprecedented' fails to capture the complex layers of material, social, and environmental dimensions facing the globe. In the emptying out of unprecedented to become precedent, it has become apparent that we need to change how we do things. Indeed, in the face of such tremendous failure, many have turned to the Indigenous ways of doing, being, and knowing as a more sustainable way for the world in the face of Anthropocentric disaster. How we work equitably with and alongside First Peoples is of upmost priority in these critical unprecedented times, recognizing that many contemporary concepts around sustainability, kin, and futurisms draw from complex Indigenous cosmologies, which are sometimes acknowledged but frequently not.

The failure of the Anthropocene — in which human-centeredness has led to destruction of the environment — has meant that many are rethinking how we relate to and 'make' the world, or what multispecies scholars call our 'worlding'. Worlding is a phenomenological concept which describes a move away from divisions between subject and the environment to instead focus on the *temporal, spatial,* and *corporeal relationality* of being-in-the-world. Fundamental to this approach is how human-animal relations figure in practices of caring — for ourselves, our others, and the worlds we make.

For Donna Haraway, the failure of science and technology in exacerbating rather than providing solutions to ecological destruction challenges us to 'radically rethink' the relationship between humans and nature, and dilate our sense of affinity, responsibility, and care to encompass animals as co-evolutionary 'kin'.[4] According to Gavin Van Horn et al., we need to radically revise the relationality between humans and more-than-humans in terms of kinship and kinning.[5] How might multispecies theory contribute to media and cultural studies to enrich our understanding of this kinship across social, digital, and material worlds?

Care is a complex layering of affect that is often entangled with practices of surveillance and guardianship, both social and benevolent.[6] Over the last decade care has become an important space and concept, particularly for feminist research by feminist scholars including

4 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

5 Gavin Van Horn et al. *Kinship*, Canada: Centre for Humans and Animals, 2021.

6 Ingrid Richardson, Larissa Hjorth, Yolande Strengers and William Balmford, 'Careful surveillance at play: Human–animal relations and mobile media in the home', in Sarah Pink, Edgar Gómez Crux and Shanti Sumartojo (eds) *Refiguring Techniques in Digital Visual Research*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 105–116.

Annemarie Mol[7], Puig de la Bellacasa[8], and Haraway[9], who directly explore care relationalities with emphases on media, technologies, and more-than-human agency. As an historically 'feminized' concept, care has many dimensions and modes of affective labor and pastoral guidance which have often been devalued. The COVID-19 pandemic as a global phenomenon transgresses isolated geographies or nation-states; it has centralized care as a matter of survival in profoundly visible ways that has forced rich and powerful nations in the Global North to bear witness to their own vulnerability and failures of equitable care and governance.

Focus has turned to ideas like more-than-human kinship[10] as a way to recalibrate how humans co-inhabit the world. More-than-human relations have been the ongoing focus of several multispecies and animal studies scholars including Haraway[11], Anne Galloway[12], Thom van Dooren[13], and Eduardo Kohn[14] among many others. Their research actively challenges human-centric approaches to ontology, agency, design, and ethnographic research, providing alternative ways of thinking about our being-in-the-world. So much so that now there is a call for critical failure studies as a way to encompass and challenge norms of success as part of neo-liberal regimes.[15]

In this way, failure is deeply embedded in our vulnerabilities. It is intrinsic to how we learn, adapt, grow, and die. It emphasizes the need to enhance our sensory experiences of the world and to acknowledge the powerful role of smell, touch, and proprioception in our interpretations of and feelings about the world. And while there has been a lot of celebration of failure in entrepreneurial technology speak ('fail bigger and better'), at the core of failure is to be reflexive to the reality of humanness. For some, failure is not just an experiment — they don't have the privilege or power. Scholars in feminist science and technology studies (STS) and multispecies and environmental humanities have long been fascinated by the role of failure in methodologies, conceptualization, and ways of being in the world. It can help us conceptualize concepts such as grief as not neo-liberal individuated feelings but as part of a

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7 Annemarie Mol, *The Logic of Care: Health and the Problem of Patient Choice*. London: Routledge, 2008.

8 Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, 'Nothing comes without its world: Thinking with care', *Sociological Review* 60.2 (2008): 197–216, *https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.02070*; Maria Puig de la Bellacasa *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

9 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble.*

10 Van Horn et al., *Kinship.*

11 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003; Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

12 Anne Galloway, 'More-Than-Human Lab: Critical and Ethnographic Experiments After Human Exceptionalism', in L. Hjorth, H. Horst, A. Galloway, and G. Bell (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*, London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 470-477; Anne Galloway, 'Emergent Media Technologies, Speculation, Expectation and Human/Nonhuman Relations', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media,* 57.1 (2013): 53-65, 54.

13 Thom Van Dooren, 'Care: Living Lexicon for the Environmental Humanities', *Environmental Humanities* 5 (2014): 291–294.

14 Eduardo Kohn, *What Forests Think*, Berkeley: University of Cal. Press, 2013.

15 See forthcoming Adriana Mica, Mikolaj Pawlak, Anna Horolets and Pawel Kubicki (eds) *The Routledge International Handbook of Failure*, London: Routledge, 2023.

cultural fabric that helps us reflect and learn from experience (rather than just repeating the same mistake again and again).

Figure 1.3: Critical making in the 2018 Workshop. Photo: Larissa Hjorth.

Failure as Creative Research Practice

Failure is a popular topic *of* research. It has long been a source of study in fields such as sociology and anthropology, STS, privacy and surveillance, cultural and media studies, art, theatre, film, and political science. When things go awry, breakdown, or rupture they can lead to valuable insights into the mundane mechanisms of social worlds.[16] For instance, Susan Leigh Star has argued that essential infrastructures — such as for water or electricity — are often overlooked and under-appreciated until something goes wrong;

16 See for example: Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, SAGE Publications, 1986; Mike Michael, *Technoscience and Everyday Life, The Complex Simplicities of the Mundane,* London: Open University Press, 2006; Gay Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2005.

breakdown reveals behind-the-scenes activities ordinarily taken for granted.[17] And as Luke Munn argues, failure is now 'designed into' the 'resilience' of data center infrastructures — rendering them operational imaginaries for future possibilities through enactments in the present.[18]

Yet, while failure is a familiar topic *of* research, failure *in* and as a tactic *of* research is far less visible, valued, and explored.

Research failure rarely features in finished scholarly and artwork. More often, it is cleaned-up in the final polished argument or piece. When it does appear — often in the form of mess, mistakes, and mishaps — it is framed as unexpected problems to be solved or navigated around, such as the 'confessions in the field' genre.[19] Ethnography has a long tradition of disclosing moments of failure in the field as breakthroughs.[20] While providing fascinating insights in the realities of research, failure of this type rarely challenges methodological practices, data collection, analytic teachings, or normative research outputs. We seldom learn from them — except to try to prevent whatever happened from happening again.

In conventional methods textbooks, failing is largely presented as the result of poor preparation and execution. It is written of in terms of what-not-to-do and workarounds via a plethora of techniques for erasing awkward data and resolving problems and closing down the unexpected and tangential. As Christine Hine critiques: 'Our methodological instincts are to clean up complexity and tell straightforward linear stories, and thus we tend to exclude descriptions that are faithful to experiences of mess, ambivalence, elusiveness and multiplicity.'[21] Another type of failure in research resonates with popular tech-entrepreneurial discourse. Here, failing is viewed as heroic, individualistic, and heteronormative in tone, and often instrumentalized as part of a linear success story. Some, like Appadurai and Alexander, argue that this kind of failure is blind to conventional tropes and, as such, 'produces and sustains cultural fantasies and regimes of expectations.'[22]

Here we seek to argue that failure isn't the opposite of success — rather it is a productive way of being in the world that acknowledges the inequalities, contingencies, subjectivities and collaboration in, and with, the field. Drawing from stories in the field, we explore how to think and write about failure in ways that acknowledge it as an important part of the researcher's journey — from being reflexive in the field, to designing in contingency through iteration, to how to understand social impact in dynamic ways.

17 Susan Leigh Star, 'The Ethnography of Infrastructure', In P. Lyman and N. Wakeford. (eds) *Analysing Virtual Societies: New Directions in Methodology, American Behavioural Scientist*, 43.3 (1999): 377-391.

18 Luke Munn, 'Injecting failure: Data center infrastructures and the imaginaries of resilience', *The Information Society*, 36.3 (2020): 167-176.

19 James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

20 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books, 1973.

21 Christine Hine, 'Multi-sited Ethnography as a Middle range Methodology for Contemporary STS, *Science, Technology* & *Human Values*, 32.6 (2007): 652-671, 12.

22 Arjun Appadurai and Neta Alexander, *Failure*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020, 1.

The authors in this collection are also interested in usurping the idea that failing is only possible for the successful, beyond the precarity of academic life. Instead, by attempting to reclaim failure, in multiple forms, we want to 'escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development' and which 'clean boundaries between [...] winners and losers'.[23] We are open to practices of failure that de-link from conventional systems of knowledge and research practice. Taking a decolonizing approach, we set out to rethink and rework failing in research in terms of the enduring power and influence of 'imperial legacies of Western knowledge and the ways in which those legacies continue to influence knowledge institutions to the exclusions of Indigenous peoples and their aspirations'.[24]

Figure. 1.4: Images from the workshop. Photo: Larissa Hjorth.

Failure as a workshop

As mentioned, this book emerged from a critical making workshop hosted at RMIT Europe in July 2018. While the primary theme was failure, it was designed to discuss best practices for creative, impactful research methods.[25] Led by Larissa Hjorth, it featured

23 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011, 3.

24 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.* London: Zed Books, 2013.

25 Examples included Lisa LeFevre, (ed) *Failure*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010.

11 interdisciplinary researchers from a wide range of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, geography, STS, game studies, digital media, design, and creative arts. They travelled from Aarhus, Barcelona, Leiden, London, Madrid, Manchester, and Melbourne. Everyone was asked to present on the following questions:

How has my work or method failed in a particular project?

What do we learn from failure?

What are some of the habitual failure expectations we make when we design our research?

How does failure play into the process of creative research design and practice?

How can we think about doing impactful methods and what are some of the failures?

The goal of this workshop was to explore experiences of research failure and build conceptual understandings of and practical solutions for innovative creative methods that address challenges in doing collaborative, interdisciplinary work. Through a series of scenarios and examples, we mapped it as a generative space for recalibration, adjustment, and attunement. These examples were then discussed in terms of various contexts: understanding and working with failure for students; with peers and partners; and future interdisciplinary collaborative scenarios. Together we explored various tropes around failure — not just as a creative opportunity for recalibrating methods, research questions, and external expectations, but also as a way of knowing the world, and, most importantly, failure as a vehicle for critiquing larger issues around the challenges of the academic landscape.

Figure 1.5: Workshopping “Staying with the trouble” 2018. Photo: Larissa Hjorth.

Failurists Collective

This collection has emerged out of continued conversations sparkled by the initial workshop. It features several of the participants and more colleagues around the world. In the following pages, interdisciplinary researchers and practitioners share their practice, insights, and challenges while discussing key tropes in the failurist taxonomy (see Figure 1.5). Disciplines are even more diverse: architecture, digital arts, cultural studies, design, media studies, sociology, and STS. Everyone was asked to reflect on the following questions in relation to failure in their own research:

How can we be more faithful to failure in research?

How might failure in research be viewed as a form of disciplined undisciplining?

Can failure be a tactic for wielding, unraveling, or enabling different kinds of power?

Can failing uncover hidden heteronormative and colonial systems of oppression?

How, when, and why should researchers hold onto, value, or argue for failure?

How might failing help us to think, feel, see, smell, speak, act, and know differently?

Together we reflect upon the role of creative interventions as a critical mode for methods, research techniques, fieldwork, and knowledge transmission (to publics). Here, failure is considered a productive part of engaging *with* and *in* the field. It is about acknowledging the ‘mess’ of the social and how we need methods, modes of attunement, and knowledge translation that address this complexity in nuanced ways.[26] We organize this eclectic mindhive for thinking and feeling through failure and failurist actions in four sections: Section I: Digitality, Archives, and Design; Section II: Care/Activism; Section III: Creative Critical Interventions; and Section IV: Play and the Senses.

The sections are dynamic and seek to coalesce various ways of thinking about the concept and practice of failure. The sections weave in different subjectivities, relationalities, and positionalities — rhythms reflecting the numerous material, social, and digital encounters. Each subtheme is an invitation to probe certain areas of failure in all its complexity; an invitation to sit with someone’s own lived experience of failure and how it manifests in research practice and theory. What does failure mean? What does it do? What does putting failure under the microscope do to our assumptions around ontology and epistemologies? How can it be deployed to challenge norms in a time of great uncertainty, crisis, and anxiety? And what are some of the ways resilience and failure are interrelated?

We begin the book with the Section I: Digitality, Archives and Design, which discusses classic sites of failure in research. While the fields of digitality, archives, and design can

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26 See Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford (eds), *Inventive Methods*, London: Routledge, 2012.

broadly encompass many things, this section spans research *with* and *on* computers, patent archives, mobile phones, social media, and big data. Few researchers would be without a story of malfunction, loss, or disruption of some regard to these kinds of essential tools or sites designed to host, support, or enhance research practice. Our perspective on failure goes beyond the usual breakdown, complicating the normative binaries of success or failure, to deliberately blur the idea of something working or not working. Although moments of crisis might catalyze an initial happening, authors in this section collectively 'stay with the trouble' of the unexpected, while simultaneously broadening learnings and insights far beyond the immediate unfolding issue.[27]

The authors in this section share and discuss failure in classrooms, museums, archives, on screen, and in ethnographic fieldwork. They explore it in relation to professional contexts and personal experience, in the present and in the past. And they ask questions, reflecting on the feelings and learnings, the impacts on others, and how failure shapes research planning, questions, and outputs.

We start with Jessamy Perriam, who shares her experiences of researching Instagram, hashtags and selfie sticks in 'Making Friends with Failure in STS'. She reflects on 'rookie errors' in past projects, learnings in practice and what happens when ideas develop along the way. Rather than feeling embarrassed or pressured to make a failed experience productive, she discusses attempts to make friends with failures, and asks: 'How do we think about them not as offcuts of the research, but as a part of our narrative as researchers?'

Emma Fraser and Clancy Wilmott's chapter ''No Device Found': Failure and Frustration in Critical Digital Methodologies' starts with the premise of problematic digital media. Many devices and systems are always in a state of needing updates, maintenance, and ongoing care and repair. The authors reframe the media and mediums in their practice, shifting perspectives from what they call 'perfect machines with imperfect users, to imperfect machines: glitch-filled, design-limited, dust-ridden, bound by bodged code, and held together by loose connections'.

Kat Jungnickel then takes us into patent archives to investigate data riddled with gaps, erasures, and silences in 'Patent Failure, Researcher Failure, Archive Failure: Getting Inventive with the Study of Inventions'. She focuses on what archives reveal and conceal and explores failures from three perspectives: inventors and inventions, researchers and research, and the archive itself. Throughout, she explores different ways of getting at data that may not be there and 'questions the politics that shape collections'.

In 'Failure as Reflexive Method to Think Otherwise', Annette Markham explores the common view of failure as something bad, negative, or the opposite of success. She discusses how these perspectives can be socialized into researchers, moving from an experience into a personal attribute and can be difficult to shift. By exploring ideas of

27 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble.*

failure in and outside academia she sets out to 'build the conceptual notion that failure is nothing more or less than an outcome of an experiment or action'.

Everyday memory and forgetfulness in terms of gendered research and ethnography is central to Anna Hickey Moody's chapter 'Digital Agency and the Authorship of Failure'. She focuses on the 'politics of feeling like a failure' and how this can shape, and be shaped by, gendered research experiences. Examples of this might be when researchers get locked out of devices, get hacked, or lose data in different ways. She asks: 'how we can reclaim and articulate that experience of failure in a gendered world of research and digital media?'

All the chapters in this section articulate a more creative, expansive, and open approach to failure rather than assuming everything is fine, will work, or won't break. Things rarely, of course, go as planned. And not everything that goes awry can be necessarily avoided, nor should be. These authors remind us that research generates not only knowledge and insight, but also new experiences and more questions. As Linda Dement's 'Schematic of an Art Failure' (artwork) delightfully shows, sometimes art and answers can emerge as 'leakage from the wreck' of a project.

We then move onto Section II: Care/Activism*,* where authors explore the tensions, contradictions, intentions, challenges, interconnectedness, and executions of navigating risk and reflecting on failure (the good, bad, and ambiguous). The unifying theme in this section is the desire to 'do something', whether to pierce through feelings of inertia, to act against complex systems of injustice, or to offer alternative ways of seeing, knowing, doing, and being with others. The authors make visible the messy terrain of failure in concept and practice — in private, public, institutional, and global contexts where navigating complexity, uncertainty and vulnerability helps to create feedback loops, tools, and scaffolding for experiential learning, knowledge-sharing, harm reduction, course correction, and radical empathy for self and others known/unknown, living or yet-to-be-born. Authors in this section are speculative futurists, artists, scholars — all, could be regarded (if not already self-identifying) as care-givers and activists or activist researchers.

We begin with Jen Rae and Claire G. Coleman's 'Reworlding: Speculative Futuring in the Endtimes, in the Everywhen'. The authors introduce the ecological state of refugia, an environment where organisms living in hostile conditions retreat to in order to reorganize their biological processes. They must adapt to survive. The authors, through the Centre for Reworlding, ask 'what are we willing to give up and/or fight for in the greatest challenge facing humanity? Where to we begin?' The authors propose 'reworlding' as a means of reorganizing our systems for the health and wellbeing of future ancestors. Through their speculative futuring practice of reworlding, failure is fodder for navigating risk and decoupling from maladaptive ways of engaging with the climate crisis (the ultimate failure of colonialism and capitalism). We adapt or we succumb.

Adaptation is prevalent in Julienne van Loon and Kelly Hussey-Smith's chapter 'Failure and Interruption: Creative Carers in a Time of COVID-19'*.* Their research engaged with twenty-two creative practice researchers in Melbourne, Australia working and caring from home

(WCFH) during six lockdowns stretching over 260 days between March 2020 and October 2021. Their research explores the difficult and debilitating impact of juggling work and the invisible aspects of care labor compounded by stress and anxieties of an uncertain future and perceptions of failure. By making visible the participants' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of failure, new possibilities emerge for adaptation and understanding collective failure.

Li Jönsson and Kristina Lindström's chapter 'Who Cares About Fågeltofta? Failing to Grieve Landscapes in Transitions' explores the disconnect between anticipatory grief and sacrifice as a means to probe larger questions of collective failure and how we might find balance between the destruction of other lifeworlds and the need to ensure a sustainable future. Learning how their *Clayworks* project failed to collectively practice pre-solastalgic grief with the local community opened up some of the tensions and contradictions implicit in transitioning to a carbon-free society and the values placed on maintaining the status quo of mobility and modern lifestyles over places of belonging and connection.

Sam Hind's chapter offers a 'methodological framework for how to examine navigational failures considering navigation as instituting networks of care or 'care-tographies'' — a means to mediate care relations between people their worlds, what they do, how they operate, and what their needs are. By approaching navigational failures beyond specific technological or systems 'failure' and evidenced by protests and autonomous driving, Hind suggest the framework could provide greater understanding of who is impacted and why, potentially offering a new evaluative tool for designers, map makers, and software designers.

Lekshmy Parameswaran similarly doesn't shy away from failure as material informing her practice at The Care Lab. There is joy in the messy terrain where failure can be a creative force and in doing so builds capacity to be bold and confident in navigating risk and uncertainties. In her chapter 'Failure is Inevitable in Care Activism', Parameswaran offers the building blocks of a Failurists' Toolkit, where failure can support changemaking. Reflections and questions may offer more effective ways to scale and disseminate new modes of care.

Closing the Care/Activism section is Syrus Marcus Ware's chapter 'Failure — A Day Fractured Forever, and Ensuring Change: The Summer Uprisings of 2020 and Lessons Learned From the Frontlines'. Like Parameswaran, who seeks to transform public systems of healthcare through care activism, and Rae and Coleman, who offer a vision of a future created by 100 years of reworlding, Ware seeks to abolish racism, violence, and ableism in law enforcement through activism and solidarity. Believing there is a better way to have 'safety, security, and solutions to conflict, crisis, and harm without carceral violence and punishment', Ware is a voice for many silenced by oppression. Ware shares the triumphant story of the Black Lives Matter and Defund the Police action on the streets of Toronto, Canada, before unpicking the inequities and multiple failures (personal and systemic) that arose in their follow-on action to dismantle monuments of slavery and colonialism.

In Section III, we explore the concept of creative-critical interventions as a core principle for understanding the complexity of failure in research as part of a broader, increasingly

neo-liberal university context. Can failure allow for us to challenge organizational success matrices and to explore the uneven power relations and how we might radically revise current processes to address crises and uncertainties? How does failure expose different textures of practice, infrastructures, and systems? Indeed, this section exposes many of the tensions around conceiving failure as productive and its relationship to risk, iteration, and experimentation and how the institution 'interprets' these acts.

As Lisa LeFevre notes, failure in art practice has a long history of challenging norms of success. She argues that artists embrace failure as a theme, strategy, and worldview — especially in face of growing crises and uncertainty. For LeFevre, 'between the two subjective poles of success and failure lies a space of potentially productive operations where paradox rules and dogma is refused'.[28] And yet, how does failure translate in practice and systemically? Does failure as a process challenge institutional dogma in an age of neo-liberalism? Or is it just the performance of inclusion? This section examines critical-creative interventions across macro and micro scales.

We begin with Nanna Verhoeff and Iris van der Tuin's exploration of 'Failure is a Project'. Starting with the *Journal of Trial & Error (JOTE)* — which focused on publishing short empirical articles examining 'what went wrong?' — they eloquently traverse the ways in which failure has been addressed by key social and creative scholars. As they note, 'in the reality of science in the making, failure is, quite simply, daily practice'. From STS — which has a long rich history in exposing failure as core part of technological development and research — and Latour, to Appadurai and Alexander's 'habitual failure'[29] and Legacy Russell's paradoxical notion of the glitch, Verhoeff and van der Tuin highlight the productive role of failure to *linger* and *drift* throughout the research process. As they note, acknowledging failure allows for an emphasis back on the process, constant iteration, and drafting. This echoes the work of games for change designers John Sharp and Colleen Macklin, who argue that failure and iteration are a co-dependent and crucial part of the creative process. [30]

We then move onto Olivia Khoo's critical analysis of all that is wrong with neo-liberal systems in the academy — especially if one is colored or queer. As she notes, she was deemed by a colleague as the 'triple threat' — Asian, female, and queer. Khoo explores what failure has to offer race and cultural studies — from Halberstam's suggestion that failure 'allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behaviour'[31] and Melissa Gregg's challenge of the very use of 'productivity' as the right measure[32], to Arlie Russell Hochschild's emotional work.[33]

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28 LeFevre (ed), *Failure.*

29 Appadurai and Alexander, *Failure*.

30 John Sharp and Colleen Macklin, *Iterate: Ten Lessons in Design and Failure*, MIT Press, 2019.

31 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 2.

32 Melissa Gregg, *Counterproductive: Time Management in the Knowledge Economy*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, 4.

33 Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012[1983].

As Khoo identifies, administration work is about often tacit emotional labor, which often gets done by women. This complex pastoral work is also often overlooked in favor of the superstar who avoids administration. The focus on 'joy' is partly ironic but also points to the work in cultural studies to queer such normalized concepts — for example feminist Lynne Segal has argued against increasing individualism by embracing a collective joy approach.[34] Turning to the important work by the likes of Sara Ahmed, Khoo evocatively argues for 'failure as a tactic of new knowledge formation, embodying emotional resilience, and providing opportunities for us to imagine new ways of "doing" the university differently outside of the institutionalized mandate to continually succeed and be productive'.

Continuing the theme about systemic inequality and for failure to push against neo-liberal regimes, we turn to Grace McQuilten's 'Who Can Afford to Fail? Art and Risk in an Era of Precarity'. Focusing on risk and failure in creative practice, McQuilten highlights that the right to 'failure' is a privilege — as she asks: is failure a privilege of those who have the resources and capacity to fail? Moreover, she argues, 'how much can we ask people to contribute — both in human capacity and income — to realize a risky project, and risk failure?' Teasing out the tension between risk and failure, McQuilten critically reflects on two curatorial research projects — *Remote-Controlled Terrorist Coffin*[35] and *The Magic Tent.*[36]

We then turn to Chantal Faust's 'Coloring in the Void: Absurdity and Contemporary Art' in which she performs and embodies LeFevre's notion of failure as a key site for creative process and rumination. Drawing on the song *Boo Boo Bird* by the Scottish poet, songwriter, and humorist Ivor Cutler, Faust investigates the relationship between failing the absurd and failing as part of what she sees as a new kind of absurdist tendency in contemporary art practice. As she argues, while failing is about being out of tune, what does this mean in a world that is increasingly discordant?

The section then finishes with Nancy Mauro-Flude's art pages *Erroneous Interventions into Infrastructure | The <<< Pirate Girls >>> say...* As a feminist artist who exposes inequalities and injustices around data and code, Mauro-Flude's work takes Legacy's notion of the glitch and failure for a walk. She asks us to consider the agency of technology in our lives and how feminist practice can provide new interventive ways to challenge the normalizing tendencies.

In Section IV: Play and the Senses, we explore play in research as intricately related to failure and multisensorial experiences. Playful approaches and, in particular, its qualities of probing and experimenting, imply ambiguity and speculative thinking, thus also open the door to risky, tricky, unscripted, and misunderstood situations. Such glitches and trip-ups can lead to a deeper insight in underlying concepts and assumptions. Furthermore, they can also produce unexpected, creative, and imaginary insights, stories, and outcomes.

34 Lynne Segal, *Radical Happiness*, London: Verso, 2018.
35 US artist/architect Adam Kalkin, 2015.
36 The Social Studio, 2011.

Playful approaches allow us to step out of direct functionality or a wish of a direct or specific outcome. This is close to what Haraway says about play:

> It's not a matter of direct functionality. We need to develop practices for thinking about those forms of activity that are not caught by functionality, those which propose the possible-but-not-yet, or that which is not-yet but still open. [37]

That play has the potential to invite failure in research is due to their similarity with (non) practices. Indeed, as game scholar Jesper Juul pointed out in *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games,* it would be wrong to simply understand playing games in terms of fun, as play is far more related to experiences of pain, frustration, and failing to resolve this pain.[38] In this section we push this claim a bit further, by proposing that this is not only an important part of games, but also of play and creativity in the field and the methods employed in situ.

Closely related to play and failure is the question of how we account for multi-sensorial experiences in terms of failure. It can be said that failure can anyhow lay bare parts of research that are more uneven, visceral, and painful, such as grief, frustration, or hitting a brick wall. Yet play can transform these experiences into something more openly creative, reflective, and meaningful. Furthermore play (as closely related to risk-taking) can encourage researchers to engage with such experiences actively and willfully by searching for the what-if and probing the evenness, functionally, and viability of the everyday through playfully engaging with the senses.

The overarching questions of this section are: how do play and playing with the senses allow for and encourage failure, and how can it be valued as part of research? How can we conceptualize the relation between methods, multi-sensorial play, and failure? Can this give an impetus to a different approach to research? By engaging with these questions this section wants to make a case for including failure, play, and multi-sensorial experiences as possible parts of research and methods. This can be informative for collaborative and creative fieldwork, but also for other research practices, ranging from AI (e.g. creative indicators in machine learning), data sprints, vernacular mapping, and the use of (digital) research tools.[39] It can enable us to feel, do, (for)see, produce, and analyze social realities and daily practices differently.

All the chapters in this section deal with these aspects in different yet related ways. The chapter of Sybille Lammes argues that the experience of boredom in play — which is a failure of action rather than play — can create space for reflection that holds great value for researchers that use playful methods. In the following chapter, Larissa Hjorth draws

37 Moira Weigel, 'Feminist Cyborg Scholar Donna Haraway: "The Disorder of Our Era Isn't Necessary"', *The Guardian*, 20 June 2019.

38 Jesper Juul, *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013.

39 Joe Gerlach, 'Vernacular Mapping, and the Ethics of What Comes Next', *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization* 45. 3 (2010): 165–68.

attention to how her ethnographies, to which playful methods are intrinsic, always entail kinds of failure. She shows how failure allowed her to develop a deeper understanding of less human centered multi-species kinship as well as of this failed era of the Anthropocene and the feelings of grief and loss that are intrinsically part of it.

Kate McLean speaks of failure of smell in her chapter. During her creative smellmapping fieldwork (such as smellhunts), she focuses on smell as one of the least verifiable senses, which is therefore scientifically tricky to validate and for some failing research de-facto. She discusses a series of mini-failures to substantiate how smell can be related to failure on many levels, from the smell of failure of the Anthropocene (e.g. pollution), to the failure of design in fieldwork and the failure to capture and record smell.

This section ends with a short provocation by Juliette van Loon about a playful intervention, in which she invited twenty Australian scholars from different fields to engage with 'playful risk-taking' through writing a Tanka. In these poems they engaged with a playful reflection on their research practice in which failures of thinking and doing are transformed into more open 'admissions' of feelings of rejection, limitation, grief, frustration, and lack of ideas or resources. Together these chapters show how play as an approach can help us to appreciate and openly address failure as an integral part of our research practices and can foreground feelings, experiences, and the senses as part of that process.

Figure 1.6: #FAILURISTS logo by Naomi Bueno de Mesquita (2018).

A Failurfesto

This book aims to offer provocations to further discussions around failure. In doing so, we conclude with a manifesto — a *failurfesto* — as a call to action for future research in increasingly uncertain and precarious times. Our *failurfesto* proposes:

We do not seek to fail more or differently.

We do not see failure as something to be avoided, cleaned up, or concealed, nor as a normative part of the grinding journey to success.

We critically resist separating failure into subject, method or approach. Instead, we view it

as something worthy of considered attention in research that has the potential to unravel, reveal or open up alternatives, unexpected combinations and narratives, thicken scholarly practice and onto-epistemologies.

We work together to draw attention to innovative ways of thinking about failure as a productive constituent of research processes and the impact journey.

We acknowledge the ways in which working in the field of the social involves dynamic processes that constantly disrupt research questions and methods.

We seek to make visible the processes of uncertainty, risk and play that are core to research.

We aim to learn from failure. We try to witness, acknowledge, and sit with failure. We attempt to embrace failurism. We need to become failurists.

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SECTION I

DIGITALITY, ARCHIVES, AND DESIGN

MAKING FRIENDS WITH FAILURE IN STS

JESSAMY PERRIAM

I often tell a story to my Masters of Science students in a course called 'Navigating Complexity' about a research experience I had early in my PhD studies. It's one part failure narrative, one part lesson in keeping boundaries in science and technology studies (STS), and another part entertaining story.

A group of us were doing a research project about selfie sticks (forgive us on the subject matter, it was 2014) with a mixed methods approach. One person in the group did an ethnography in a museum, another did a Twitter scrape of #selfiestick, and I did a visual analysis of Instagram images with the hashtag #selfiestick and later a breaching experiment at an art gallery where the object had been banned. We were using these methods to look for accounts of the selfie stick being considered disruptive in public places. In some respects, the research was a failure. The museum ethnography didn't show anyone being offended at the selfie stick—in fact, its use was encouraged on the day our researcher visited. The co-hashtag analysis wasn't useful from an STS perspective; we had gathered the data from the Christmas/New Year period, which meant a lot of people had received selfie sticks as gifts and were tweeting photos along with hashtags such as #love, #family, #NYE, and #xmas.[1]

'Love?!' remarked one of the researchers, 'we can't do anything useful with love in STS!'

I tell that story to my students and emphasize the punchline to make the distinction between doing an STS-style controversy mapping, with the focus on objects and actors, and a cultural or media studies project, where an analysis could have been made of the tweets and their co-hashtags. I also follow up by reassuring students that within the bounds of the course where they are required to use digital methods to visualize and analyze a research question of their own choosing, that failure does not lie in the data collection activities itself.

For many students, it is the first time they have done research design with digital methods from a feminist STS standpoint. I make a point that digital methods projects such as these are inherently inductive. While the researcher can control the search queries they make to the application programming interface (API)[2], they are largely at the mercy of the what the API serves up based on those queries and what any given user is tweeting about on that day with those hashtags. For the purposes of the students' projects, failure lies in a

1 This co-hashtag scrape on Twitter happened during a time where Instagram users could also directly post to Twitter from the platform. The two platforms are now less coupled together in this way. This had an impact on the types of posts that appeared in our scrape.

2 The application programming interface (API) is the piece of code that allows the researcher to ask a platform to gather data. The API usually gathers a sample of content, rather than the entirety of what has been posted due to large volumes of data.

lack of working with the data they have collected to tell a narrative in relation to the course syllabus, which deals with methods, standpoints, data feminism, mapping, and analysis, along with the absence of data.

In the data collection and visual analysis of Instagram images tagged with #selfiestick, I was looking at the configuration of the images and specifically asking: what are selfie stick users taking pictures of and with? I was hoping to find some posts of people being annoyed at selfie stick users. After analysing more than 10,000 posts, I was somewhat surprised at what I found. Rather than producing a data visualization, I had managed to put together a typology of selfie stick posts. But the original intention of trying to find accounts of the selfie stick being disruptive or derided? There were only a few posts that backed that up.

In hindsight, it's clear that this was a failure that lay in the research formulation. The research question (if there was one at the time) was as close to being deductive as one can get with qualitative digital research. There was the assumption that both selfie sticks are disruptive and that they were disruptive enough for people to post about them on social media. It was a rookie error; one that I would have encouraged my current students to avoid. But the error had been made and happens so often (especially when doing digital methods research)—you go in looking for accounts of the selfie stick being disruptive and end up with a typology that includes people using a selfie stick while posing with their pet.

The final failure in that project has turned into another one of those research stories that I milk for entertainment value with colleagues and friends. The breaching experiment was the most amusing research failure of all. A breaching experiment is a research method used almost exclusively by ethnomethodologists to try to uncover the reasoning for taken for granted behaviour. Breaching experiments usually consist of the researcher breaking a publicly accepted, taken for granted social norm or rule to deliberately get caught, with the intention of then asking the person responsible for keeping the rule why the rule exists in the first place. Some contemporary STS-based examples of breaching experiments come from Woolgar and Neyland, involving researchers taking more than 100 millilitres of liquid through airport security to try to uncover the reasoning for the rule and how it is enforced.[3] Breaching experiments were initially devised by Harold Garfinkel, who rather tellingly made his students do the research work that laid the foundations for this method.[4]

My encounter with breaching experiments led me to purchase a selfie stick and take it with me on a visit to the National Gallery in London. The gallery had recently banned the selfie stick. The plan was that I would get caught using the selfie stick and then ask follow up questions as to why. In practice, I am a rather introverted person who dislikes breaking rules, especially in a conspicuous way. Perhaps doing a breaching experiment was not the research method best suited to my temperament, so I took my flatmate as moral support.

3 Steve Woolgar and Daniel Neyland, *Mundane Governance: Ontology and Accountability*, 1st edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

4 Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, 1st edition, Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1991.

When we arrived, we found out that many of the National Gallery's docents were on strike, so there was a reduced security presence. We were browsing the galleries and started taking photos using the selfie stick in front of artworks that piqued our interest. We were initially timid but became more brazen as we realized none of the docents or security guards had noticed our deviant behaviour enough to ask us to stop. By the end of our visit, none of the gallery staff had intervened in our selfie stick use. The indifference of the gallery staff meant that the breaching experiment was a failure in terms of uncovering an institutional explanation for restricting the selfie stick in the space.

However, despite the failure of the breaching experiment, the exercise was not wasted. It generated a rich, autoethnographic account of selfie stick use in galleries, particularly in relation to how visitors might navigate the space differently with selfies in mind. While it didn't end up being a breaching experiment, it was also somewhat an instance of the walkthrough method[5], as I had not used a selfie stick before the breaching experiment. The experience of navigating the gallery was also an experience of learning how to use the selfie stick.

I tell these stories to also make failure relatable. It happens to many of us, and yet we are not encouraged to publish about it, so as to falsely emphasize our infallibility as researchers. Twenty-five years after Haraway[6] wrote about the modest witness, we as a research community still do not acknowledge mess, failure, and conflicting standpoints in our outputs.[6] Only the sanitized, wrinkles-ironed-out version of research activities and their analysis is worthy to be told to the broader academic community, or actioned upon by a business or government.

My PhD almost failed, and it resembles little of the selfie stick descriptions contained in the last few hundred words. It pivoted to become a digital ethnography of how mundane failure is demonstrated on digital and social media[7]. The failure of the selfie stick still makes an appearance as a chapter that reflects on methodological failures of researching disruption. If your entire PhD thesis deals with how commuters, public institutions, cybersecurity experts, and researchers talk about failure and breakdown, it takes the sting out of talking about your own failure. I rarely talk about this failure, but I own it and its contribution to my formation as a researcher.

But there has also been an urge in recent years to ensure that failure be generative, as some form of consolation prize for things not going to plan. Is that a neoliberal way of looking at failure? Everything must have value squeezed out of it, even our screw ups. As the British artist David Shrigley (2021) so astutely put on a poster: 'When life gives you a lemon/ you

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5 Ben Light, Jean Burgess, and Stefanie Duguay, 'The Walkthrough Method: An Approach to the Study of Apps,' *New Media & Society* 20. 3 (1 March 2018): 881–900. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816675438.

6 Donna Haraway, Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: *Feminism and Technoscience*, New York: Routledge, 1997.

7 Jessamy Perriam, *Theatres of Failure: Digital Demonstrations of Disruption in Everyday Life*, PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2018. http://research.gold.ac.uk/23312/.

must eat the lemon/ all of it /including the skin'.[8] Sometimes we as researchers are in the position of eating the skins of our research lemons.

So how then to talk about failure in research? How do we work with failure in such a way that we do not feel shame about it, nor do we feel urged to capitalize on it? In short: how do we let failure be what it needs to be within our research?

Some colleagues of mine have run workshops that encourage participants to 'talk to texts that they're struggling to write.'[9] They consider the troubling parts of their work in the 'monster writing' process, but in framing these troubles as monsters, the troubles are rendered addressable. Part of the exercise involves addressing the text and honestly admitting the struggles that they're having with it as a form of moving forward—either to closure or working more on the text with a renewed understanding of its place in the world:

> What responsibilities does the writing self have toward the written creature, the written body, the body of text as it is set lose to roam the world? This creature is part self, part other, never at rest; in its hybridity and in its undoing of stable boundaries between self and other, this text-creature is a monster. How might one learn to live in the company of one's text monsters, both while writing them and while they roam this world, co-creating it as they go, separate from their creator but never fully other?[9]

What responsibilities do we have towards our failures in STS research? How do we think about them not as offcuts of the research, but as a part of our narrative as researchers? By addressing our failure and introducing it to others like an old friend, we are able to share it but not exploit it under the weight of the constant pressure to be generative.

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8 David Shrigley, *When Life Gives You A Lemon*, 2021, poster, 80 x 60 cm.

9 Line Henriksen, Katrine Meldgaard Kjær, Marie Blønd, Marisa Cohn, Baki Cakici, Rachel Douglas-Jones, Pedro Ferreira, Viktoriya Feshak, Simy Kaur Gahoonia, and Sunniva Sandbukt, 'Writing Bodies and Bodies of Text: Thinking Vulnerability through Monsters,' *Gender, Work & Organization* 29. 2 (March 2022), 565. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12782.

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'DEVICE NOT FOUND': FAILURE AND FRUSTRATION IN CRITICAL DIGITAL METHODOLOGIES

EMMA FRASER AND CLANCY WILMOTT

Introduction

From their inception, all digital media technologies are failing.

Our everyday devices, phones, and computers are digital media machines, and from the moment new computation technologies are developed they enter a cycle of inevitable obsolescence. As such, the defining moment of a piece of digital media technology is in its relation to perfection and failure. Each release is more advanced and complete and more perfect, than the technologies that came before.[1] Simultaneously, the success of digital media is already eclipsed by whatever new computational innovation is on the horizon. Every new app, platform, or piece of hardware or software is implicitly a failure in relation to the next more perfect update, version, or model.

In *Updating to Remain the Same*, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun argues that in order to maintain the status quo of media consumption, constant updates to software and hardware are needed in an enduring cycle of crisis and digital maintenance.[2] This chapter presents a reconfiguration of Chun's original position: rather than updating to remain the same in a constant state of renewal and progression, we argue that all digital media technologies are never finished or complete, but always in a state of comparative and increasing failure and decay. As Chun writes in her conclusion, what matters is 'what and how things linger', rather than 'the new and fading—the bleeding edge of obsolescence'.[3]

From this position, we ask: what would it mean to encounter digital media as already failing — and what would it mean to use this as a starting point for establishing a different kind of critical digital methodology which critiques notions of contemporaneity and completeness? Such questions shed new light on our relation to all — past, present and future — digital media technologies. We have never been modern.[4] Software and hardware (like fashion) have never been up to date.[5]

1 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual Media*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2016.
2 Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same.*
3 Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, 171.
4 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern,* trans. Catherine Porter, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
5 For Walter Benjamin, for example, history is antiquity dressed up as novelty, though everything — including fashion and media — immediately becomes out of date. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1999.

If we accept that digital media fail to be emergent, and only succeed in being outmoded and perpetually unfinished (lingering on as the ephemera of the contemporary technological moment that is always in-progress), we can develop a critical and pedagogical frame informed by Chun and others' critiques of both digital media technology, and dominant framings of computation and technological development. Central to this approach is a move away from the fetishization of the new, opening up playful and critical encounters with contemporary and historic digital media technologies as spaces of perpetual failure and reframing them from perfect machines with imperfect users to imperfect machines: glitch-filled, design-limited, dust-ridden, bound by bodged code, and held together by loose connections.

Device Not Found

In digital media technologies — unique compositions of software and hardware, computation, and silicon — failure is apparent across the material and the symbolic. Consider two computers sitting side-by-side in a teaching studio: a Macintosh 512k (c.1985), and a Macintosh SE (c. 1987). Their exteriors are covered in a residue of dust and grime left behind by many hands and many commands ground into their 'Snow White'[6] design over the years, the patina of old technology.

Curious students discover with disappointment that the Mac 512k is broken. A feature of the Mac 128k/512k is a small parameter RAM (PRAM) battery slot in the back, which was used to hold basic memory functions while the computer was off — a technical fix for the problem of a portable computer that would otherwise wipe essential data (like time and date, or user data) whenever it was unplugged and transported. A portable personal computer that was already failing in its most basic function from the very start. At some point in its previous 38 years of life, a small 4.5v Eveready No. 523 battery has been inserted into this slot and then forgotten — left to corrode, and eventually burst open. As a result of design failure and human neglect — but also entropy and obsolescence — corrosive material now coats the battery slot and has begun to corrode the computer's circuitry itself.

The newer version — or a more recently *failed* version — of this early model, the Mac SE, was released without this external PRAM battery feature, and as such it still turns on and functions as designed. For students encountering this machine, the imperfections and failures of the much-fetishized original Mac combine with a strong familiarity with the fundamentals of its design. The antecedents of their own screen, keyboard, and mouse and the Apple ecosystem provide a strange encounter with failure as both a problem and possibility of modern technology. Once they identify the power switch on the back, the Macintosh SE turns on with a chime once familiar to many, but largely unrecognizable to this generation of students. Students begin to explore a suite of System (Mac O.S.) 4 software and applications, exclaiming as they make links between old and new interfaces (playing with menus and system preferences), and as features they take for granted (like the Spotlight search) are

6 'Snow White' describes the minimalist design principle of the early Macintosh computers, with very little ornamentation, casings lightly colored with a fog color or similar (like putty or platinum), and using horizontal and vertical lines to hide ventilation and other functions.

frustratingly absent. Searching through their own indexes of computation technology, they experiment between the awkwardness of the machine and the magic of computing.

Between material and usability failures, students learn that digital media technologies are bound to let us down, to break, to fail. With the appropriate attitude, they can be met intentionally in their imperfect state — expressly, critically. Here we understand 'digital instantiations of imperfection as elements of friction capable of challenging the digital's problematically frictionless veneer'.[7] This frictionless veneer is in part a cultural perception that overlooks 'social and machinic relations' in order to fetishize the 'magic' workings of source code and programming, and invisibilizes the contact points between user, 'machine', hardware, and software.[8] It also includes the mystifying, ideological framing of computation as the drive to perfect code and representation; computers as machines that simply execute the desires of the masterful programmer.

Consolidating knowledge, information, process, and meaning, code becomes logos. Code-as-logos inserts the abstraction of 'software' in place of executed code and conflates meaning into action in the pursuit of some essence of command and control through calculation.[9] Automated code (in the form of, for example, compiled instructions or higher-order programming languages that short-cut the dreary repetition of raw computation via libraries and source code) becomes an exercise in truth-telling. To command code is to render knowledge and information into a unified language or form, to control a language without ambiguity that simply 'does what it says'; instruction and result in tandem.[10] In programming languages, '[o]ne's word creates something living'[11] — yet this creation is, always, imperfect, whether in the gap between meaning and action, user and machine, software and hardware, or writing and execution, or in the friction between instrumental reasoning and perpetual, illogical, obsessive reinvention.

Against such perfection and efficiency and the alchemical 'sourcery' of source code,[12] we develop a pedagogical framing of failure as an alternative mode for the study and design of all computational technologies. The tension between playful, disruptive, and messy experiences of technology, and the idealized fetish of mastery and completion is the source of our claim that all digital media technologies are always failing: not just in the way that media in general fail to neatly signify (one of the interpretations of logos), but in the way that computational technologies at the heart of the digital media ecosystem fail to be error-free, fail to remain up-to-date, fail to function as expected or intended. In their failure, digital

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7 Jakko Kemper, 'Silicon Ashes to Silicon Ashes, Digital Dust to Digital Dust: Chronolibido and Technological Fragility in *Glitchhiker*', in Caleb Kelly, Jakko Kemper, and Ellen Rutten (eds), *Imperfections: Studies in Mistakes, Flaws, and Failures*, New York, London and Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, pp. 165-188, 167.

8 Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2011, 51.

9 Chun, *Programmed Visions,* 20-23.

10 Chun, *Programmed Visions,* 22.

11 Chun, *Programmed Visions,* 47.

12 See chapter 'On Sourcery and Source Codes' in Chun, *Programmed Visions.*

media technologies demand that we (academics, students, designers) figure out through trial and error; that we push past the veneer of perfection to find the productive frictions between function and obsolescence, which rest in failure.

States of Failure

The challenge for us as researchers and educators is to find critical digital methodologies that reveal the frictions and patinas of digital media technology from the point of failure, rather than the axiomatic framework of perfect execution, novelty, and newness — at both the level of pedagogy and of research. Key to this is a resistance against the fantasy of command and total control that comes with what Chun describes as the 'executive power'[13] in programming — in our case, by making room for students to explore so-called 'old' digital technologies without guides or instructions, without prerequisite knowledge, and without the default assumption of immediate success or legibility. Old technologies provide an insight into the past and future of contemporary tech, but also a uniquely low-risk space in which failure can be embraced. In failure, the 'executive power' is humbled, and we see ourselves and our computation critically. Further, this failure is more transparent — we can pick apart the intersections between machine and code and see the system more clearly in its unfamiliar familiarity.

Thus, we invite students to sit with frustration and uncertainty, to flounder or make mistakes that might result in dead machines, missing files, incorrect outputs, or error messages. 'Device not found' here means execution incomplete; connection not quite made; attempt failed. But it also marks the meeting point of user and machine and failure and method. What does it mean for a device — a physical object that you can see and touch — to be invisible to another device? What problem does it pose, and what is the real failure here? Is it one of knowledge; of hardware; of code or compatibility; of representation; of obsolescence? Or is it the wider failure of the ever-present expectation that a machine (anthropomorphized by language and logos) *knows* something we don't? That the machine's code and software *does* something magical that we ourselves cannot do? Is it we who are failing to work with the machine, or is the machine always failing to meet us where we are?

By asking students to engage with technologies as they have (always) failed, we also aim to draw students away from what Chun calls the 'sourcery' of source code: the reification of the executable command that invisibly stitches language to action, reducing, or rendering invisible, the steps of compilation and interpretation in-between.[14] Practically, this approach requires a veritable scrapyard of 'old media tech' — failed tech: Apple Macintoshes from the 1980s; Blackberries and Palm Pilots; a Nokia 3310; Atari and ColecoVision gaming consoles; floppy disks; and outdated operating systems like Fortran. Importantly, it is not only devices familiar in the history of computing — like the Macintosh Classic — that should be included, but those which have failed to have any significant

13 Chun, *Programmed Visions,* 27-28.
14 Chun, *Programmed Visions*, chapter 'On Sourcery and Source Codes'.

legacy at all, like the lesser-known Intellivision gaming console by Mattel, or the iPod's (more) failed peers like Microsoft Zune or SanDisk Sansa.

From the moment it was developed, the Macintosh 128k was already failing in relation to its successors: the 512k, which provided a more appropriate quantity of RAM to run the desired programs of the time, but also the Apple SE, the Macintosh Plus, and the (now classic) Macintosh Classic, all of which contained updates to their hardware and software that addressed prior failures and rendered existing models obsolete. To use a computer from 1984 today is to encounter failures known at the time, but also the failures that emerge more clearly as we have become accustomed to working with these machine's successors. These are failures of design (the choice of 128k RAM to keep costs down meant the first Macintosh couldn't run many common programs), time-induced hardware failures of disk drives and batteries, but also stark software failures with respect to accessibility and usability.[15]

Simple tasks — finding the power button, for instance — become an exploration of failure. Not just failure of the broken machine, but of connection, and of recognition. 'Why that symbol?', students ask, referring to the '0' and '|' at the top and bottom of the power switch. These seem familiar, because they are contemporary signifiers for powering on and off (see Figure 2.1). The answer lies in the basic function of the machine: it depicts an electric circuit, closed or open — the most fundamental aspect of analogue computers and binary code: on and off — obfuscated by the increasing distance between command and execution, action, meaning, and function with each iteration of computing.

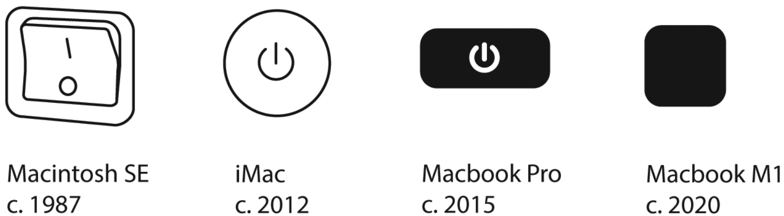

Figure 3.1: The evolution of the 'power' button on Mac, 1984-2020.

This isn't simply a failure of young people with old tech. This common experience of failure is cross—generational and speaks to the permanent failure of all digital media technology in one way or another: we (the authors) did not know how to turn on and off our new Macbook Pro machines. The on/off signification has been 'smoothed' over in newer models, demonstrating — through failure — that the distance between command and action is increasingly obscured by 'the digital's problematically frictionless veneer'.[16] In older technologies the same failure

15 Of course, the Apple II was also a successful product (manufactured from 1977-1993), and there were many contemporary competitors and precursors like the IBM Personal Computer or the Commodore 64.

16 Kemper, 'Silicon Ashes,'167.

resides in a boxy mouse that is difficult to maneuver, a cursor that drags across the screen more slowly than we are used to, a program that requires shortcuts to run (and the associated knowledge), or a switch or button where there might now be a menu or a voice command. What we can learn from these moments of failure and disconnect is the fetishization of code and programming, which invisibilizes hardware, but also the fundamental experience of using technology as one of never quite being there, never finally arriving, and never actually taking off: a promise that is never really fulfilled.

Critical Digital Methodologies

In digital media 'the ephemeral endures' — even as it fades. Just as our old Apple Macintosh hardware is degenerating, our social-technological relations are determined within a 'present that is always degenerating', but simultaneously resuscitated from 'undead' information accessed via digital media machines.[17] When the students finally get the Apple SE working, they view files unchanged since the 1990s: saves of undergraduate essays and PhD data, ephemeral media salvaged through lines of code and saved in file sizes (4kb, 8kb) that they find difficult to comprehend. 'This is hard' they say, as they play games like *Lode Runner* (see Figure 2.2), struggling with the slow feedback from the keyboard and the blunt space of the blocky black and white landscape. 'You have to think ahead. Press the spacebar early!' Too late, another death and another failure. The game restarts and another student takes the keyboard. Another set of hands wear down the plastic, the connections, and the circuitry, trying to 'figure out how' in the space between execution and action.

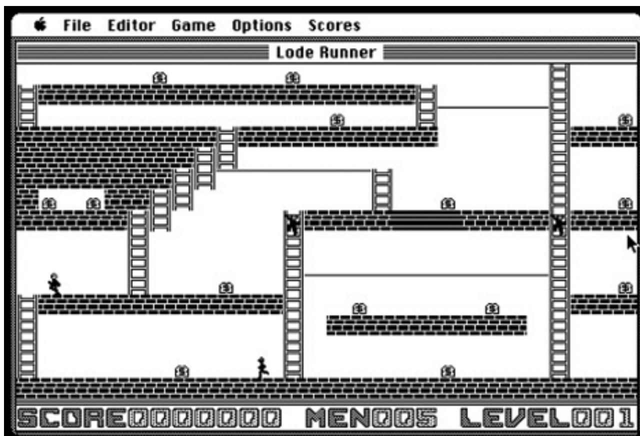

Figure 3.2: Screenshot of Lode Runner (128k port for Macintosh, c.1985).

We developed this pedagogical approach with failure as guiding principle from the start. Coding and programming are forged in failure. Machines and code are fetishized as world-making media even as they degenerate. As a result, our students don't encounter technology just expecting it to successfully run or function. Through doing, they learn to understand

17 Chun, *Programmed Visions*, 172-173.

digital media technologies as systems, devices, and interfaces that *never* 'just work', but in fact constantly fail. Without critical intervention, source code remains a mysterious backend, obfuscating the machine in a way that emphasizes the power of the programmer as commander, without questioning this knowledge, and without thinking about the gaps between meaning and execution.

Critical digital practices can operate in a mode perpendicular to more traditional forms of computer science; where the latter tries to solve problems through technology, the former attempts to intervene in technology *as both problem and possibility*. If we only focus on teaching students perfect mastery of program, code, and hardware, we deny them space to work things out through play, to learn from errors and disconnections, and to understand computation not as the increasing collapse of meaning and action, or an idealized practice that will eventually disappear the machine, but in fact a profound meeting of intention and chance, user and hardware, mistake, cover-up, invention, and perpetual failure. Rather than approaching failure as a nuisance element of computational practice — an element that stymies the search for perfect execution, and which is the exception rather than the norm — this chapter has argued that critical practices *must* embrace the constant frustration and uncertainty of computing, particularly in the digital media sphere. This awareness can be built up through working with old technology and broken components and sensors and working against the culture of novelty, mastery, and invisibility built through computational disciplines. It can also be recognized in the many false starts, misfires, and random connections of contemporary technological design. To resist the fetish of computing[18], digital and computational pedagogy and research must engage in a more failure-oriented method of teaching and interpreting digital media technologies, a method that challenges the smooth veneer of perfection, where critical potential can be found against the illusion of frictionless computation, the mastery of programming, and the hubris of the new.

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18 Chun, *Programmed Visions*, 18.

PATENT FAILURE, RESEARCHER FAILURE, ARCHIVE FAILURE: GETTING INVENTIVE WITH THE STUDY OF INVENTIONS

KAT JUNGNICKEL

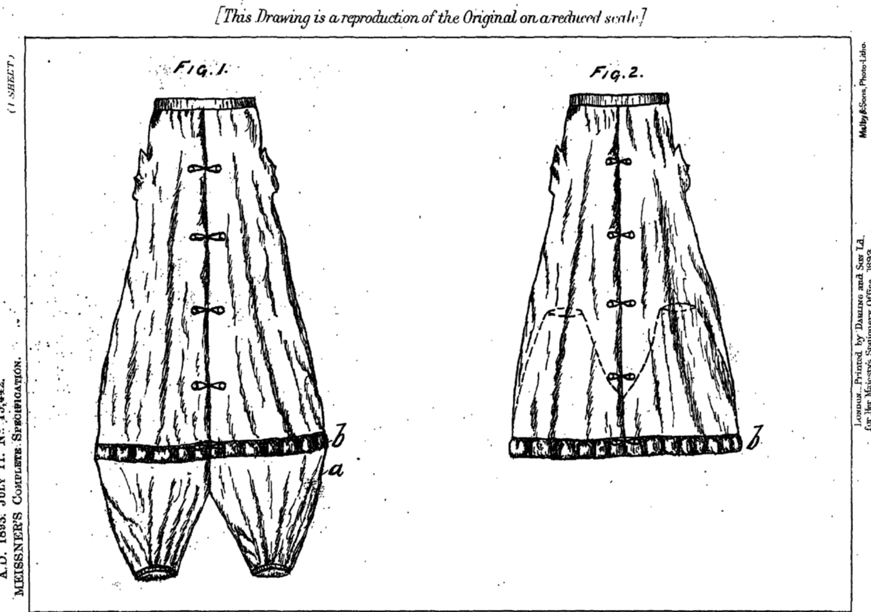

Figure 4.1: Drawings from Sidonie Meißner's 1893 patent for a 'Garment for Lady Cyclists'

I, SIDONIE MEIßNER of Grosse Brudergasse, Dresden, in the German Empire, Spinster, do hereby declare the nature of this invention [...] to provide for lady cyclists a garment which allows of a convenient working of the treadles, serves as a protection against dust and dirt and keeps covered the upper part of the leg. The garment terminates at bottom in a trouser, the two lower ends of which are drawn in by rubber or elastic binding. The garment is buttoned down the front as shewn [sic] and may have the form of an ordinary coat with trouser like extensions which in use are drawn upwards within the body and it is drawn in at the waist in the ordinary manner at the upper band. Suitable pockets may be provided.

I start this chapter with drawings and words by Sidonie Meißner, an inventor living in Germany in 1893. She applied for a patent for a 'Garment for Lady Cyclists' at the British Patent Office — with the assistance of Patent Agents in Chancery Lane, London — on 11th July, and it was accepted on 23rd September in the same year. It responded to a cycling craze sweeping

Europe in the late nineteenth century. Both women and men were enthusiastic early adopters of the bicycle, but they experienced it very differently.[1] Early women cyclists suffered intense social scrutiny, because like many Victorian sports, cycling was considered the ‘natural domain of men’.[2] They were pressured to maintain ‘feminine dignity’ regardless of the activity, and to avoid looking hot, dishevelled, or dirty.[3]

Yet, cycling was not only a highly public activity but also an intensely physical one. Long skirts appropriate for walking were largely incompatible with the moving machinery of the bicycle. In many cases looking dishevelled was the least of their problems. Materials caught the wind and blew up, revealing legs, and tangled in wheels and pedals. Newspapers regularly reported on deaths and disfigurements from cycle crashes caused by women’s clothing. Unsealed roads were also a reality which made cycling a dusty and often muddy experience. While wearing more ‘rational dress’ such as shorter skirts or swapping them entirely for bloomers or knickerbockers might have been safer and more comfortable, it exposed the wearer to different dangers. Writing about the experience of cycling in England in the 1890s, Irene Marshall[4] explains:

> Caps, stones, road refuse — anything was then flung at the hapless woman who dared to reveal the secret that she had two legs. And the insults were not confined to the lower classes. Well-dressed people, people who would be classed as ladies and gentlemen, frequently stopped and made rude remarks.

Yet nothing was going to stop women from cycling once they experienced the freedom and independence promised by the bicycle. Late Victorian Britain was an exciting time for new ideas, technologies, and media. The cycling boom corresponded with patent system reform and opened the process of claiming an inventive idea to a broader range of inventors. Along with the many social and sartorial challenges facing women, these conditions catalysed much inventive activity by and for women. This chapter focuses on inventions for convertible cycling skirts which enabled wearers to safely cycle while also concealing evidence of their athletic activities as and when needed.

Sidonie Meißner’s invention does this and more. From the outside her ‘Garment for Lady Cyclists’ looks like an ordinary long skirt yet it includes excess fabric shaped into ‘pop out’ leggings concealed under the lower hem. She explains it’s triple aim; to provide freedom of movement to cycle, to keep pedalling legs covered, and to protect the wearer from ‘dust and dirt.’ Her suggestion for ‘suitable pockets’ is also reflective of independent women’s desire to carry goods and free their hands. ‘No pocketless people’, asserted a male *New*

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1 For more discussion in these issues see Kat Jungnickel, *Bikes and Bloomers: Victorian Women Inventors And Their Extra-Ordinary Cyclewear*, London: Goldsmiths Press, 2018.

2 Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women’s* Sports, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, 43.

3 ‘Bicycling News and Sport and Play. Lines for Ladies by Marguerite’, quoting from ‘The Compromises of Cycling’ in *Hearth and Home*, 28 May 1895, 34.

4 Irene Marshall. *The Rational Dress Gazette, Organ of the Rational Dress League – Correspondence*, No. 10, July 1899, 40.

York Times writer in 1899, 'has ever been great since pockets were invented, and the female sex cannot rival us while it is pocketless.'[5]

I know all these related contextual insights from years of research on this topic. While Sidonie Mießner's patent data is valuable and points to lots of rich topical issues to explore, I'm looking for more. Yet her patent only provides half a page of text and two intriguing line drawings. It is tantalisingly brief. And I haven't been able to access anything else more directly related to her. As a result, I know very little about the inventor or what happened to her specific invention.

There are several potential reasons for this.

My initial response is to worry that I had failed as archive researcher. Did I miss extra data about her life in the archives? Did I overlook a critical fragment of her life somewhere? Was there a snippet of text or an image I flicked past that would have led me down new and untravelled paths? Maybe more is still out there. As researchers, we seek threads across archives; serendipitous connections, sharp moments of association when a visual fragment from one archive suddenly slots into place with text from another. I know this feeling. I have celebrated on my own very quietly in dusty stacks with joy and relief when something like this happens. But not here. Not now. Sidonie Mießner's life eludes me.

Another possibility is that the inventor failed. Perhaps this is all there is. Was she unsuccessful in securing a future for her patent? Did her invention fail to leave the patent office records? Did no one see any potential in it? There is no trace of it being commercialized or distributed. There was no launch event. There is no evidence that anyone talked about, made, or wore it. There is nothing about her or her invention in newspapers, magazines, or periodical archives.

Data: Too Much, Not Enough

In past projects I conducted ethnography with live people. I visited them in their homes, climbed onto their rooftops, spent time in their backyard sheds, went cycling with them, and discussed their relationships with technology, public space, and each other. Data was everywhere. All too frequently, issues in research emerge from having too much of it. [6] Ethnographic texts commonly discuss being 'overwhelmed', 'unnerved', and 'daunted' by data. Learning how to make sense and order it is much harder. Archival analysis can feel similar, in many circumstances. For example in *Dust*, Carolyn Steedman writes at length about the overwhelming feeling of dealing with a tsunami of stuff people have left behind:

> Archive fever comes on at night, long after the archive has shut for the day....
> Everything. Not a purchase made, not a thing acquired that is not noted and

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5 *The New York Times,* 'World's Use of Pockets,' 28 August 1899, 7.

6 See for example Martin, Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 3rd edition, Oxon: Routledge, 2007; David, M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step by Step*. 3rd edition, Applied Social Research Methods Series 17, London: Sage, 2010.

> recorded. You think: I could get to hate these people and, I can never do these people justice, and, finally: I shall never get it done [. . .] Your anxiety is that you will not finish, that there will be something left unread, unnoted, untranscribed [. . .] Your craft is to conjure a social system from a nutmeg grater.[7]

But, what do we do with a nutmeg grater and very little nutmeg?

I felt adrift and mildly panicked the first time this happened. The feeling was amplified as I had just spent a giddy few days finding many exciting connections across archives about another inventor. Now, I had this. Nothing. Zilch. Sidonie Mießner was nowhere to be found. What would I do if I couldn't find anything about her or her invention? What kind of a patent researcher was I? What could I do in this research dead end? What would I write about?

But, maybe it wasn't just Sidonie Meißner's or my fault.

Another site of failure lies with archives themselves. Not everything is recorded about everyone. Or even if they are, over time archival data can get lost, ignored or systematically erased.

Sidonie Mießner may have filed her patent in Britain, but she resided in Germany. Lots of archival data went missing or was destroyed in wartime. Apparently, 'World War II resulted in the greatest loss and displacement of cultural treasures, books, and archives in history.'[8] While her name seems distinct, and generates several promising genealogical results, nothing can be certain. This is partly because she self-identifies as a spinster. Even though their last names change, it is sometimes easier to find women if they are married (as there are more records about the men in their lives).[9] Her patent unfortunately doesn't provide any information about her vocation (either she didn't have one or it wasn't considered important, as was the case for much women's documentation in archives).

Many inventions, especially those of women, were renamed when they were commercialized, which makes them even harder to trace. Being a woman made it even harder to succeed in business at the time (as she most likely lacked socio-political capital, networks, and funds). Even worse, being a spinster was viewed as a failure by parts of society. For some 'the state of singleness for women was a most "unfortunate" condition.'[10]

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7 Caroline Steed, 'Something She Called Fever: Michelet, Derrida and Dust', *The American Historical Review*, 106.4 (2001): 1159-1180, 1164-5

8 Patricia Kennedy Grimstead, 'Spoils of War Returned', *Prologue Magazine*, 34. 2 (2002), https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2002/spring/spoils-of-war-1.

9 For example, ancestry records provide lots of accounts of Sidone Meißners. A Sidonie Elise Mießner was born 29 Feb 1868 in Erfurt, Germany. This would make her quite young, 21 years old, at the time of her patent. However, she was married to Emile Richard Fuhrman. Another Sidonie was born 1855 in Dresden (making her 42 in 1897). She was also married to a Hugo Roßner.

10 Katie Holmes, ''Spinsters Indispensable': Feminists, Single Women and the Critique of Marriage, 1890-1920,' *Australian Historical Studies*, 29.100: 68-90, 68.

Archives: Biased, Messy, and Troublesome

Archives always tell certain stories about specific people, places, and times. Much like maps, archives are powerful devices that simultaneously convey and conceal knowledge, are shaped by political norms and beliefs, and predominantly assembled by a victor with an explicit purpose in mind. Archives 'are not innocent sites of storage' but rather 'already texts shaped according to interests and needs of certain groups'.[11] Queer and feminist archivists and historians have long drawn attention to and questioned the politics that shape collections and encourage readers to see not only what is present but also what is absent.

As technofeminist Ruth Schwartz-Cowan reminds, 'the absence of a female perspective in the available histories of technology was a function of the historians who write them and not of the historical reality.'[12] For Anne Stoler, a feminist turn in the archives involves a 'move from archive as source *to* archive as subject.'[13] She talks about 'archiving as a process' rather than 'archives as things.'[14] This work reorients the reading of the past as a way to critique the political and colonial contexts of knowledge and knowledge makers. The lack of data about women is especially troublesome. Women tend to go unrecorded in official accounts, especially technological and cycling histories. Patents are valuable in this context as they 'present a valuable perspective on female inventive activity and market participation in an era when marriage meant the virtual "invisibility" of married women in terms of objective data.'[15]

None of this means that Sidonie Mießner didn't exist, of course, or that her patent wasn't successful or that her invention wasn't made, worn, and enjoyed by early women cyclists. The task becomes how to reconstruct her life and invention when there are few traces in the archives.

What to do with flawed archival data? Or in this case, the lack of flawed archival data?

Experimental Approaches to Archival Research

Inspiration can be found in many creative and experimental approaches to archive research. Writing about queer filmmaker Cheryl Dunye's practice, Julia Bryan-Wilson explains how 'Dunye has consistently explored the affective potency that lies within historical records — and the gaps in those records — to explore how fictional archives might be necessary for queer lives in the present as well as for imagined futures'.[16] Feminist archivists Nydia Swaby

11 Griselda Pollock, 'Trouble in the Archives', *Women's Art Magazine* 54 (1993): 10-13, 12.

12 Ruth Schwartz-Cowan, *A Social History of American Technology*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007, 120.

13 Kate Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87-109, 93

14 Stoler, 'Colonial Archives', 87.

15 Zorina B. Khan, 'Married Women's Property Laws and Female Commercial Activity: Evidence From United States Patent Records, 1790-1895', *The Journal of Economic History* 56.2 (1996): 356—388, 365-6.

16 Julia Bryan-Wilson and Cheryl Dunye, 'Imaginary Archives: A Dialogue', *Art Journal*, 72.2 (2013): 82-89, 83

and Chandra Frank take a different sensory approach: 'We are invested in exploring the experimental as a means to read, experience, feel and touch archives' and 'as an imaginary, in which we deliberately make space for play, refusal and artistic renderings of archives and their materiality'.[17] They also 'propose experimentation as a form of dwelling and lingering in the archive to subvert linear notions of time and place'.[18]

Even more directly, African-American scholar Saidiya Hartman creatively challenges the authority of historical data that 'dictates what can be said about the past and kinds of stories that can be told about the persons catalogues, embalmed, and sealed away in a box of files and folios'.[19] Her powerful work reads 'against the grain, disturbing and breaking open the stories' which requires her 'to speculate, listen intently, read between the lines, attend to the disorder and mess of the archive, and to honor the silence.'[20]

Although diverse, these writers collectively take political positions in their work by identifying and rendering visible the 'telling blanks and perversely wilful holes' in archives.[21] Guided by this inspiring interdisciplinary work, failures and gaps in archives can be seen as invitations to find, piece together, and convey new stories or alternate perspectives on existing ones. A dead end in the archives is not terrible. It does not mark the end of a project. Rather, as I am learning, there are many ways of responding to it. In the case of Sidonie Mießner's patent, it enabled me to get inventive with the study of invention. As Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford have argued, 'Inventive methods are ways to introduce answerability into a problem [. . .] if methods are to be inventive, they should not leave that problem untouched'.[22]

My practice involves the use of what I term 'speculative sewing', whereby I 'stitch data, theory and fabric into inventions described in patents and analyse them as three-dimensional arguments'.[23] The lack of surviving data about the invention and/or the invention itself can be partially rectified by remaking it. The patent after all is a step-by-step series of instructions for future users to replicate an inventor's idea. For my research team, the process of researching, reconstructing, and re-imagining lesser known technoscience stories into material forms offers ways to spend time with the inventor, interview her about her practice, make mistakes, take tangents, and reflect on the process.

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17 Nydia A Swaby and Chandra Frank, 'Archival Experiments, Notes and (dis)Orientations,' *Feminist Review* 125 (2020): 4-16, 4.

18 Swaby and Frank, 'Archival Experiments'.

19 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, London: Serpent's Tail, 2007, 17.

20 Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*, London: Serpents Tail, 2021, 34.

21 Bryan-Wilson and Dunye, 'Imaginary Archives', 82.

22 Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford (eds), *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*, London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 3.

23 Kat Jungnickel, 'Speculative Sewing: Researching, Reconstructing And Re-Imagining Clothing Inventions As Wearable Technoscience', *Social Studies of Science*, online first 16 Aug 2022, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/03063127221119213.

This practice reveals the complexities of the invention often hidden in (brief) texts. Physically getting up close to and into the research and reflecting on the intimacy of making and wearing other people's clothes adds new and different textures and layers to the analysis. This approach to failure can be seen as a political act of visibility. The materiality of a convertible cycling skirt marks a firm counter argument to the invisibility of the inventor in other forms of official and formal records.

Getting Inventive with Failure

This chapter started with questions about failure. I asked who or what was central to the problem of not finding data about the inventor Sidonie Mießner's life and her invention. Research rarely takes us in the direction we initially expect. And even, as mapped out above, when we start to approach seemingly stressful dead ends there are sometimes inventive ways out. Reflecting on the work of scholars who approach failure in archives in creative and experimental ways encourages us to read 'against the grain'.[24]As Swaby and Frank remind us, 'the archive is as much a site of loss as of abundance'.[25]

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24 Hartman, *Wayward Lives,* 34.

25 Swaby and Frank, 'Archival Experiments', 11.

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FAILURE AS REFLEXIVE METHOD TO THINK OTHERWISE

ANNETTE N. MARKHAM

I fail. I failed. I have failed.

It failed. It is a failure.

I am a failure.

#FAIL

Failure. The term gets used all the time, in both scientific communities and everyday conversations. It means very different things to different people, once you start to unpack the use of the term in its specific context, or listen to how people describe how they define failure. This chapter takes as its departure point the colloquial definition of 'failure' when used in everyday conversations among researchers, like social science and humanities doctoral students I have mentored over the years, as they talk about what did or didn't work in the practical and logistical accomplishment of their scientific research.

While the negative valence of failure is resisted in contemporary critiques, such as the work of Jack Halberstam in the *Queer Art of Failure*, failure in the everyday sense is still considered something to avoid, overcome, or obscure.[1] In more than 30 years of mentoring early career researchers, I have come to realize labelling one's own work a failure can cause a researcher to pull up short, come to a full stop, and turn away from rather than toward these critical junctures. In this piece, I present three heuristic principles for rethinking what failure actually constitutes in the course of inquiry, to build the conceptual notion that failure is nothing more or less than an outcome of an experiment or action. This is an effort to recast 'failure' as merely a critical juncture, an essential core process of sensemaking. I have used these heuristics in my own teaching to help build a mindset and methodological vocabulary as a practical guide for especially those researchers who want to resist or work around the debilitating vocabularies of failure.

In popular culture, business, career, and relationship advice books, the term 'failure' is used to describe something bad, wrong, not working as expected, intended outcomes, or lack of success. 'Success' is a state typically achieved by attaining money, fame, love

1 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

or at least a stable relationship. Following the typical — and very Western — hierarchy of needs proposed by Abraham Maslow, the pinnacle of this success story would be 'self-actualization.' All of these forms of success are presumed to be achievable through — and the result of — motivation + effort. For example, in business, I'm likely to be 'a failure' if I (a) am not seeking success or (b) have not succeeded. Therefore, if a person is a failure, that person has not tried hard enough.

Of course, there have been many efforts in past decades to flip failure into a concept with a positive valence. In the 2013 book *Fail Fast, Fail Often*, authors John Babineaux and Ryan Krumboltz insist that failure is a good thing, something we should embrace.[2] But as one reads deeper in this or other popular texts (like business blogger Megan McArdle's 2014 book, *The Upside of Down*[3]), one will learn that failure is not good in itself, but is valuable because it is a point or moment of identification that you should change something, or that you're enroute to getting past failure in the ongoing progression toward success.

Failure, in this pop culture world of blog and book advice for business, innovation, creativity, or relationships, is portrayed as natural and normal, something to accept and embrace. But this is not because failure is a place to stay or an acceptable way of being. Rather, failure becomes something to overcome in the ambition to achieve the state of non-failure. *Fail Fast, Fail Often* is littered with excellent examples of famous people or well-established companies following what they describe as a natural linear progress toward achievement:

> Since success is usually preceded by bumbling starts and botched efforts, you can think about anything you would like to succeed at in terms of how you must first be bad at it. You can put it in this form: If I want to succeed at _________, I must first be bad at _________.[4]

Alexander Clark and Bailey Sousa, Canadian social scientists and qualitative methodologists who have written various pieces on failure in academia[5] resist this sort of 'failure is part of a linear progression toward success' logic. They suggest failure is not something to get beyond. Instead, it is an inherent part of research. Yet even as much as the concept of failure is lifted up as a good thing, and elaborated in refreshingly nuanced ways, their conceptualization and use of the term still reinforces a negative valence. In their call for papers on failure, Sousa and Clark define research failures as 'situations or events of consequence in which your choices, presence, or influence contributed conceivably to

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2 John D. Babineaux and Ryan Krumboltz, *Fail Fast, Fail Often: How Losing Can Help You Win*, Penguin, 2013.

3 Megan McArdle, *The Up Side of Down: Why Failing Well Is the Key to Success*, New York, New York: Viking Adult, 2014.

4 Babineaux and Krumboltz, *Fail Fast*, 50.

5 Alexander Clark and Bailey Sousa, 'Academics: You Are Going to Fail, so Learn How to Do It Better,' *The Guardian*, 4 November 2015, sec. Education, https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/nov/04/academics-you-are-going-to-fail-so-learn-how-to-do-it-better; Bailey Sousa and Alexander Clark, 'A Manifesto for Better Research Failure,' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2020, https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1177/1609406920973858.

an adverse or undesirable research process or outcomes'.[6] While expanding the notion of failure as inevitable and natural, these authors still situate these moments as wrong and unwanted. They suggest, in a different article published for *The Guardian,* that academics should learn to fail better, so the negative outcomes are minimized: 'When failure happens, be grateful that it occurred but was not bigger, more damaging or more complex'. [7]

The storyline in the self-help sections of bookstores is not markedly different from the typical academic environment where early career scholars are socialized into what it means to do good research, unfortunately. Failure remains the opposite of success. Within this framing, while failure is something we might accept, it is still bad or wrong, implying that if one were only a better researcher, it wouldn't have happened. The discursive impact of this negative valence can be internalized over time from simply an account of what happened ('It failed') to an attribute of a person ('I'm a failure').

It is no surprise to me that across academic research environments, especially in fields that are continuously criticized for being less scientifically rigorous than the hard sciences (i.e. the humanities or social sciences), failure is almost always cast as something to avoid, and when something fails or is deemed a failure, it is likely hidden behind the cleaned-up explanation of one's practices in a written report. Despite the many philosophical and critical discussions to the contrary, everyday discourses around failure remain strongly negative and fall into the 'blameworthy' end of a spectrum of causes, rather than 'praiseworthy,' according to Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson. In her piece exploring the misguided beliefs about failure, she explains:

> When I ask executives to consider this spectrum and then to estimate how many of the failures in their organizations are truly blameworthy, their answers are usually in single digits—perhaps 2% to 5%. But when I ask how many are treated as blameworthy, they say (after a pause or a laugh) 70% to 90%.[8]

This attitude among my own doctoral students is certainly exacerbated by the persistent injunction of academic institutions to conduct research with the goal of success, a goal that has been heavily scaffolded by the classic scientific model and driven by the models of an ideology that science should be in a continuous state of progress.

What happens when we simply define failure as an 'outcome' and then accommodate failure as a common type of outcome, an inherent and necessary part of inquiry practices, creating critical junctures where we might pause, reflect, and possibly think otherwise? Especially in research models involving emergent or open-ended practices of engagement in social contexts or working with human-generated data, the researcher is not a passive observer of processes or a neutral agent, but the primary filter through which cultural and

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6 Sousa and Clark, 'A Manifesto', n.p.

7 Clark and Sousa, 'Academics'.

8 Amy C. Edmondson, 'Strategies for Learning from Failure,' *Harvard Business Review*, March 2011, https://hbr.org/2011/04/strategies-for-learning-from-failure.

material data passes to be interpreted. Within this idea, what is the value or role of inquiry processes that take an unexpected turn, or tools that don't operate as expected? If we take failure out of the realm of something to avoid, and detach failure from a negative personal attribute, how can it function as a more positive part of discovery and sensemaking?

Rethinking Failure: A Model for Using Failure as Part of Reflexive Practice

In developing models that embrace failure as useful and natural, the humanities or social science researcher can take a cue from the hard sciences, particularly those fields where experimentation is a standard practice, such as chemistry, design, or engineering. Here, failure is common and expected. In engineering, for example, failure is traditionally an attribute given to processes or mechanisms that don't operate as expected, or stop operating as expected, as in 'the termination of the ability of an item to perform a required function'.[9]

In designing things for use-in-the-world, it is necessary to test various aspects of efficacy by trying to get to the failure state. Here, failure has high information value for further development. It's a form of what engineers or designers call 'stress testing,' whereby the researcher can push a system or structure to the breaking point in an accelerated manner to 'identify non-intuitive failures that would normally require months or years in the field to identify'.[10] In laboratory or bench research like chemistry, failure happens so much it's hardly the best explanation for what's occurring. When one notices how much failure is happening, cognitive scientist Ann-Sophie Barwich notes, one might wonder how science makes any advances at all. But on the contrary, she suggests, science is successful precisely because of these failures.[11]

As Barwich explains, science 'must fail to achieve an important job it sets out to do: discovery. For scientific research to exceed our initial modelling assumptions and to continuously supersede our ever-adjusting experimental limits, things have to go wrong'.[12] Failure is information that can be used to disrupt the taken for granted strategies and models. There is strong heuristic value in failure.[13]

Taking a cue from authors seeking to build failure more positively into academic research practices, I use this opportunity to outline a model where outcomes discarded or dismissed

9 K.M. Blache and A.B. Shrivastava, 'Defining Failure of Manufacturing Machinery and Equipment,' in *Proceedings of Annual Reliability and Maintainability Symposium (RAMS)* (Annual Reliability and Maintainability Symposium (RAMS), Anaheim, CA, USA: IEEE, 1994), pp. 69–75, https://doi.org/10.1109/RAMS.1994.291084.

10 Alex Porter, 'Success through Failure with Accelerated Stress Testing,' *Intertek,* 8 June 2021, https://www.intertek.com/.

11 Ann-Sophie Barwich, 'The Value of Failure in Science: The Story of Grandmother Cells in Neuroscience,' *Frontiers in Neuroscience* 13 (24 October 2019): 1121, https://doi.org/10.3389/fnins.2019.01121.

12 Barwich, 'The Value of Failure in Science', n.p.

13 Barwich, The Value of Failure in Science', n.p.

as ‘failures’ can be put back into the stacks of usable moments and materials in a project to prompt reflexivity about the levels of fit between research questions and research design, the role of the researcher, assumptions about participants, and assumptions about how one’s tools are working. Inserting failure repeatedly in the process is to ask for opportunities to think otherwise.

The point I’d like to make here is that we can go some steps beyond the idea that failure is necessary, normal, or essential, as authors like Babineaux and Krumboltz, Clark and Sousa, and Barwich have stressed in their various works, respectively, and to insist that failure is central to any sensemaking. As a central component, whatever we might label as ‘failure’ during the process of inquiry should be included and highlighted more deliberately in models for social research design. This discursive reframing is also an effort to correct the imbalance caused by the persistent negative framing that occurs when something is labelled as a failure.

Building from the more abstract manifesto of Sousa and Clark[14], the three principles below seek to build a methodological vocabulary and heuristic as a guide for researchers, especially those who seek to resist the negative valence of failure or consider how they can use these moments more fruitfully and reflexively in their own practice. Notably, the three principles below don’t outline methods, or explicate instances of failure, but describe some epistemologically-driven, generative questions that emerge at various points throughout a study.

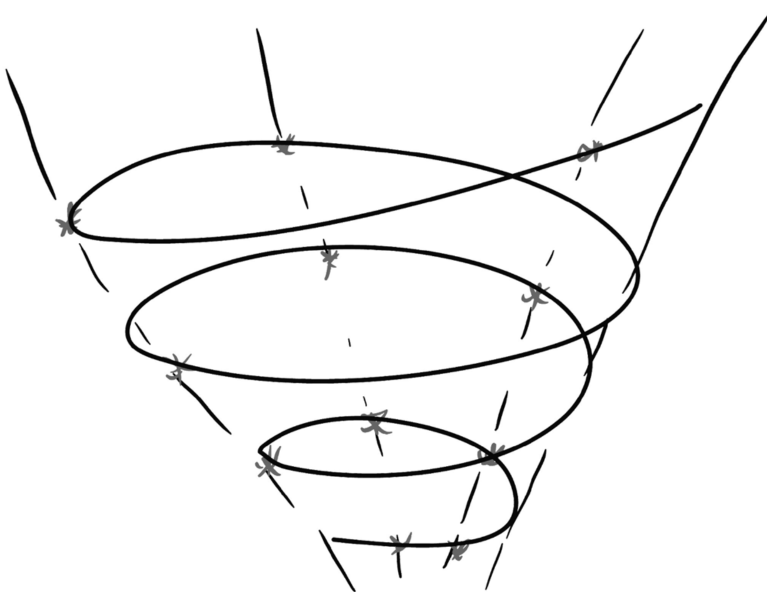

Figure 5.1: The iterative inquiry spiral. Source: Annette Markham. Used with permission.

14 Sousa and Clark, ‘A Manifesto,’ n.p.

Failures as Outcomes: Identifying Critical Junctures in Iterative Spirals of Inquiry

Based on a previous model of reflexive practice that emphasizes inquiry as iterative spirals,[15,16] any decision that leads to action constitutes a critical juncture where one ventures into experimental territory, a sort of venturing forth into the unknown to see what happens. The outcome of this experiment can be considered another critical juncture where we can examine what happened and explore where to go next. These continual junctures or turning points are encountered again and again as one returns repeatedly to interrogate the research, in all stages and processes. This idea is depicted in Figure 4.1.

At each of these critical junctures, one might invoke Donna Haraway's practice of speculative fabulation[17] to ask a series of 'what if' questions. This practice of examining the moment as a temporal possibility invites speculation along a number of different lines. One can explore 'What if it had been otherwise?' or 'Why did this happen versus that?' Prompts like these enable reflections about what is happening, or what just happened, or what might have happened otherwise. This sort of check-in is not with the intent to verify that the process is valid, but to acknowledge that the process of inquiry is inherently a matter of choices that have consequences, and there are innumerable other choices that could be or could have been made, which would lead to alternate consequences.

Continuing with the inspiration of Haraway's later discussion of string figures,[18] discovery comes into and out of view iteratively. By focusing on these moments with some detailed 'what if' questions, the researcher can find gaps or absences. This is part of what Haraway means by her concept of 'staying with the trouble'.[19] These in turn might highlight certain other 'failure points,' which can in turn help us think about shifting the lens or direction of gaze or sensemaking practice slightly to get a better (more productive, more ethical, more daring, more meaningful) angle.

Alternately, this can be a moment to pause, slow down, and reflect. By allowing the process, event, or moment to breathe more fully, one can gain a renewed sense of priorities, or maybe discover some limitations, turning points, or blockages in the current way of going about things. Or, this sort of critical interrogation might also reveal rich possibilities and new potentialities, making room for new directions of fruitful inquiry or even inviting more radical transformations of the core goals or audiences for the project.

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15 Annette Markham, 'Ethic as Method, Method as Ethic: A Case for Reflexivity in Qualitative ICT Research,' *Journal of Information Ethics* 15.2 (2006): 37–54, https://doi.org/10.3172/JIE.15.2.37.

16 Annette Markham, 'Reflexivity: Some Techniques for Interpretive Researchers,' *Annette Markham*, 28 February 2017, https://annettemarkham.com/2017/02/reflexivity-for-interpretive-researchers/.

17 Donna Haraway, 'SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far,' *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, 3(2013), doi:10.7264/N3KH0K81.

18 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, 2016.

19 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble.*

The process of reflection occurs repeatedly, but at different levels. This may not always be comfortable and is, in a practical sense, time consuming. Yet once we start to pay attention to these critical junctures, we might realize that the label of failure is somewhat arbitrary and certainly capricious. In some circumstances, the outcome will be labelled 'failure,' whereas in other cases, it will simply be labelled 'a turning point', or maybe an event that shifted one's practice.

Failure as Information: Locating Movement, Positionality, and Worldviews

As we move — through the world, through field sites, through different experiments, through research projects — we are positioning and repositioning ourselves to various sites of meaning. Whether or not we notice, our habitual and trained modalities of attention are generating layers and layers of data — or perhaps more appropriately put, stimuli that becomes data when we use it as information to interpret situations or make meaning. Each of our movements, actions, or swings of attention create a slightly different lens or perspective. These are tacit tools for observation, engagement, and analysis embedded in our everyday trained sensibilities.

What does this have to do with 'failure'? Well, when nothing goes wrong, so to speak, we likely never notice the methodological function of the various lenses emerging from our attention, yet they are in continual operation. They become visible only when we stumble, glitch, or otherwise do something that brings our working assumptions or tacit ways of knowing to the surface. Then, they become something to scrutinize. In this way, anything labelled as 'failure' can be reflexively considered as reflections or products of particular modes of attention, ways of working, or other operationalizations of our ontologies and epistemologies.

No matter how much we might think we comprehend our own worldview or stance, critically interrogating outcomes or end results — whether we call these 'failures' or not — can function as a form of identifying and then scrutinizing the obvious methods as well as the more tacit practices or ways of knowing that were operating that might have influenced these outcomes. Reverse engineering is one way of unpacking various components of end results or products; each component in turn reveals or recreates micro-moments of processes that could have led to the outcome. In connecting to the idea of one's movements or attention as tools of methods, one is trying to connect one's trained practice to one's movements (and habitual actions of attention) more visibly, which gives reflexive focus on how one's position is influencing decisions that may have led to this versus that outcome. This scrutiny may change one's perspective, technique, or habit of attention, as is often the case when this scrutiny is used in a chemistry lab to tweak an experiment's protocol. But it also might simply generate more reflexively oriented information. This principle of conceptualizing failure as information leaps over the simplification that failure is 'wrong' and transforms it into a functional and ever-present component of reflexive practice.

Failure as Indicators: Interrogating Stakeholders and Power

In most situations of scientific or artistic endeavour, individual practices in the lab, field, or studio don't emerge tabula rasa, but operate within larger communities of practice, disciplinary or historical traditions, and systems of cultural and conceptual frameworks. What and whose priorities are valued or devalued when the label of failure is applied? The most powerful influences on our practices are indirect, when norms are embedded in infrastructures, or when decisions are disconnected from the person through neutralizing phrases like 'that's just how it's done' or 'in this field, we use X tools.' Sure, we might assess a 'failed' project or method through our own careful determination, but in many circumstances, the decision to describe something as a failure is externally prescribed, by which I mean we've applied a label because we are using external prescriptive and normative advice to inform the categorization of something as 'failed' or 'a failure'. Something (a procedure, an outcome, an encounter, an engagement) does not meet an external expectation.

The question this leads to a question raised in many ways throughout this volume: where does that expectation come from and what does this expectation prioritize? Success? Functionality? Adherence to a norm? Quality? Reflecting on the underpinnings of the expectation reveals layers of norms, structures, and rules. Here, one can also identify and scrutinize some of the stakeholders, human and nonhuman influences on the foundations of our academic approaches. So, when something 'fails,' there are troubling but important rabbit holes to travel down, for at least two reasons. First, this interrogation opens up multiple string figures[20] of potential dynamics, relationships, or socio-political structures influencing the shape and conduct of one's choices of methodological tools or practice overall. Second, and far more poignant, it can be an act of resistance against personal and future potential damage.

The label of 'failure' or 'failing' can damage the state and progress of one's project, not because it is 'correcting' or 'assessing' but because it immediately denies and negates, potentially stalling the important experimentation and invention fundamental to discovery. That's one level of damage. The personal and professional impact of 'failure' can also be quite striking. How might the practice of labelling something a 'failure' do damage? How does the label and negative valence of failure work over time to foster an equally negative sensibility toward change or approaches that seek to transgress boundaries? While invention and experimentation are encouraged in the hard sciences and failure is actually expected, 'transgressiveness' is discouraged in fields where adherence to disciplinary standards is a powerful delimiter of experimentation and risk.

This can be taken further by returning to the classic feminist critiques of positivist science by such authors as Sandra Harding[21] or the complications of sensemaking elaborated by

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20 Haraway, 'SF', n.p.

21 Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, Cornell University Press, 1986.

such scholars as Haraway[22] and Karen Barad.[23] The value of building from these works is to continue the long effort to resist the hegemonic power of everyday discourses around how inquiry happens. In this, Gramscian inspired critical theory is valuable as a way of recognizing that failure is part of a larger structure that over time becomes naturalized and neutralized, whereby certain ways of doing things become accepted and consensual yet still privilege certain stakeholder interests over others' by valuing only particular ways of doing and being. Regaining the connection between our embodied, knowing, culturally specific senses and the moments of keen learning — labelled failure or not — is an open-ended exploration, a way of reflecting on our reflections of our own practices within The Academy.

It is a politic and ethic of resistance, one that contributes to the longstanding and continuing efforts to decolonize narrow Western ideas about causality, scale, knowing, and sensemaking. This goes beyond simply challenging the negative valence of failure. It is a matter of deliberately and robustly interrogating how the attribution of failure happens, with what potential or actual consequences —both positive and negative — for the people involved as well as for future infrastructures of inquiry practices.

What if failure didn't really exist?

The three principles above are examples of rethinking how failure functions, or ways of resisting the label in one's own practice, to gain more specificity about what is really happening, since 'failure' is such an all-encompassing yet somewhat meaningless term. There are other principles that can emerge as one creatively digs beneath the surface to consider how recasting the term or playfully rejecting it might be useful to one's own practice.

And it's worth noting that these creative or playful practices of reconsidering the definition and utility of the concept of failure may require building phrases or mantras to repel or push back against the dominant narratives that repeatedly tell us that failure is the opposite of success. Even doodling can help provide these mantras, as you see me doing in the middle of a workshop in 2018, in Figures 5.2 and 5.3.

22 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble.*

23 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

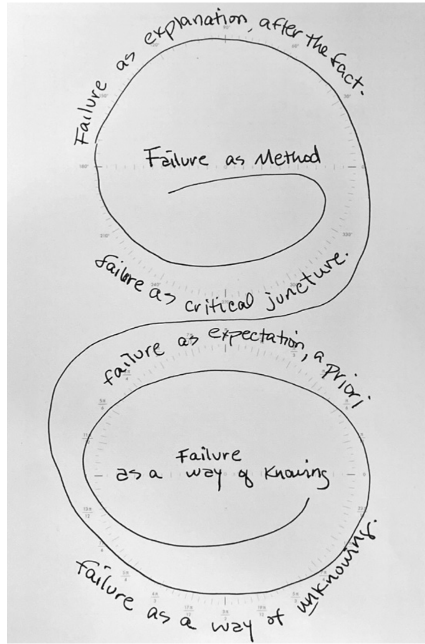

Figure 5.2: Rethinking the concept of failure as a type of infinity spiral. Sketches by the author from a 2018 workshop in Barcelona. Source: Annette Markham. Used with permission.

Figure 5.3: Asking a speculative 'what if?' question about 'Failure' as a traveling club. Source: Annette Markham. Used with permission.

As I conclude this chapter, I must admit that I have never believed in failure. Everything labelled as failure is nothing more or less than an outcome. Within this definition, failure never actually exists as 'failure.' When it involves research, if we think of the action preceding an outcome as 'experiment,' we can gain knowledge from scrutinizing how and why certain outcomes happen, versus other possibilities. Removing the negative or positive valence removes the label itself. The only exception is when failure is used to describe a mechanism that no longer functions as intended, as mentioned at the outset of this essay, as when a spark plug on a combustion engine no longer fires, or the key gets stuck in the lock. Otherwise, anything we label as failure simply highlights a critical juncture, inviting us to pause, look around, and reflect for a moment as we make another decision to do the next thing, which will inevitably turn us this way or that on whatever journey we are on. Recast in this way, we can further specify failures as informational, indicators of pathways, and pointers for thinking otherwise.

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DIGITAL AGENCY AND THE AUTHORSHIP OF FAILURE

ANNA HICKEY-MOODY

In this chapter I intentionally problematize popular ways of valuing research and shift registers for what we might expect to see when reading 'research.' Empirical research assemblages call researchers to inhabit diverse forms of radically different worlds. These worlds can profoundly dis-organize and re-distribute us as ethnographers and people. Often, communication across and within worlds relies on algorithmic forms of mediation or digital platforms.

I contend that we need more academic work unpacking the politics of feeling like a failure in ethnographic fieldwork and exploring the complex agencies of research assemblages, which modulate the subjectivity of empirical researchers. I argue that digital agency is gendered and is part of the algorithmic worlds in which feminist digital researchers work. As such, we need to develop our own failure archives of the roles played by digital agency and digital failure in the production of experiences of failure in research assemblages.

Digital psychopaths?

Machines have no humility. Artificial intelligence and algorithmic assemblages have no feelings, no ethical conscience, no capacity to relate on interpersonal levels. In human terms, machines, algorithmic assemblages, forms of artificial intelligence, are, effectively, psychopaths. That is, if we take a psychopath to be a body (assemblage) suffering from an '(antisocial) disorder in which an individual manifests amoral and antisocial behavior, shows a lack of ability to love or establish meaningful personal relationships, expresses extreme egocentricity, and demonstrates a failure to learn from experience and other behaviors associated with the condition'[1], then a machine would be diagnosed as having psychopathy. This is not to reduce the complexity of mental illness or equivocate mental illness to a non-human characteristic, but to point out the fact that digital technology has no remorse (indeed no capacity for remorse) and a complete absence of empathy for others. Despite this fact, humans need to relate to and rely on digital technologies and the agency of digital technologies in ways that are comparable to the kinds of reliance we have on other people. Shared memories, information, thoughts, notes are held in this relationality.

Algorithms do not have personal relationships. They are designed to make money. There is an irony here, however, in the fact that algorithms have been developed to facilitate

1 Henry Hermann, 'Alternate Human Behavior,' in Henry R. Hermann (ed), *Dominance and Aggression in Humans and Other Animals*, San Diego: Academic Press, 2017, pp. 139-57.

personal relationships even though they do not have personal relationships themselves. Despite this, and through necessity, I outsource so much of my memory work, archival work, and research recording to machines, digital spaces, and algorithmically mediated platforms.

Building on my recent work on experiences of failure in the gendered research assemblage,[2] I argue that thinking critically about digital agency and digitally orchestrated failure really matters in supporting the work of emerging feminist digital ethnographers. This approach is important for understanding how, as researchers, our own experiences of failing in the field are produced. Losing data, being locked out of online accounts, electronic equipment breaking, being hacked, video and sound recording errors: digital technology brings with it a distributed network of increased possibility for failure. When we outsource memory and data recording we distribute the network we rely on for recall and recording and increase possibilities for failure.

I already suffer from forgetfulness. I have a clinical diagnosis of PTSD, which impairs one's memory, and I live with a significant level of professional stress which impacts memory. I often ask digital devices to help me retain information. However, as I have learnt, digital devices, algorithms, and mediated platforms can lose more information in one moment than I ever have (as yet). This is difficult to recuperate.

Jack Halberstam has suggested that forgetfulness can be queer, or queering; it can be a problematization of the known.[3] Yet as Halberstam[4] also reminds us, even forgetting can become over coded by capitalism:

> Forgetfulness is not always queer, of course; indeed in the early twenty-first century it has become a major trope of mainstream cinema. But while most forms of forgetting in mainstream cinema operate according to a simple mapping of memory onto identity and memory loss onto the loss of history, location, and even politics, a few films, often unintentionally, set forgetting in motion in such a way as to undermine dominant modes of historicizing.[5]

Even failing and forgetting can become a trope and can be purposed for financial gain.

Further, feeling like a failure in the research assemblage is an experience that is not often discussed in the literature on research methods, particularly in relation to digital methods. For example, Catherine Dawson's *A-Z of Digital Research Methods,*[6] Peter Halfpenny and Rob Proctor's *Innovations in Digital Methods,*[7] and Cristina Costa and

2 Anna Hickey-Moody, 'Three Ways of Knowing Failure', *M.I.A: Feminism and Visual Culture*, 4.4 (2019): 1-30.
3 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.
4 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure,* 74.
5 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure,* 74.
6 Catherine Dawson, *A-Z of Digital Research Methods*, United Kingdom: Taylor and Francis, 2019.
7 Peter Halfpenny and Rob Proctor, *Innovations in Digital Methods*, United Kingdom: SAGE, 2015.

Jenna Condle's *Doing Research in and on the Digital: Research Methods Across Fields of Inquiry*[8] respectively offer comprehensive examinations of digital research methods, none of which examine the extended possibilities of failure and loss that accompany the digitalization of research data collection and storage. Failure is seemingly not conceived as an embedded aspect of method, although failure is, in fact, embedded in everything we do. Women are often especially aware of this.

Women are consistently positioned as failing to achieve their gender successfully. Being too large, too loud, infertile, critical, or bossy are all qualities that are popularly turned 'against' women as examples of failure to achieve their gender successfully. This experience of failure is echoed in the research assemblage through concerns about developing a 'strong' or 'robust' data set, discussions of strong and weak data, and rhetoric recounting successful analysis. Gendered tropes of mastery prevail in how embodiment is policed, remade, performed, taught, and understood. Failing to achieve mastery, loss, emptiness, and forgetfulness are constituent aspects of the very ideas of mastery, achievement, success, achievement, and recall.

Contemporary research and communication assemblages have become entwined in digital platforms in ways that researchers are not able to avoid. There are intersections of the personal and professional that are mediated by digital platforms. In what follows, I offer an auto-ethnographic account of my own journey of digital forgetting and the loss of enmeshed personal and research data. This was an experience that made me reflect upon the extent to which I have come to rely on digital platforms as a form of professional and personal memory.

Outsourcing Memory and Media Rituals

José van Dijck has suggested:

> as memories are increasingly mediated and thus constructed by networked technologies, the boundaries between present and past are no longer given, but they are the very stakes in debating what counts as memory. Memory, after the connective turn, is a new mediatized memory that challenges currently dominant concepts of time and space.[9]

Andrew Hoskin also argues that contemporary memory is distributed through digital networks and embedded in socio-technical practices and calls for networked memory.[10] My own experiences of outsourcing memory and distributed media rituals supports these

8 Cristina Costa and Jenna Condle, *Doing Research in and on the Digital: Research Methods*, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2018.

9 José Van Dijck, 'Flickr and the Culture of Connectivity: Sharing Views, Experiences, Memories', *Memory Studies*, 20.10 (2010), 4. See also José van Dijck, *Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

10 Andrew Hoskin, 'Digital Network Memory', in Astrid Erll and Ann Rigny (eds), *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009.

arguments. On the 17th April 2012 in Shoreditch, East London, I made the first post to my current Instagram account. My previous account was lost to me due to a work email change when I moved to London to teach at Goldsmiths, and with it my access to control over the digital archive of my memories. In my new account, I posted a giant green flying bee or wasp painted on a historic wall in Shoreditch, the blue and white national trust plaque not quite readable in the top right-hand corner of the image. This was not a political statement—just an expression of a being-in-placeness of my contemporary moment. Images marking significant life events (finishing a book, getting married), experiences (*The Sisters Hope* show in Mälmo), places (London Pleasure gardens, the black heart bar, street shrines, Cambridge), populate my early timeline. Meeting my brother in Bratislava, spending time with him in Vienna, getting to know his wild, anarchist housemates and then heading to Paris for the *International Crossroads in Cultural Studies* conference are events only documented on my Instagram account.

Previous workplaces, homes, social events, desserts shared with students (one of whom is now dead), conferences organized, vows witnessed, romance. Teaching in the Louisiana Museum of Art (Denmark), time with family in Dublin, holidays in Milan. A cycling holiday with my girlfriend to Lulworth Cove. Keynotes given in Mälmo (Sweden), Aarhus (Denmark), Maribor (Slovenia). These are events I have no documents recording, other than those technically owned by Meta. I can't remember my password to download the data. I think it's written in a diary I have somewhere. I must remember to look when back from fieldwork.

Over the 10 years since I started this account, it has become my most significant archival practice for work (including research milestones and significant fieldwork moments), travel, significant life events. In retrospect, I realized that a lot of what I lost was generated through what we might call a media ritual: the marking of an important life moment through posting it on social media. In their book *Everyday Data Cultures*, Burgess et al. discuss 'media rituals'[11], drawing on Lee Humphries'[12] discussion of practices of documentation, which turn everyday mundane activities into what Humphries calls 'media accounts'. These media accounts add up to a public record of everyday life that have real meaning for people. Media accounts show us how people connect to and shape online identity in both personal and professional capacities. Often the two are intentionally blurred thorough the digital platforms they mobilize.

Some fieldwork data is only on my personal Instagram — snaps of artworks taken in the field that turned out to really capture a work or a moment very effectively. I have naïvely backed myself into a corner: so many things that matter to me are remembered and indeed owned primarily by a digital platform with no ethics, no relationality, no humility.

One day it was all deleted. Someone tried to hack into the account and Meta wiped it. I had outsourced my memories and the algorithm stole my past. I had archived my thinking

11 Jean Burgess, Kath Albury, Anthony McCosker, and Rowan Wilken, *Everyday Data Cultures,* United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, 2022.

12 Lee Humphreys, *The Qualified Self: Social Media and the Accounting of Everyday Life*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018, 35.

digitally, on Instagram, a platform owned by global corporation Meta, and my intellectual and emotional labor was destroyed. I was left wondering: what does this ritualized attention to a mutable and fallible memory archive say about memory in late capitalism? What does it mean for identity? After a couple of weeks I had the content restored, and have most certainly learnt my lesson that the content is not owned by me.

When we rely so heavily on digital platforms to retain, organize, and share the products of our labor, we also rely on them to record and memorialize our most precious moments. Simultaneously, we give these digital platforms the power to forget for us. Halberstam[13] suggests there are no fixed values between remembering and forgetting. Memory can be a disciplinary thing that makes one think about the past in certain ways, and in relation to certain disciplines. Forgetfulness has the potential to allow for new narratives to be created. There are conservative forms of forgetting — forgetting that is designed to allow a continuation of forms of the same. National memories of colonial countries are filled with forms of amnesia that have an ideological value for regimes that want to cover up bad deeds. However, what Halberstam is interested in is the possibility of queering family reproduction and traditional identity narratives through forgetting information, bloodlines, memories. Digital amnesia orchestrated through capitalist platforms has no political purchase or significance. It is mindless loss.

Digital Failure Archives

As I have noted, Jack Halberstam[14] suggests that failure is one of the ways that we can escape the normative constraints of 'success'. Implicitly, failure can be seen as a critique of the terms of success. Indeed, within failure is embedded a fierce critique of all that is embedded in normativity, as normativity *implies* success. Thinking back on my experience of working with digital technology to collect data for fieldwork, I can see an archive of failure; an archive of moments and episodes of loss. Video cameras not working, devices being used in the wrong way, children photographing strange objects, being locked out of digital devices, losing passwords. The internet now houses vast quantities of information I generated but can no longer access and information that I did not mean to generate but is digitally archived in my name, or stored on a profile I own. Children taking research equipment have generated a decent amount of the data I have generated but do not own.

This brings us back to the question of externalized memory on commercialized platforms. Data might be in our name, but often we do not own it. Further, what is our relationship to material generated by others on our platforms or that we have reshared? Digital archives documenting my research failures, or moments of failure in research which I organized, are collected in virtual spaces — only some of which I can access. What will happen to these digital catalogues of my fieldwork? Can anyone access them? Will they ever be able to be retrieved? I suspect these are questions which will never be answered. In contemporary research cultures, machines can fail for us.

13 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure.*
14 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure.*

Conclusion

This writing is an exploration of intersections of experiences of failure in fieldwork. I am not looking to advance a specific pedagogical or conceptual point, but, rather, I see utility in creating space to discuss the everyday nature of failure that we experience. As Raymond Williams'[15] thoughts on structures of feeling have taught us, what 'feels' everyday is wrought with structural issues and politics. The intersection of this is our consciousness. Specifically, in this example, I want to start to think about the power to fail, and the power to create failure, that digital platforms now possess within our research assemblages.

Through drawing on my experience as a woman researcher undertaking digital ethnographic fieldwork, I am trying to normalize the articulation of experiences of failure. More than this, though, I am explicating how the distributed agency of digital platforms and algorithms exponentially increase the possibilities for experiencing failure in the field. Not only might I forget the occurrence of an event, but all documentation of the event may indeed be lost due to a technological error.

So much of the data I have worked to create is lost to me, but it still exists somewhere in the digitalized world where it may or may not be 'owned' and farmed in a capitalist system. This creates an interesting entanglement between queer failure as a resistance to capitalist heteronormativity and the capitalist mechanics of the world we live in. Is my failure feeding capitalism? My thinking here circles back here to the question of gender and digital agency with which I opened the essay: who 'owns' failure, or who (or what) fails, and how we can reclaim and articulate that experience of failure in a gendered world of research and digital media? Can there be an outside to digital failure that does not result in capitalist gain? In a move to 'do queer failure better', I want to be that outside.

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15 Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with the New Left Review*, London: New Left Books,

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SCHEMATIC OF AN ART FAILURE (ARTWORK)

LINDA DEMENT

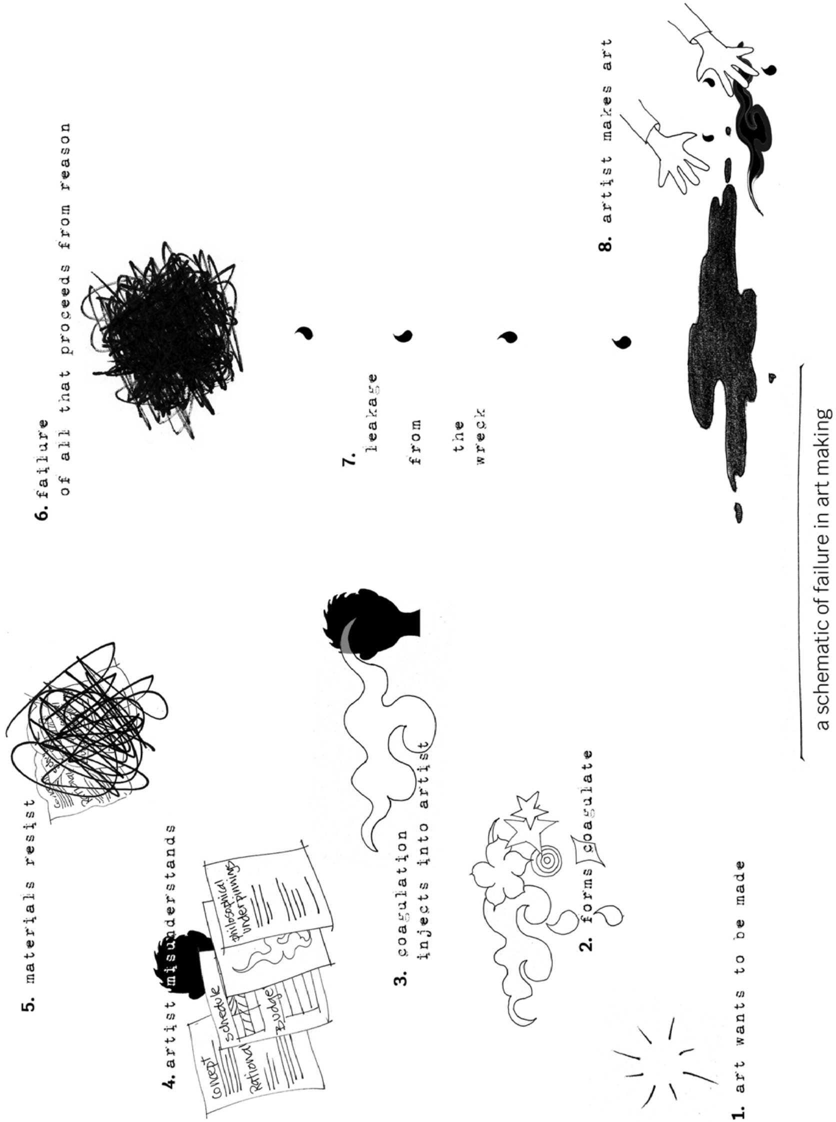

Figure 7.1: A Schematic of Failure in Art Making. Source: Linda Dement. Used with permission.

SECTION II:

CARE/ACTIVISM

REWORLDING: SPECULATIVE FUTURING IN THE ENDTIMES, IN THE EVERYWHEN

JEN RAE AND CLAIRE G. COLEMAN

Activities by the Centre for Reworlding are made possible while living on the unceded lands of the Wurrundjeri, Taungurung, and Dja Dja Wurrung peoples. We pay our respects to their ancestors and elders past and present.

Introduction

In ecology, when external conditions become hostile, organisms gain a higher chance of survival in refugia. In isolation, they reorganize their biological process to increase in numbers or strength until the disturbance abates. They must evolve to survive to gain a possible future. The risk of failure is extinction.

Our moment in the spacetime of the world is one in which we as humans have failed to exist in an equilibrium with nature and in which our connections with our non-human ancestors are broken. Complex and compounding human system failures have placed our species and our non-human relations on a long march towards the next extinction event, one that we created and one that will likely lead to great suffering. Adaptation is our only recourse. We must evolve to gain a liveable future.

In our increasingly climate-change impacted future, we at the Centre for Reworlding ask:

What are the conversations that we aren't having now that might aid us, our loved ones, and our future ancestors?

What are the skills and knowledges at the thresholds of being forever lost, overlooked, or undervalued that our future generations may need for survival?

And what are we willing to give up and/or fight for in the greatest challenge facing humanity?

Where do we begin? How will we reorganize?

We begin by reworlding.

This chapter reflects upon and weaves together some of the stories emerging from our collaboration on *REFUGIUM* (2021),[1] an Incinerator Art Gallery award-winning short film

1 Jen Rae and Claire G. Coleman, *Refugium,* 2021. Centre for Reworlding.

of speculative fiction in the climate emergency context, and the activities of the Centre for Reworlding, a collective formed around our collaborative work intersecting art, disaster risk reduction, and resilience within the climate emergency context. Our practice centres First Nations knowledge systems and protocols, where time and compounding existential crises converge to delve into moral dilemmas of life and death, and where we hone in on themes of child-centred trauma prevention and intergenerational justice in the coming collapse. Speculative futuring is a way of decoupling from maladaptive ways of engaging/disengaging with the climate emergency context to reorganize our relational thinking and being.

Engaging with the discipline of the imagination allows us to take calculated risks, experiment, understand our capacities, and fail together in creative hypothetical practices so we may change course, reorganize, and hopefully create a thriving and liveable world for future generations. Failure through speculative futuring is creatively and critically holding calculated risk in one hand, adapting and preparing for potential threats in the other, and simultaneously it is an outcome to avoid at all costs.

Reworlding

'Reworlding' was coined in Jen Rae's speculative fiction story *Centre for Reworlding: Umbilica Homepage* (2020) as it relates to three Indigenous futuring and survivance relationships — rematriation, reconciliation, and resurgence — acknowledging some of the tensions and contractions these concepts have in Indigenous and non-Indigenous usage. Jen refers to Métis Elder Maria Campbell's oration on the role of artists in reconciliation as described by Métis author Erica Violet Lee in her essay discussing Indigenous futures. Campbell says that artists and writers are mirrors to people showing them 'we build what could have been or should have been' prior to colonial disruption, through which Lee writes that by cultivating an understanding our relationships to histories, kin and land, we can begin to build new worlds[2] drawing from our complex cosmologies and reconnecting storylines.

While 'worlding' has been explored by scholars such as Haraway[3] and Spivak[4], the authors of this chapter are Indigenous and write from this perspective through praxis and art as 'this decolonization/Indigenization is necessary in order to bring Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and practices to the fore in a meaningful and ethical way'.[5] Reworlding also considers the 'everywhen' — a time that is outside of time where everything can be seen at once and where nothing new can be created, only discovered —

2 Erica Violet Lee, 'Reconciling in the Apocalypse,' *The Monitor*, 1 March 2016, https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/reconciling-apocalypse.

3 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016).

4 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (1985).

5 Zoe Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthropocene," in *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015).

a term originally coined by anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner in his 1956 essay *The Dreaming*,[6] a highly regarded piece of writing on race relations and Australian Aboriginal culture. The everywhen acknowledges that time is non-linear encompassing past, present, and future simultaneously and is integrated as a way of life for many First Peoples. Reworlding is an active presence of looking back to look forward, always acknowledging the eternal now. This time we live in, the Anthropocene, is therefore also part of the everywhen. The questions explored in our film *REFUGIUM* (2021) is the unearthing and what we attempt to do together through the Centre for Reworlding (C∞R) is the reorganising — refugia.

Speculative practices can provide the ability to see and shape the world in a different way — to divide our reality from our imaginings, and to decouple our history and future from time in the everywhen. The long imaginary helps us prepare, prioritize, and know what's worth fighting for when hope becomes fleeting — as written on our first banner *COLLAPSE//SURVIVE* (2020). To collapse is to honour the bully, the colonizer, the capitalist, the future-killer, and bask in the failings of centuries of extractive genocidal mania. To survive, unfuck, and reworld is to honour resurgence, intergenerational justice, rematriation, and culture — as written on our second banner *UNFUCK>>REWORLD* (2022).

Social change has always been a topic for speculative fiction — to transcend realities and corporealities. In the climate emergency context, as global temperatures rise at accelerating rates, timescales and impacts expand and detract, and we become numb to lives lost daily from disease and disaster. Now more than ever, there is a role for arts and culture to lean into the tensions, to tell the unpalpable stories along with the rousing, and to ensure we have skin in the long game.

Exploring risk through experimental speculative practice invites failure as fodder for learning together with audience, communities, and participants. It is part of the reorganising of thinking and relations. One of the limitations and challenges of climate emergency communication is its 'failure to activate the public imagination to the potential risks and consequences of disaster especially in an urban context'.[7] Whereas artists are deeply embedded in the discipline of the imagination, allowing us to see with collaborators and audiences alternate futures, delve into scenario mapping, and practice hypotheticals where the stakes are lower, risks can be explored and failures allow for course correction/re-direction.

Backstory

To put the Centre for Reworlding in context, the impetus for us to begin collaborating began in early 2020 when we were both invited to participate in a two-week artist-

6 William Edward Hanley Stanner, ed. *The Dreaming*, Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

7 Alison McMillan, Alan March, and Jen Rae, *Arts House Listening Program*, podcast audio, REFUGE: Adaptation 2017, https://bit.ly/3S3lEBV.

exchange residency in Sydney, hosted by Sydney Festival (Australia) and Other Sights for Artists' Projects (Canada) and curated by Vanessa Kwan, Barbara Cole, Lorna Brown, and Sunshine Frère. Sandwiched between the catastrophic Australian Black Summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, *The Future is Floating* residency centred intersectionality, often underrepresented in dominant climate emergency discourses, which is now recognized as a failing in communicating to diverse publics as demonstrated in many climate emergency action plans. The residency brought together settler, Black, and Indigenous artists to connect and create a culture of exchange to discuss shared colonial histories, art, futures, and collectivity — water, sound, activism, and performance being common threads between the artists. The water on which we floated, the Parramatta River and Sydney Harbour, were poisoned, polluted, and severely wounded by the ongoing colonization event giving our works a mournful but urgent energy.

The invitation to be in ceremony and learn from Elders of the Simms, Timbery, and other La Perouse Kameygal families, the experience of being aboard the Aboriginal-owned Tribal Warrior boat for the residency events, performances, and programs, and the contested political climate in Australia left strong impressions and influenced some of the artist's creative responses including ours. The experience of collaborative art making grew into a practice of collective protest. The making and performance became a methodology for activism. Many works developed with extinction peri-colonization as their themes.

All artists were preselected by the curators into four collaborative performance groups. We were placed in a group with Tkaranto (Toronto)-based artist-scholar-activist Syrus Marcus Ware and Dharug-Dharwal artist Venessa Possum. Claire performed a reading of *WE ARE WATER* (2020), a poem speaking about the loss of land and water during colonization, and the connection between colonization and the loss of everything that matters to Indigenous people. Central to the work was an understanding of the difference between Indigenous notions of sacred water and the failure of Western developments that see water as a commodity at best and a garbage dump at worst.

Jen performed *Sleepwalking into Extinction* (2019) as the persona Ellis, who arrives from the year 2130 with a call from the future speaking to the rise of nihilistic and fundamentalist thinking in the climate emergency. She offers do-it-together instructions on how to defeat the fanatic and halt the sixth mass extinction event. To the audiences' surprise, the Tribal Warrior was then steered as close to Kirribilli House as possible (then Prime Minister Scott Morrison's official residence in Sydney Harbour), blaring Jen and Marco Cher-Gibard's sound-score *Evacuate* (2019).

Evacuate is an intense 12-minute journey that starts with the 'simplicity of a beckoning church bell and builds to a maniacal cacophony of alarms, sirens, and emergency announcements [...] reaching a crescendo where the mind imagines near-apocalyptic scenarios [...] [until] the sound gradually subsides to the gentle lapping of water', as described by art critic Jennifer Barry.[8] The public audience were then encouraged by

8 Jennifer Barry, 'Review: Refuge 2019: Displacement, Arts House (Vic),' *Arts Hub*, 3 September

Ellis to partake in a protest stance aimed at Scott Morrison's government for their abject failure to act on climate change and the catastrophic bushfires.

Our first collaborative banner *COLLAPSE//SURVIVE* (2020) hung from the bow of the boat (Figure 8.1) and was later carried in the Sydney Invasion Day Rally (Figure 8.2). The text highlighted the prophetic doomsday tensions present in contemporary discourses on the compounding human and ecological systems failures we now call the climate emergency or what Margaret Atwood more appropriately calls 'everything change'.[9] It also called for the collapse of colonial and capitalist power systems and transcending reconciliation towards Indigenous resurgence where we all have the 'courage and imagination to envision life beyond the state'.[10]

Figure 8.1: Collapse//Survive (2020) banner tethered to the Mari Nawi — Tribal Warrior boat. Photo: Vanessa Kwan. Used with permission.

2019, https://www.artshub.com.au/news/reviews/review-refuge-2019-displacement-arts-house-vic-258709-2364400/.

9 Margaret Atwood, 'It's Not Climate Change — It's Everything Change,' *Medium,* 27 July 2015, https://medium.com/matter/it-s-not-climate-change-it-s-everything-change-8fd9aa671804.

10 Jeff Corntassel, 'Re-Envisioning Resurgence: Indigenous Pathways to Decolonization and Sustainable Self-Determination,' *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1.1 (2012): 89.

Figure 8.2: Collapse//Survive (2020) banner carried in the Sydney Invasion Day Rally on Gadigal lands, 26 January 2020. Photo: Salote Tawale. Used with permission.

The *Future is Floating* experience and the content of our respective performances aboard the Tribal Warrior led us both to commit to exploring how we might further collaborate, as it was apparent we were creatively operating within the same zeitgeist. We recognized that we are both interrogating through speculative futuring the existential crisis of the times.

The opportunity came through Melbourne performance venue Arts House, where we proposed an experimental performance work within their multiyear REFUGE program. However, due to the Melbourne COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in March 2020 and the professional impact of project suspensions, our creative development moved online and resulted in almost weekly Zoom meetings.

In April 2020, it became more evident that our future imaginings were rapidly becoming current realities thus opening new crevices to explore in our collaboration. As speculative futurists we noted that events of early 2020 and the socio-political fallout in Australia and other Western nations mirrored colonial histories and stories within science fiction films and literature (e.g. *Soylent Green* (1973)*, Foundation* (1951)*, The Sea and the Summer* (1987)*,* etc.).

This realization propelled us to ask in our discussions: *what are the conversations that we aren't having now that might aid us, our communities, and our future ancestors?* Answering this question requires a preparedness mindset with many tendrils, trajectories,

and temporalities. It speaks to accountability, empathy, and intergenerational justice — themes often absent in Western discourses, especially in relation to climate resilient futures.

A few months later, we both participated in artists' Alex Kelly and David Pledger complex digital project *Assembly for the Future*[11] for the BLEED festival — a project exploring multiple near futures. Claire's provocative oration *Beyond Whiteness — The Rise of New Power* spoke from an imagined future about the end of racism, the beginning of a healthy post-colonial culture, and how it was achieved. Jen Rae's 'Dispatch from the Future' response titled *Centre for Reworlding: Umbilica Homepage* (2020) was a short story marking the 10th anniversary of a fictional underground group of mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and aunties who mobilize in the collapse to support one another and the next generation through the practice of reworlding, an integrated practice of knowledge sharing, radical empathy, and child-centred trauma prevention.

Jen's short story was influenced by her then present experience of living within 20 metres of Australia's largest COVID-19 outbreak, witnessing and shielding a young pre-schooler at home to the human tragedy unfolding nearby. In hindsight, this experience and our participation in *Assembly for the Future* formed a second critical turning point in our collaboration with the lingering questions: *can we imagine a world without racism? Can we imagine a world where in one hundred years, children aren't traumatized by the impacts of climate change as they continue to unfold as a way of life? What can we unearth from our ancestral knowledges and other overlooked knowledge systems to support a new imagining, knowing and being for the future?*

This last question references what we now call 'reworlding' and the conceptual framework came together in our short film *REFUGIUM* (2021).

REFUGIUM

It is the end of the world as we know it. Every beginning is an ending with a backstory, a right now, the unimaginable, the inevitable, and the beyond of what might be possible. The ending teaches us where to start. Reworlding imagines a world that could have been — before colonial disruption — as our beginning. The film begins with Claire in 2042 at the age of 68 in an undisclosed bunker attempting to log into the *Bilya* portal in a futile effort to warn other reworlders about a raid.

Claire is the sentinel of the Centre for Reworlding, the last person standing per se. Everyone has dispersed and she is alone. She descends into a nihilistic spiral, half-way believing that all efforts at reworlding were for nothing. 'We failed', she says, and attempts to communicate with those back in 2021 to save themselves and abandon reworlding and each other. For the sake of future generations, Jen's great-granddaughter Ellis in 2121 is tasked with intercepting Claire's transmission, and a dialogue ensues. Difficult questions

11 Alex Kelly and David Pledger, "Assembly for the Future," (Melbourne: Arts House, 2020).

about the future are answered. *REFUGIUM* becomes a sort of Zoom call of transtemporal proportions. The audience-listener is witness and becomes implicated as a collaborator in the project by their presence. Ellis offers a blueprint for reworlding. There is a provocation, tasks, and protocols to follow, and everyone has a role.

Figure 8.3: Jen Rae and Claire G. Coleman, REFUGIUM (2021), digital still. Photo: Devika Bilamoria. Used with permission.

Centre for Reworlding — Climate Leadership and Creative + Cultural Resilience

REFUGIUM, when created, was intended to be a stand-alone artwork. It premiered at the *First Assembly of the Centre for Reworlding* at Arts House in April 2021. In the lead up, we asked and others asked 'what would it take to turn this work of speculative fiction into a reality?' and 'how can we prepare the world to maintain culture and foster intergenerational justice in the inevitable apocalypse?' as the film imagines. At the *First Assembly,* it became apparent that the Centre for Reworlding had already begun, albeit different than how it originates in the film. With support of the original eight reworlders and the beginnings of our Council of Grandmothers, Mothers, Aunties, and Sisters, the Centre for Reworlding is forming.

With the support of the Australia Council for the Arts, the Centre for Reworlding (C∞R) is now a collective of Indigenous, people of colour, settler, and LGBTIQA2S+ artists, scientists, thinkers, and change-makers with a track record of collaboratively working at the intersections of art, disaster risk reduction, and resilience and the climate emergency leadership. To reworld is to decolonize, Indigenize, and collectively imagine into action a 'world worthy of its children'[12] for the sake of all our future ancestors. Through our

12 Albert E. Kahn and Pablo Casals, *Joys and Sorrows: Reflections by Pablo Casals as Told to Albert E. Kahn.*,

Creative Resilience Lab, palavers, events, workshops, and projects, the C∞R aims to bolster inclusive collaboration and creative leadership in climate emergency response and action including prioritising the mainstream integration of arts and culture in national climate emergency discourses, policy frameworks, and tertiary education.

In Melbourne, our co-curated exhibition the *Centre for Reworlding presents RESURGENCE*, at Incinerator Art Gallery (June/July 2022) offered a new provocation in the form of a second collaborative banner handmade with the assistance of another group of artists in residence at Commonground, in Seymour, Victoria. Barkandji woman, researcher, curator, and collaborator Zena Cumpston reminded us that to fast forward to reworlding means a whole lot of 'unfucking' needs to happen, thus the positioning of unfuck in the *UNFUCK>>REWORLD* (2022) banner that greeted gallery visitors at the entrance of the exhibition. Visitors could choose which way to enter the space, to begin with *REFUGIUM* or to end with it. The exhibition is about truth-telling, future-back stories and brave unfailing where facts reveal fictions and mnemonics help you to remember so action and relationships with others embed. It's heavy in speculative imagining and offerings to the eye, ears, heart, and gut.

Figure 8.4: UNFUCK>>REWORLD (2022), Claire G. Coleman, Jen Rae, Venessa Possum, and Marcus Syrus Ware, fabric protest banner, Incinerator Art Gallery. Photo: Lucy Foster. Used with permission.

ed. Albert E. Kahn, United Kingdom: Macdonald and Co. Ltd., 1970, 183.

Unfucking to Reworld in the Endtimes in the Everywhen

Climate/everything change is upon us.

While it is possible to imagine futures where heroes and technology 'save us', where Mars becomes habitable, and underground bunkers become the norm, the reality is that these visions aren't going to do the deep work needed to ensure a liveable future for our future ancestors to thrive. The elite aren't making decisions for the commoners, the preppers aren't stocking for communities, and the grass is not always greener on other planets.

Only in togetherness can we unfuck and reworld. We can collectively destabilize these nihilistic and fundamentalist ambitions and powers by imagining and acting for futures we want for our young and future generations. There is not the luxury of time for contemplation. Join us. Your time begins now in the everywhen.

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FAILURE AND INTERRUPTION: CREATIVE CARERS IN A TIME OF COVID-19

JULIENNE VAN LOON AND KELLY HUSSEY-SMITH

Introduction

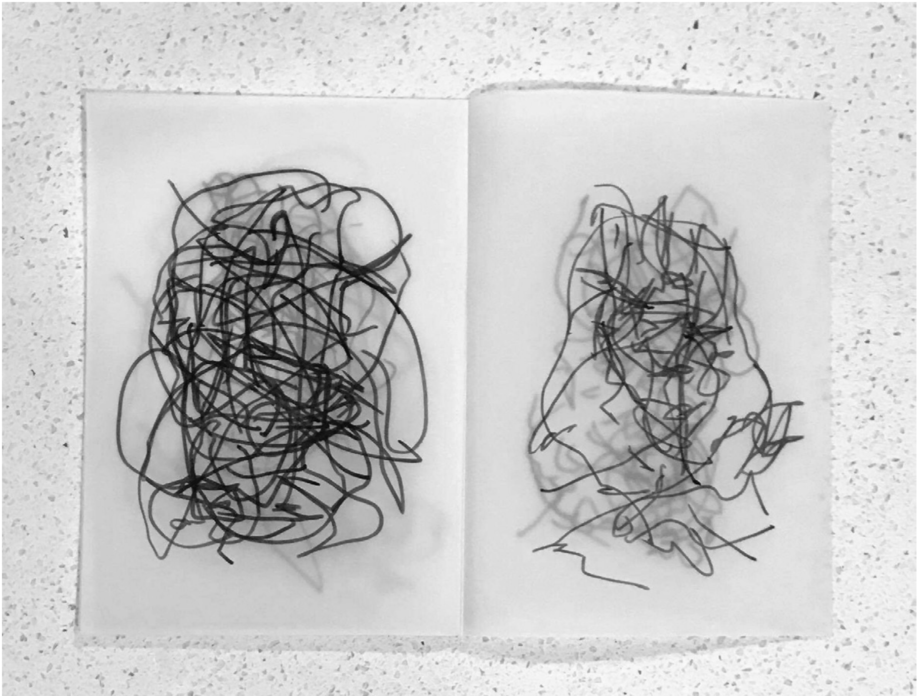

Figure 9.1: Participant C's map of their domestic space while working and caring from home.

Recent research indicates that parents and carers were interrupted up to 15 times per hour while working and caring from home (WCFH) during the COVID-19 pandemic.[1] In this chapter, we explore the relationship between interruption and senses of failure as experienced by 22 creative practice researchers in the context of WCFH between March 2020 and October 2021 in and around Melbourne, Australia. We ask: what affective impact has the intensification of 'work's intimacy'[2] had on creative industries researchers working and caring from home during

1 Suzanne M. Edwards and Larry Snyder, 'Yes, Balancing Work and Parenting Is Impossible. Here's the Data,' *The Washington Post*, 10 July 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/interruptions-parenting-pandemic-work-home/2020/07/09/599032e6-b4ca-11ea-aca5-ebb63d27e1ff_story.html.

2 Gregg, Melissa, *Work's Intimacy,* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013, 2.

the intense 'lockdown' phases of the COVID-19 pandemic? How have constant interruptions affected their capacity to maintain continuity in their intellectual and creative work? Further, how have the senses of failure widely reported by those WCFH been articulated and expressed through creative methods?

We use the phrase 'work's intimacy' in the sense employed by media studies scholar Melissa Gregg to describe and 'demonstrate the increasingly intimate relationship salaried professionals have with their work' and in particular the role of new media technologies in that development.[3]

Our chapter begins with a concise overview of recent literature on failure and interruption during the time of COVID-19. We then provide a brief outline of the methodology and methods we have employed to address our key questions in this study. We consider the domestic as a space interrupted under the pressure of work's intimacy during periods of WCFH. Through discussion and analysis of data collected through the Work, Care and Creativity Study[4] we explore perceptions of failure among participants with a focus on how these perceptions relate to real and perceived interruptions to their careers and creative work. Finally, we discuss adaptation and adaptiveness, exploring the possibilities for an affirmative political reading of failure and interruption.

Failure and Interruption

There have been mixed debates about the impact of working and caring from home. For some creative workers it was 'a surprisingly creative time',[5] but for many it was a difficult and debilitating phase of work and family life. Australian research published since the arrival of the pandemic has shown that women 'continued to shoulder the burden of unpaid domestic and caring work'[6], raising concerns about a significant worsening of existing inequalities in the workforce. The negative impact on women in academia has been notable, with many studies confirming reduced productivity[7] and a negative impact on career momentum.[8] Further, workers in the arts and creative industries were particularly vulnerable to career disruption during COVID-19, and this was especially so in Melbourne, Australia, where our project participants were based, and where lockdown conditions were among the world's most restrictive.[9]

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3 Gregg, *Work's Intimacy,* 2.

4 Larissa Hjorth, Gretchen Coombs, Kelly Hussey-Smith, and Julienne van Loon, 'Work, Care and Creativity in A Time of COVID-19: Creatively Mapping Presence Bleed in the Home', *Digital Creativity* (13 June 2022), https://doi.org/10.1080/14626268.2022.2082487.

5 Katrina Sedgwick, 'Working From Home Means More Creativity', *Australian Financial Review*, 5 August 2020.

6 Fiona MacDonald, Jenny Malone, and Sara Charlesworth, *Women, Work, Care and Covid,* RMIT University, Melbourne: Centre for People, Organisation and Work, 2021.

7 Rashmi Watson, Upasana G. Singh, and Chenicheri Sid Nair, 'Experiences of Female Academics in Australia During COVID-19: Opportunities and Challenges', *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 19.1 (2022): 176-198. https://doi.org/10.53761/1.19.1.11.

8 Cronley, Courtney, and Kirsten E. Ravi. 'Maintaining Career Momentum: Women-Centered Strategies for Social Sciences Career Success in the Context of COVID-19.' *ADVANCE Journal* 2.3 (2021); MacDonald et al., *Women, Work, Care and Covid.*

9 Jacinthe Flore, Natalie Ann Hendry and Averyl Gaylore, 'Creative arts Workers During the COVID-19

While precarity in the arts and higher education sectors in Australia pre-dated the pandemic[10] and working parents and carers are not new to career disruption, the pandemic enabled a perfect storm. The intensification of work's intimacy kept prescient the feeling that these 'new' conditions may have no end.[11] Among the 22 participants in our study, WCFH led to increased anxieties about failure, sparked in large part by the perception that focus of any kind for an extended period was no longer possible. Lived experience, for those WCFH during COVID-19, was life perpetually interrupted.

Large scale studies conducted prior to COVID-19 found that constant interruption was a key source of stress at work[12] and that knowledge workers are interrupted on average 85 times per day.[13] Related international studies have indicated that frequent interruptions have a negative impact on emotions, wellbeing, and performance[14]. The constant interruption while WCFH during the pandemic was cited consistently among our participants as a source of stress and anxiety about the future.

For psychosocial theorist Lisa Baraitser, interruption is not a deviation but the norm for the maternal subject.[15] Similarly, gender and equality studies scholar Moynag Sullivan observes that creative work that engages with an aesthetics of interruption rethinks the possibilities of subjective experience by 'bear[ing] witness to the fragmented, interrupted consciousness of the mother'.[16] For scholar and artist E.L. Putnam, an aesthetics of interruption encompasses an ethics where 'breaks, jagged edges, absences, silence and noise are not glossed over through illusions of perfection but these qualities point to the glut of experience and how it exceeds the limits of representation.'[17] Our study proposes that surfacing the affective dimensions of these interruptions places value on the fragmented, affective, and invisible aspects of care labor.

Pandemic: Social Imaginaries in Lockdown.' *Journal of Sociology* (August 2021), https://doi.org/10.1177/14407833211036757.

10 Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, London: PlutoPress, 2010; Lara McKenzie, 'Un/Making Academia: Gendered Precarities and Personal Lives in Universities', *Gender and Education*, 34.3 (2022): 262-279.

11 Gregg, *Work's Intimacy.*

12 Anja Baethge, Thomas Rigotti and Robert A. Roe, 'Just More of the Same, or Different? An Integrative Theoretical Framework for the Study of Cumulative Interruptions At Work', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 24.2 (2015): 308-323.

13 Judy Wajcman and Emily Rose, 'Constant Connectivity: Rethinking Interruptions at Work', *Organization Studies* 32.7 (July 2011): 941-961.

14 Fred R.H. Zijlstra, Robert A. Roe, Anna B. Leonora, and Irene Krediet, 'Temporal Factors in Mental Work: Effects of Interrupted Activities', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 72.2 (1999): 163.

15 Lisa Bareitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption*, London: Routledge, 2008; Lisa Baraitser, 'Communality Across Time: Responding to Encounters with Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 13.2 (2012): 117-122.

16 Moynag Sullivan, 'An "Unthought Known" of Her Own: The Aesthetics of Interruption', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 13.2 (2012): 108.

17 EL Putnam, *The Maternal, Digital Subjectivity and the Aesthetics Of Interruption*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, 12.

Building on Gregg's notion of work's intimacy, we propose that the relational intensities of the pandemic created new forms of 'intimacy work' where many people experienced an accelerated sense of failure around the daily demands of life and labor, which significantly disrupted creative and academic work. As queer and feminist theorists have highlighted, the Western concept of failure is bound up in capitalist value systems and binary thinking,[18] which leads to individualized conceptions of failure that don't recognize how failure is 'institutionally contextualized and cooperatively understood'.[19] While we acknowledge that failure has 'subversive potential',[20] we also recognize that it is painfully experienced, particularly when framed as an individual problem. Our work aims to surface the intangible affects and residues that emerge from this sense of individual failure, understanding that collective failure can make a productive contribution to feminist subjectivity.

Methodology and Methods

During 2020 and 2021, we collaborated with digital ethnographers Larissa Hjorth and Gretchen Coombs on the Work, Care and Creativity Study.[21] The aim was to understand the experiences of primary carers working from home, specifically carers who were creative arts practitioners associated with the university sector. We were interested in deploying creative practice ethnography techniques to elicit participants' lived experiences of WCFH during the pandemic. These methods enabled our participants to articulate often overlooked perceptions and experiences through creative writing, drawing, and photography. The call was circulated on social media through snowballing (contacts of contacts) in early 2020. Twenty-two participants responded to creative prompts and we followed up on their submissions with narrative interviews. This mixed methods approach provided insights into the affective experience of during the pandemic. Here, we draw on the creative prompts and the interview material we collected in order to discuss and analyse senses of failure and their relation to extended periods of constant interruption.

In our study, many participants expressed a heightened sense of precarity and fear about the future during their time WCFH. This was likely exacerbated by the fact that project participants work in industries that, in addition to being precarious, often demand additional and invisible labor.[22] An inability to perform this additional labor disadvantages those with caring roles — a reality that disproportionately impacts women and was exacerbated by the pandemic.[23] The

18 Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2010; Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

19 Nicole Laliberte and Alison L. Bain, 'The Cultural Politics Of A Sense Of Failure In Feminist Anti-Racist Mentoring', *Gender, Place & Culture* 25.8 (2018): 1093.

20 Arjun Appadurai, and Neta Alexander, *Failure,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019, 7.

21 Hjorth et al., 'Work, care and creativity'.

22 Gregory Shollette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, London: Pluto Press, 2020.

23 Jessica Malisch, Breanna N. Harris, Shanen M. Sherrer, Kristy A. Lewis, Stephanie L. Shepherd, Pumtiwitt C. McCarthy, Jessica L.Spott, Elizabeth P. Karam, Naima Moustaid-Moussai, Jessica McRory-Calarco, Latha Ramalingami, Amelia E. Tally, Jaclyn E. Cañas-Carrell, Karin Ardon-Dryer, Dana A. Weiser, Ximena E. Bernal and Jennifer Deitloff, 'Opinion: In the Wake of COVID-19, Academia Needs New Solutions To Ensure Gender Equity', *PNAS, 7* July 2020, doi:10.1073/pnas.2010636117.

sense of failure experienced by many working parents and carers during COVID-19 brought these gender and caring inequities into view.

Playful and modest forms of creative practice — in the form of brief prompts — offered our participants the opportunity to express humor, irony, and forms of feminist resistance that acknowledged failures small and large by giving expression to competing subjectivities and tacit labor under difficult conditions. Our lived experiences as creative academics working and caring from home in the longest locked-down city in the world[24] influenced the framing and interpretation of our research. This included bringing humor and care to the research process and acknowledging our limits at a time of constant interruption. Modes of humor that found expression through this project made possible a shared recognition of collective fears and anxieties about the status quo, particularly its potential to be maintained by patriarchal and labor market forces. Shared career and parenting failures and a heightened sense of irony around everyday failure, in this context, became something our participants could draw on to create a sense of hope for an affirmative politics.[25]

An Aesthetics of Interruption: The Spatial and Relational Intensities of the Home

Figure 9.2: Participant E's response to 'work/life balance' while WCFH, 2020.

24 Caitlin Cassidy, 'Melbourne Freedom Day: World's Most Locked Down City Takes First Cautious Steps to Re-Opening', *The Guardian*, 2 October 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/oct/22/melbourne-freedom-day-worlds-most-locked-down-city-takes-first-cautious-steps-to-reopening.

25 Maud Ceuterrick, 'An Affirmative Look at Domesticity In Crisis: Women, Humour and Domestic Labour During COVID-19' *Feminist Media Studies*. 20.6 (2020): 896-901. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1789396

One of the creative prompts we produced asked for a description, sketch, or photograph of the improvised home workspace during the height of Melbourne's COVID-19 lockdown. During this intensive phase, the space of 'the office' at home, often improvised and shot through with the noise and movement of children, appeared in participant responses as a site interrupted. One respondent, in her creative writing prompt, wrote, 'my office is a magic trick, an illusion.' Figures 9.3 and 9.4 represent additional responses to this same prompt.

> In the background of my 'office' — which cannot be shut to the rest of the house — is the noise of two seven-year-old girls. It is the last day of school holidays and I feel like a husk. They are supposed to be keeping quiet, but they are not. Some sort of argument is bubbling and so my ears are pricked up, my body coiled for intervention.

Figure 9.3: Participant A's response to our creative writing prompt while WCFH, 2020.

> I have a door. I have a lock. But sound carries. There's a big gap at the bottom of my door that my eldest slips notes under. They can't write yet, but there'll be letters and drawings. The gist of the notes is always: come out. Sometimes the notes are angry, with a picture of me at my desk with a cross through it. Sometimes the notes have love hearts, things that say I love you, I miss you. Sometimes they just yell at the door.

Figure 9.4: Participant B's response to our creative writing prompt while WCFH, 2020.

Those participants who responded to the prompt visually, as seen in Figures 9.1 and 9.2, foregrounded forms of fragmentation, intensity, or disruption that commonly accompany digital technologies. The cumulative effect of constant and persistent trespasses at the edges of the improvised 'workspaces' while WCFH is a noticeably negative impact on the kinds of thinking or practices that could be performed there. Forms of improvisation or 'making do' were also emphasized in the creative prompts we collected, underlining a setting in which caring is also present, such as the precariously balanced laptop in Figure 9.5, where the presence of domestic chores lies somewhere just beyond view.

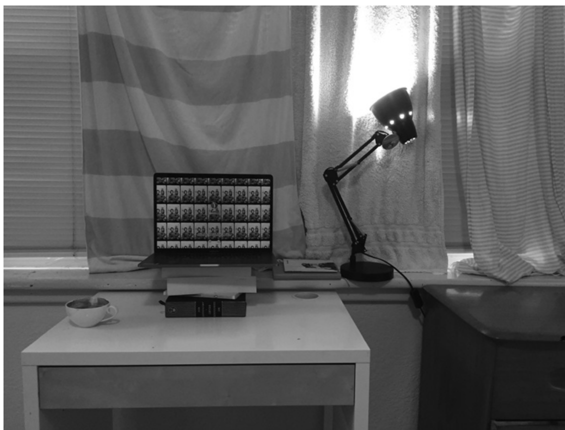

Figure 9.5: Participant J's workstation while WCFH, 2020.

Our research demonstrates that the confidence with which those WCFH can 'hang on' to their critical thinking skills or creative practice is impacted by their WCFH circumstances. This also affects their hopes and plans concerning career continuity, career development, and major creative or intellectual work. As one participant expressed in her interview:

> I think what is more difficult to communicate is, is the sense of, I could kind of tear up thinking about it, but I think it's not even the mechanics of the idea that you're going to be interrupted or that you might be interrupted. It's what it actually kind of does for any deep work, which might be a relationship or yourself or a creative work or critical [work] or being responsive to another human in a work way, you know, any, any deep engagement I think becomes compromized. [Participant Q, interview, 2020]

In Figure 9.1, the scribbled 'maps' of the improvised WCFH space offered to us by Participant C provide an absurdist take on the working carer's subjective experience of the lockdown. There is no guidance in this map: meaning has broken down. Overlapping lines of text could be the rough play squiggles of a child who took hold of the pen in an act of defiance just at the wrong moment; alternatively the lines may show the negative impact of interruption on the carer's emotional state.[26] This is an instance of artwork that, as Putnam observes, challenges our desire for coherence, giving us instead 'a sensory experiential phenomenology of co-being in which "the forward thrust of our lives" is interfered with'.[27] In this way, it is also an instance of Sullivan's aesthetics of interruption and emblematic of the lived experiences of many participants in our study. In follow up interviews, our participants spoke at length about the problem of interruption. This flags a deepening concern about how WCFH periods, still being experienced by many of our participants as we finalize this chapter in 2022, will impact their intellectual and creative work and their well-being into the future.

Perceptions of Failure

While some participants spoke about 'frantically' producing creative work, or productively adapting to their limitations, others saw a complete erasure of this part of their life. For some, the erosion of time for academic and creative work was compounded by an internalized and ubiquitous sense of failure:

> I totally failed at the PhD [. . .] I had no mental space, no emotional space, it just became this big black abyss, that I felt like every day went by, I was failing even further. [Participant E, interview, 2020]

And:

> I know I've failed at my creative work: I've not even attempted it once. [Participant D, interview, 2020]

26 Ziijlstra et al., 'Temporal Factors in Mental Work', 163.
27 Sullivan, 'An "Unthought-Known" of Her Own', 109.

As one participant remarked about the challenges of home schooling a young child, ‘it was like having a baby again, I couldn't do anything. Whilst I was with him, I couldn't do anything for myself’ [Participant J, interview, 2020]. This feeling of *stuckness* relates to other participant responses that detailed the frustration of living in the fluidity and *unfixedness* of domestic space.

Figure 9.6 shows how Participant A perceived ‘accusing’ objects that sat beyond the flimsy boundary of the screen; while in Figure 9.7 Participant F highlights the competing modes of co-presence within the home by commenting on the aesthetic shifts caused by the pandemic.

> To the left of my desk sits the cat litter tray. To the right, the laundry basket is accusing me with laundry. Everywhere I look there are other things I have to do.

Figure 9.6: Participant A’s response to our creative writing prompt while WCFH, 2020.

> Each day there are new things in the hallway [. . .] I refrain from comment because I don’t care and I don’t want to discuss the pile — it’s like a social experiment except the pandemic is real and it brings stuff out of people’s bedroom and into the hallway.

Figure 9.7: Participant F’s response to our creative writing prompt while WCFH, 2020.

Other participants commented on the gendered tropes of domesticity and childcare that bled into professional spaces. A number of them spoke about the complexities of ‘opening’ their home to colleagues and students. Participant R described how she arranged her Zoom background to avoid any sign of domestic work or childcare stating that she didn’t want people to ‘see what I'm doing or even associate me in my professional life with domestic chores’ [Participant R, interview, 2020].

Humor helped participants to cope. Participant G’s response to our creative prompt to write a set of instructions on how to get through the day at home while balancing work and domestic and emotional labor is presented in Figure 9.8.

> 1. Login to the X as Y. Login to the Y as Z. Login to the E on behalf of F, then log into the usual place as yourself.
>
> 2. Your password is incorrect. Please reset your password. Your username is incorrect. Please find your username. Sorry, please contact the school administrator. You've been locked out of the system.
>
> 3. Answer this question: ‘Mum? Can you spell everything?’
>
> ‘E. . .V. . .E. . ..’
>
> ‘No, mum, can you spell everything?’

'Everything?'

'No. I'll just tell you the words I need. I'll just call them out and you can spell them, okay?'

4. Quick, get changed. Wait — 'Mum?' — get changed. You haven't brushed your hair. When did you last brush your hair? Wait —'Mum?' — the washing. You can't have that laundry thing hanging there. The meeting's already started. Close the door. Turn the camera off. Put the washing away.

5. Answer this question: 'Mum?' Answer this question: 'Mum?'. Answer this question: 'Mum?'

6. A definition of workload: the maximum load possible in normal working conditions. A definition of working girl: a girl or woman who is employed as a prostitute. A definition of the working day: the amount of time that a worker must work for agreed daily wage. A definition of working men: men employed or skilled in some form of labor. Full stop.

Figure 9.8: Participant G's response to our creative writing prompt while WCFH, 2020.

Collective Failures as Adaptation

Our research uncovered several possibilities for adaptation and transformation taken up by participants WCFH under COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Feminist humor and irony played an important role for many of our participants, offering light relief and shared laughter under pressure. Despite widespread perceptions of failure, a number of our participants found that the consistent lockdowns in Melbourne also led to new ways of making and doing. One participant said:

> I wrote differently, I wrote shorter pieces [. . .] I always have written [. . .] from conundrum and contradiction, from an idea or a problem that doesn't make sense to me. But the thing about the beginning of the pandemic [. . .] was that we were riddled with the unknown. What did it mean? [...] What was it going to mean? I wrote frantically. (Participant F, interview, 2020)

One of our respondents, a long-term carer for a child with a disability, observed a widespread cultural shift that meant many of the things she'd been struggling with alone as someone regularly WCFH became mainstream:

> In COVID-times my son and I seem to be coping better with 'social distancing' and 'isolation' than many other people. We have been socially isolated most of the past twenty years. The difference now is that other people start to understand how limiting it is to have a life mainly spent at home in a hostile world. The difference now is that other people begin to experience the challenge of acute anxiety. The

> difference now is the general community has to recognize that life is contingent, health is temporary, and society matters. (Participant S, interview, 2020)

Here, one person's experience of social failure due to structural and cultural isolation becomes a shared phenomenon. Film and digital media researcher Maud Ceuterick argues that while the pandemic has increased the urgency with which gender inequalities need to be addressed, an affirmative politics approach can allow us to see that 'power relations are not immutable, but rather are in constant transformation'.[28] Ceuterick sees the pandemic as providing an opportunity to make structural inequalities more visible, suggesting that 'the spatial merging of the professional and domestic spheres opens up alternatives to the status quo'.[29]

Conclusion

While our participants often took a humorous or ironic approach in their responses to creative prompts, the transcripts of our interviews reveal a darker tone. In the confessional mode of the one-to-one interview, humor and irony were less likely to be present. The pandemic exposed that the gains of women in the arts and in academia were more tenuous than they may have previously appeared. The collective exhaustion that emerged from this recognition was also experienced as personal failure. Our study found that despite knowledge that the problems of precarity were structural rather than personal, the internalized niggle to take responsibility for external circumstances remained.

As a feminist concept, collective failure resonates with notions of queer failure; specifically, that the values that constitute 'failure' are often based on capitalist formations of identity that deny the various forms of labor, insight, and value that parents and carers might generate. We have used creative practice methods to attempt to surface this sense of personal, professional, and creative failure that many people experienced while WCFH. By highlighting senses of failure and exhaustion through creative practice methods, we have considered what these interruptions and failures might tell us about the subjectivity of those WCFH. Rather than positioning these experiences as something to be hidden, we propose that surfacing these dimensions places value on the fragmented, affective, and invisible aspects of care labor, and as such, has much to offer conceptions of feminist subjectivity.

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28 Ceuterick, 'An Affirmative Look at Domesticity', 1.

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WHO CARES ABOUT FÅGELTOFTA? FAILING TO GRIEVE LANDSCAPES IN TRANSITION

LI JÖNSSON AND KRISTINA LINDSTRÖM

Standing in the middle of a field in Fågeltofta, Sweden, we see an open landscape featuring fields with different crops, grassing cows, some houses, farms, a church, and a closed petrol station. Cars rush through the village heading somewhere else. At first glance, there is nothing striking about this place. However, what is not possible to see with the naked eye is that Fågeltofta is an area that holds a lot of hope for transitioning into a post-fossil society. If we could look below the growing crops and grass, underneath our wellies, we would discover vanadium. This is a hard, silvery-grey, malleable transition metal classified by the European Union as critical for future innovation, meant to be used in batteries storing sun and wind energy. Vanadium is therefore considered important for enabling continued mobility in a fossil-free society. For those living in the area, harvesting vanadium would radically alter both their local landscape and living conditions as it would require mines to open.

As researchers drawing from participatory design, feminist techno-science, and cultural geography, we will give an account of an ongoing research project meant to mobilize a heterogeneous understanding of hope as well as loss in a transition towards a fossil-free society. Our interest in vanadium was initiated by a curiosity about how to productively engage with the disruption of a landscape, literally a field, in the name of future innovation. This was explored through an installation called *Clayworks*, connected to a series of workshops where we invited inhabitants to engage with the issue of landscapes in transition using clay from Fågeltofta.

In this chapter, we will discuss Fågeltofta as a potential future 'shadow place'[1] that creates what can be described as a 'pre-solastalgic state'.[2] Drawing on our engagement with *Clayworks*, we will discuss the need for and potential failure to grieve landscapes in transition. We will focus on this failure as we argue it reaches far beyond this event into contemporary accounts of how to understand and approach the transition into a post-carbon society. In other words, we believe that there is something important to learn if we approach this work as a potential failure.

Fågeltofta — A Future Shadow Place?

In 1868, the area around Fågeltofta was hit by two disasters. Spring came early that year, and the animals were released to graze on the green meadows. As per usual, the farmers sowed their crops when the soil was ready for the small seeds to start sprouting, but the plants quickly

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1 Val Plumwood, 'Shadow places and the politics of dwelling', *Australian Humanities Review* 44.2 (2008): 139-150.

2 Glenn Albrecht, 'Solastalgia and the New Mourning', in Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman (eds) *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2017, pp. 292-315.

froze as winter returned with full force at the end of May. Later that year, this abrupt weather change had large consequences and led to famine. Due to the almost non-existent harvest, the farmers also struggled to imburse their lease of land. The landowner, Count Hamilton, seized the opportunity to take control of the land himself and terminated their contracts. The farmers lost not only their land as their source of food but also their houses, which were taken down, clay brick by clay brick. Some of them were rebuilt by the Count to provide houses for lumbermen. Other houses disappeared, leaving no ruins or marks due to being built with the clay from the surrounding fields. Today, a generation of newer houses make up the village, while the local church predating the disasters stands in solitude, surrounded by fields instead of houses.

Figure 10.1: A rusty upside-down sign reading 'motor oil', standing outside the village of Fågeltofta, where test drilling for vanadium might be done. Photo credit: Li Jönsson.

The land surrounding Fågeltofta and the clay that was once used to build the local villages has gained new value. The aluminium slate that hides in the soil is predicted to contain vanadium. Finding and extracting it requires special skills, a lot of capital, and access to large areas of land. In Sweden, therefore, anyone who meets the conditions to exploit deposits can be granted a permit, under the so-called Mineral Act (a legislation about the right to undertake exploration and exploitation that came into force in 1992), regardless of who owns the land. Local citizens have gathered to protest these plans, partly doubting claims being made that this is done for environmental reasons. One of the biggest concerns and worries for locals has been the fact that one literally loses the right to land and properties if the chief mining

inspector grants a permit for the exploration. In Fågeltofta, an exploration permit has been granted, but no actual test drilling has yet been done. The locals are waiting in uncertainty regarding the future of the landscapes on which their homes stand.

Although this might seem to echo the historical narrative of a place with unjust power distributions and unsustainable processes, we might also recognize the dilemma that if mines are not opened here, then where might they be opened? What other places will become what Australian philosopher and feminist Val Plumwood[3] refers to as shadow places? These are places that remain invisible but supply the rest of the world with energy, raw materials, and other resources. The existence of many loved places and the ways of living they support are, in other words, enabled by shadow places. Similarly, vanadium inscribes a hope for the continued high energy consumption that allows us not to have to change much in our everyday lives.

Clayworks

To stage and facilitate a hands-on discussion in relation to some of the above dilemmas, we created the installation *Clayworks* (Figure 10.2). The installation invited people passing by to make a clay brick by following some simple instructions. They were asked to mark their brick with the name of a place that faces a potential transition and might be in need of care.

We hosted the installation in a time-worn shabby shed during the yearly local artisan fair and gathered a pile of clay from Fågeltofta. The clay had been unearthed by a farmer from Fågeltofta and possibly contained vanadium. The story of Fågeltofta's two disasters and the prospect for future mining was nailed to the shed. *Clayworks* was installed for six months, and occasionally, some of our project team would facilitate clay brick workshops announced to the public through the organising art fair.

Figure 10.2: Clayworks exhibited during ART WALK 2021 at Tjörnedala Art Gallery. Photo credit: Li Jönsson.

3 Plumwood, 'Shadow places and the politics of dwelling'.

In *Clayworks*, our attempt was to draw attention and attachments to the actual place, history, and future by inviting participants to literally touch, tinker with, and handle the local clay and form it into bricks. The bricks resembled a memorial of the village that disappeared. This narrative of loss in the past was interwoven with contemporary worries of places and landscapes in transition through the invitation to inscribe each clay brick with the name of a place participants cared for.

Several of the people who took part in making clay bricks shared stories and worries about the experience of places in transition. Some stories were about already experienced changes in landscapes. A couple carved the name of an overgrown brook close to their house and used it to raise concerns of how drainage for agricultural land reclamation has negatively affected local biodiversity. Many carved names of coastal settlements and expressed worries about how the coastlines currently suffered from erosion and potential rising sea levels in the future. A woman voiced her concern about the global shortage of sand and gravel used for construction as she carved the name of a local gravel pit that she had witnessed growing lately. Some people had difficulty coming up with any particular place. Instead, they would inscribe names of names of well-known beautiful places, such as beaches and nature reserves, popular with locals and tourists (Figure 10.3).

Figure 10.3: One of the clay bricks in the making inscribed with 'Baskebadet', which is one of the popular beaches in the area. Photo credit: Li Jönsson.

Six months passed. When we were about to gather the bricks that had dried in the sun, we felt a sense of failure. Had we managed to cultivate care, attachments, and commitments to places and landscapes such as Fågeltofta that are at risk of irreparable destruction and that too few people know about or have visited? Or, was something else required for cultivating care and commitment? A question posed by a resident in Fågeltofta echoed in our heads: Who cares about Fågeltofta?

Failure to Grieve

Clayworks is part of a three-year project concerned with mobilising a heterogeneous understanding of hope as well as grief in a transition towards a fossil-free society. In *Clayworks*, our particular focus was on landscapes that are going through or are about to undergo changes that might cause worry and distress for people who care about those places. The main narrative of *Clayworks* was centred on Fågeltofta, its past, and its potential future.

In the context of climate change, species extinction, and ecological damage caused by human activities, several scholars argue for the need to rework how we cope with losses and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the kind of work grief can do.[4] For example, Cunsolo and Landman[5] argue for moving beyond a Freudian understanding of mourning, which suggests that successful mourning implies overcoming that which has been lost to become whole again. A failure to do so would imply a state of melancholia, preventing a person from moving on. Coping with the loss of species or landscapes caused by human activity might, however, suggest other understandings of mourning and what it means to move on. Influenced by Butler's[6] articulation of grief as transformative, Cunsolo and Landman[7] argue that ecological grief is less about forgetting or overcoming that which has been lost and more about recognising one's attachments to it. To be able to 'move on' then requires allowing oneself to be transformed. For example, the loss of a place that you have a strong connection to will also change who you are.

To capture this kind of 'existential distress'[8] experienced by people when 'directly confronted by unwelcome change in their loved home environment',[9] Albrecht articulated the concept of solastalgia. The word solastalgia is a neologism based on the word nostalgia. Albrecht describes nostalgia as a kind of homesickness experienced when being away from home, whereas solastalgia refers to 'the homesickness you have when still being at home'.[10] Although the concept of solastalgia is highly relevant in relation to the narratives that were enacted through *Clayworks*, these narratives does not fit perfectly within the definition of solastalgia. Instead, it can be understood as an expression of a 'pre-solastalgic state'[11] that enquires into worries 'about the possible passing of the familiar and its replacement by that which does not sit comfortably within one's sense of place'.[12] In other words, the distress experienced in the

4 Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, 'Introduction. To Mourn beyond the Human' in Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman (eds) *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2017, pp. 3-26; Lesley Head, *Hope and Grief in the Anthropocene: Re-Conceptualising Human–Nature Relations,* London and New York: Routledge, 2016; Albrecht, 'Solastalgia and the New Mourning'.
5 Cunsolo and Landman, 'Introduction. To Mourn beyond the Human'.
6 Butler, Judith. *Precarious life: The Powers Of Mourning and Violence,* London and New York: Verso Books, 2004.
7 Cunsolo and Landman, 'Introduction. To Mourn beyond the Human'.
8 Albrecht, 'Solastalgia and the New Mourning', 292.
9 Albrecht, 'Solastalgia and the New Mourning', 292.
10 Albrecht, 'Solastalgia and the New Mourning', 299.
11 Albrecht, 'Solastalgia and the New Mourning', 309.
12 Albrecht, 'Solastalgia and the New Mourning', 309.

context of Fågeltofta and many of the other narratives that emerged in *Clayworks* were not necessarily about something that had already happened but concerned the distress of that which might be about to happen.

Looking back at the narrative of both past and potential future losses of Fågeltofta, it is evident that there are similarities but also differences between them. There are similarities in the sense that both narratives involve experienced or potential loss of landscapes with implications for people living there. There are, however, also differences that might suggest different kinds of emotional or affective responses, such as how the crop failure caused by cold weather is in the past, whereas the plan for vanadium mines is an anticipated future. Furthermore, the crop failure and following famine were not self-inflicted in the same ways the future mining plans are.

Although grieving is always hard and requires work, it is easier to grieve losses that have happened and where we do not see ourselves as culpable. But how do we move from these recognisable forms of grief towards a grief concerned with losses that are ongoing, uncertain, and caused by human activities? How do we strike up practices that can support pre-solastalgic grief?

Perhaps we can find some insights in what Barr describes as 'resistant ecological mourning'.[13] This articulation builds on the work of Rae, who describes a kind of mourning that resists bringing grief through catharsis and instead provokes questions on the causes of past or potential future loss and which can act as a 'warning about future losses that could occur given the continuation of the status quo'.[14] Drawing on her own and others' artistic practices, Barr[15] argues for narratives and artistic expressions that acknowledge and bring past losses into the present, not to simply remember that which has been lost but as a reminder of the continued devastation that will take place unless there is action and change. The difficulty here is that we often fail to imagine what that change could be and find alternatives to the well-trodden modernistic path. Furthermore, a defining feature of solastalgia is the personal and political powerlessness in the lived experience of environmental change,[16] echoed by some of the inhabitants of Fågeltofta along with others expressing a need for resistance in light of risking losing their home place to a future mine.

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13 Jessica M. Barr, 'Auguries of Elegy: The Art and Ethics of Ecological Grieving' in Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman (eds) *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2017, pp. 190-226.

14 Patricia Rae, 'Introduction: Modernist Mourning' in Patricia Rae (ed) *Modernism and Mourning*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007, pp. 13-49.

15 Barr, 'Auguries of Elegy'.

16 Albrecht, 'Solastalgia and the New Mourning'.

Figure 10.4: Part of the collection of dried clay inscribed with places that participants cared for in multiple ways. Photo credit: Li Jönsson.

Seeing the drying clay bricks next to each other, names of potential future shadow places like Fågeltofta were positioned next to names of places (Figure 10.4) that we can understand as beautiful and cherished, places to which the individual participants had a strong sense of connection and belonging. This might not be surprising given that we asked participants to write down the name of a place they cared for. Nonetheless, the ways in which different locations and experiences were brought into *Clayworks* often enacted these places as singular, and we often failed to recognize the ways in which these places interconnected. Although the bricks were placed next to each other to indicate their connectedness, we failed to account for the ways in which caring for one place might have implications for other places. Plumwood argues that 'recovering a storied sense of land and place is a crucial part of the restoration of meaning'.[17] However, she argues, if we treat places of belonging as singular, without recognising their dependence on other places, we run the risk of generating a false sense or understanding of these places and what is at stake in our care for them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked at the failure to attend to, care for, and recognize places in transition. We have responded to this by aiming to strike up practices of pre-solastalgic grief. What characterizes this form of grief is that it is anticipatory, and that the potential loss is implicated in our ways of living. In other words, it is a grief concerned with a potential future loss that we, to some extent, are responsible for, even though we often lack a sense of agency in the matter. In line with Cunsolo and Landman,[18] we argue that grieving successfully in this context would not simply imply accepting the loss and moving on. Instead, we argue for

17 Plumwood, 'Shadow places and the politics of dwelling', 1.
18 Cunsolo and Landman, 'Introduction. To Mourn beyond the Human'.

grieving practices that invite hesitation regarding what is at stake in moving on and instead open up for transformation.

To support this form of grief, we argue for narratives and material engagements that are situated in specific places and draw their histories and potential future together. Importantly, we also argue for extending this care and concerns beyond the singular place, individual, animal, or plant and instead recognising the ways in which places and ways of living are interconnected. In many ways, our collective failure seems to be in the resistance to see how imaginaries of becoming fossil-free contribute to the creation of new shadow places and the destruction of other lifeworlds. The question of 'who cares about Fågeltofta?' can be expanded to other places with similar fates — multiple potential future shadow places. Following Plumwood, there is much to be said for having love for a specific individual, animal, or place, but this is simply not enough. To nurture more ethical and justice-driven worlds to grow, we need to recognize the fate of Fågeltofta as a shared responsibility connected to our current practices that construct these harmed places and their beings.

We would not say that our work in *Clayworks* fully managed to support this collective and transformative form of grief. It should rather be seen as a first sketchy attempt to collectively rehearse how to practise pre-solastalgic grief. There is much to learn from our failures.

On a final note, calls for how to deal with vast ecological damage are urgent, and our attempt to respond with the slow pace of lingering and the hard work required to grieve might in many ways seem contradictory to the need for action. Comparably, the response of opening mines to harvest materials in the name of eco-innovation might be seen as a direct and more productive contribution to the fossil-free transition. Although problematic, this response is still a form of self-preservation of our modern selves and lifestyles — a melancholic state of being where ordinary routines are to be conserved. In light of this, we need to ask if it is reasonable to sacrifice Fågeltofta to preserve our current lifestyle and allow it to become a shadow place. Our response, to strike up practices of pre-solastalgic grief, is meant to invite such questions of sacrifice to become more publicly available, to allow for other considerations of urgency to be balanced, to problematize the disengagements of our fossil-dependent shadows, and to expand the repertoire of possible responses for how to become fossil-free.

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CARE-TOGRAPHIES: FINDING FAILURE IN NAVIGATIONAL SETTINGS

SAM HIND

Introduction

In this chapter I offer a methodological framework for how to think about navigational failure, considering navigation as instituting networks of care or 'care-tographies'. In order to do so, I first lay out the feminist understanding of care as a practical activity, dependent upon specific 'phases' of care. Then, I consider how failure has routinely been studied by scholars, in respect to events like train crashes and nuclear accidents. In light of these efforts, some have considered how theories of care might be applied to such failures, offering an analysis of how 'matters of care' might crystallize,[1] helping to prevent or alleviate the effects of technological or organizational, failure. Building upon these insights, I consider how navigation might be similarly understood through a care-tographic framework, and how navigational devices, interfaces, and infrastructures mediate caring relations between people and worlds. In the final two vignettes, I briefly evidence how care is practiced in navigational settings, with reference to protest events and autonomous vehicle tests.

Care and Failure

Feminist political scholars Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto identify four phases of care,[2] neither temporal in form, nor 'orderly stages'[3] culminating in 'some completion of the caring activity'.[4] Each phase might be carried out by a single individual or 'divided among different individuals or groups,'[5] with each ordinarily 'intertwined in chaotic and contradictory styles',[6] in which care might co-exist with carelessness, or caregiver might become care-receiver. Thus, locating care is tricky. For instance, 'care giving may proceed where no one any longer cares about the original situation',[7] say when housing support is provided to an evicted family. In such a case, 'the original situation' of the eviction (arguably a situation where care is noticeably absent) may or may not be a factor in the

1 María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds,* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.
2 Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring,' in Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson (eds), *Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990, pp. 36-54.
3 Fisher and Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring', 41.
4 Fisher and Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring'.
5 Fisher and Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring'.
6 Fisher and Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring'.
7 Fisher and Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring'.

resulting decision to provide housing support (merely that the family now require housing). In any case, searching for care involves analytical skill, and attunement to the conditions that make care possible.

Firstly, care involves *being attentive*. In this phase of the caring process, one must decide to 'care about' something,[8] with the judgement being more an 'orientation rather than a motivation',[9] driven by finite resources, time, knowledge, or ability. Secondly, care requires taking *responsibility*. In this phase, care becomes an action, requiring 'more continuous time spent and more explicit knowledge of the situation than does caring about'.[10] Thirdly, care requires *maintenance*, with care understood as a continual, iterative, activity rather than a single, declarative act. Here caregiving involves being responsive to changing 'moment-by-moment or day-by-day conditions'[11] that might demand the revision of any 'caregiving strategy' devised.[12] Then lastly, care involves *feedback*, constitutive of any care*giving*, in which one must be aware of, and responsive to, the *receiving* of care. Here the needs and desires of the people receiving care must be understood, such that the provision of care be tailored accordingly, and that care itself can achieve its stated or implicit aims.

Taken together, these phases constitute care as a set of inter-connected practices, rather than simply a moral ethic or principle. Through their asynchronous interweaving, these phases of care form what I have called 'care-tographies', networks of care relations drawn between people by the things they do.[13]

Technological failures have commonly been studied by science and technology studies (STS) scholars, sociologists, and geographers, whether in the context of nuclear accidents, train crashes, or electricity blackouts.[14] Whilst much of this work has offered sociological or socio-technical analyses of why particular technologies or systems 'fail' through reference to ideas around complexity, multiplicity, relationality, and materiality, few provide a methodological framework for finding failure. By incorporating feminist theories of care, some STS scholars have shifted discussion from how failure might be understood through addressing 'concerns' (a broken part, a forged safety certificate)[15] to how it might be understood as a failure to offer

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8 Fisher and Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring'.
9 Fisher and Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring', 42.
10 Fisher and Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring', 42.
11 Fisher and Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring', 43.
12 Fisher and Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring'.
13 Sam Hind, 'Cartographic Care, or, Caretographies,' *LivingMaps Review* 3 (2017): 1-14, http://livingmaps.review/journal/index.php/LMR/article/view/67/136.
14 Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies*, New York: Basic Books, 1987; John Law, *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*, London: Routledge, 2004; Stephen Graham and Nigel Thrift, 'Out of Order: Understanding Repair and Maintenance,' *Theory, Culture & Society* 24.3 (2007): 1-25, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407075954.
15 Bruno Latour, *Aramis or the Love of Technology*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996; Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,' *Critical Inquiry* 30.2 (2004): 225-48, https://doi.org/10.1086/421123.

and maintain curiosity, attention, affect, responsibility, responsiveness, and thus care itself.[16] Fisher and Tronto provide the necessary methodological foundations with which to locate, and analyze failure itself: through the lens of care, care work, and the practice of taking care.

Navigational Failure and Care

Building on Fisher and Tronto's feminist work, and extending existing scholarship on failure, I understand navigational failure as conditional on care, and the activation, maintenance, or suspension of a caring process. In this, navigational failure might broadly be attributed to a lack of care at any one moment, whether a lack of attention by a hiker who misses a path, an overworked driver who misses a turn, a mapping company who depreciates a cartographic product, or a development company who renames a neighborhood. In each case we might argue that a navigational 'failure' (a missed turn, an out-of-date map) has occurred or has an increased chance of occurring, and that a lack of care might be attributed to the failure.

Thinking about maps and navigation as matters of care is nothing new. Monica Stephens, for instance, has examined how childcare facilities are often left off digital mapping platforms like OpenStreetMap (OSM), whilst Valentina Carraro has considered how social navigation apps like Waze warn ('white, middle-class') users of dangerous areas in Israel/Palestine.[17] Significant examples of navigational failure that invite a care-ful analysis include the 2012 Apple Maps failure evidenced by misplaced labels and 'melting' satellite imagery[18] or the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, when Google Maps disabled their live traffic feature to protect local users.[19] Both of these cases might be framed as particular kinds of technological 'failures', either in reference to database issues (as with Apple Maps) or location-tracking (Google Maps). However, both examples can also be considered as failing to offer and maintain care. In the Apple Maps case, the launch of a new product suddenly rendered routine navigation hazardous. In the Google Maps case continuing to offer the same live traffic feature potentially exposed local users to Russian attack.

In the following two navigational vignettes I expand on this prior work, considering how each case can be evaluated using a 'care-tographic' framework, as well as examining how navigational situations elicit specific aspects of care itself. Whilst the first vignette highlights

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16 Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, 'Matters of Care in Technoscience: Assembling Neglected Things,' *Social Studies of Science* 41.1 (2011): 85-106, https://doi.org/10.1177/0306312710380301; Aryn Martin, Natasha Myers, and Ana Viseu, 'The Politics of Care in Technoscience,' *Social Studies of Science* 45.5 (2015): 625-41, https://doi.org/10.1177/0306312715602073.

17 Monica Stephens, 'Gender and the GeoWeb: Divisions in the Production of User-Generated Cartographic Information,' *GeoJournal* 78.2 (2013): 981-96, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-013-9492-z; Valentina Carraro, *Jerusalem Online: Critical Cartography for the Digital Age*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

18 Nilay Patel, 'Wrong Turn: Apple's Buggy iOS6 Maps Lead to Widespread Complaints,' *The Verge*, 20 September 2012, https://www.theverge.com/2012/9/20/3363914/wrong-turn-apple-ios-6-maps-phone-5-buggy-complaints.

19 James Vincent, 'Google Disables Maps Traffic Data in Ukraine to Protect Citizens,' *The Verge*, 28 February 2022, https://www.theverge.com/2022/2/28/22954426/google-disables-maps-traffic-data-in-ukraine-to-protect-citizens.

how care is iterative and requires ongoing evaluation, the second vignette shows how the accumulated burden of responsibilities can easily lead to tragedy.

Vignette 1: Protest Mapping

At 11pm on 30 June 2020, a new national security law was imposed in Hong Kong, severely restricting freedom of speech and free assembly in the territory.[20] A year before, citizens had taken to the streets to protest a controversial extradition bill, the first mass protests since the 2014 'Umbrella Revolution'.[21] In doing so, several protest mapping projects sprung up, including HKmap.live and 103.hk.[22] Following the protests in 2019, HKmap.live had been removed from the Apple App Store citing public safety concerns, continuing as a dynamic, web-accessible map only.[23] In contrast, 103.hk published regular static, digital image-based maps. Both used Telegram channels to push cartographic updates to subscribers.[24] I have previously written about how both projects cultivated forms of care towards protesters, helping them navigate dangerous situations and encounters with the police.[25] But here I want to emphasize three aspects.

Firstly, that protest mapping requires *self-care*, in which not only map users are cared for, but map makers too. As the 103.hk team emphasized to its cartographic volunteers, 'the map is not as important as you are',[26] echoing Tronto's later addition of a fifth phase of care, 'solidarity'.[27] Secondly, that protest mapping requires *resilient care infrastructures* in order to offer a sustainable, effective, and robust navigational service. As the 103.hk team acknowledged, reporting protocols, including a standardized system for communicating incidents, was integral to their project. Thirdly, that protest mapping needs an understanding of when care needs *expire*. While the 103.hk team had largely perfected the art of representing incidents on the map, they struggled to deal with incidents that *no longer needed to be*

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20 Lily Kuo, 'Controversial Hong Kong National Security Law Comes into Effect,' *The Guardian*, 30 June 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/30/controversial-hong-kong-national-security-law-comes-into-effect.

21 Lily Kuo and Oliver Holmes, 'Police Use Rubber Bullets as Hong Kong Protesters Vow 'No Retreat'', *The Guardian*, 12 June 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/11/hong-kong-extradition-law-protesters-rally-outside-government-offices.

22 At the time of writing (17 August 2022), neither map is still directly accessible, except via archival links: https://web.archive.org/web/20220501132639/https://hkmap.live/ and https://web.archive.org/web/20191212145044/https://103.hk/en/map/.

23 Sam Byford, 'Apple Removes App Used in Hong Kong Protests After Pressure from China,' *The Verge*, 10 October 2019, https://www.theverge.com/2019/10/10/20907596/apple-hong-kong-protests-app-removed-china.

24 At the time of writing (17 August 2022), both Telegram channels are still accessible via https://t.me/hkmaplive and https://t.me/RealTimeMapHK.

25 Sam Hind, 'Cartographic Care, or Care-tographies: From London to Hong Kong,' in Phil Cohen and Mike Duggan (eds), *New Directions in Radical Cartography: Why the Map is Never the Territory*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022, pp. 257-282.

26 'Team Info,' 103.hk, https://web.archive.org/web/20191212145044/https://103.hk/en/map/obs/#status.

27 Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice,* New York: New York University Press, 2013, 35.

represented. In a time-critical and resource-intensive environment, knowing when care was no longer required was vital.

Vignette 2: Autonomous Driving

At 9:58pm on 18 March 2018, an Uber ATG autonomous vehicle killed a pedestrian, Elaine Herzberg, in Tempe, Arizona (USA).[28] As a crash investigation by the US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) later confirmed, Herzberg had been hit whilst walking her bicycle across northbound North Mill Avenue, a four-lane arterial route in the north of the city.[29] At the time of impact, the vehicle had been undertaking a second loop of an established test route routinely driven since 2017 by the fleet of modified Volvo XC90s operated by Uber ATG in Tempe.[30] The 'vehicle operator' behind the wheel was Rafaela Vasquez, an employee with the company since June 2017, responsible for a range of tasks whilst the vehicle was in autonomous mode.[31] Here I want to emphasize three aspects of the tragic event.

Firstly, according to the NTSB report, the Uber ATG vehicle failed to *account* for Herzberg. 5.6 seconds before she was hit, the vehicle's on-board developmental automated driving system (ADS) detected and classified Herzberg as a vehicle. After a further eight new classifications in which she was also categorized as stationary and as an 'unknown object', 0.2 seconds before impact Herzberg was classified for a final time as a bicycle.[32] At no point was Herzberg correctly identified or classified as a pedestrian walking with a bicycle.

Secondly, Vasquez herself failed to *maintain attention*. Between 9:16pm and 9:59pm (one minute after impact), Vasquez's personal mobile phone was alleged to have been streaming a TV show.[33] Using eye-tracking analysis, NTSB investigators determined that Vasquez had glanced down towards the center console of the vehicle (where they believed her personal mobile phone to be) 23 separate times in the three minutes before crash.[34] One of the principle tasks of the vehicle operator was to monitor the driving environment, ready to take control of the wheel in an emergency, something Vasquez had failed to do to avoid a crash.[35]

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28 Sam Levin and Julia Carrie Wong, 'Self-Driving Uber Kills Arizona Woman in First Fatal Crash Involving Pedestrian,' *The Guardian*, 19 March 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/mar/19/uber-self-driving-car-kills-woman-arizona-tempe.

29 'Highway Accident Report: Collision Between Vehicle Controlled by Developmental Automated Driving System and Pedestrian, Tempe, Arizona, 18 March 2018, ,' National Transportation Safety Board, https://www.ntsb.gov/investigations/accidentreports/reports/har1903.pdf.

30 'Highway Accident Report,' National Transportation Safety Board.

31 Lauren Smiley, ''I'm the Operator': The Aftermath of a Self-Driving Tragedy,' *WIRED*, 8 March 2022, https://www.wired.com/story/uber-self-driving-car-fatal-crash.

32 'Highway Accident Report,' National Transportation Safety Board', 15-16.

33 'Highway Accident Report,' National Transportation Safety Board', 24.

34 'Highway Accident Report,' National Transportation Safety Board', 18.

35 'Highway Accident Report,' National Transportation Safety Board', 42.

Thirdly, Uber ATG failed to sufficiently *take care of* their vehicle operators. Five months prior to the crash, the company had reduced the number of vehicle operators in the vehicle during each test from two to one. This 'consolidation of responsibilities'[36] meant a single individual was responsible for a suite of ongoing tasks, from monitoring the road, to flagging driving infractions on a dashboard-mounted device.[37] The extra burden placed on Vasquez was a significant factor in Herzberg's death.

These are not the only aspects of the event that can be evaluated with reference to care but the aspects that help to make sense of the various intersecting 'failures' that created the conditions for the fatal crash.[38] By approaching them as matters of care, or more appropriately, as matters of a *lack of care*, the tragic circumstances of the navigational situation can be better understood.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered a methodological framework for how to examine navigational failures, considering navigation as instituting networks of care or 'care-tographies'. In this, navigational failures can be seen as being precipitated through the relative presence, or absence, of caring practices and strategies. More specifically, such failures can be considered through a feminist lens of care, in which possible 'phases' of care may be identified as part of the provision of navigational assistance in a range of navigational settings.

In the two short vignettes, I have considered how a care-tographic approach might help to draw out specific navigational relations in the mapping of protest events and the testing of autonomous vehicles. In both cases, to understand how mapping requires diligent, patient work in often dangerous and either physically exhausting or mentally numbing conditions. A care-tographic approach offers the possibility of locating moments at which the normal state of things breaks down and of drawing attention to the routine manual work behind digital platforms and nominally 'autonomous' machines,[39] where the experience of performing such work is situated somewhere between intolerable burden and boredom.

For scholars of navigation, feminist theories of care also provide a significant, but often overlooked, approach to understanding how navigational settings are constructed, how navigational technologies nominally 'fail', who suffers when they fail, and why. For

36 'Highway Accident Report,' National Transportation Safety Board', 45.

37 Sam Hind, 'Machinic Sensemaking in the Streets: More-than-Lidar in Autonomous Vehicles,' in Gillian Rose (ed), *Seeing the City Digitally: Processing Urban Space and Time*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022, 57-80.

38 One could also analyze how the median strip on North Mill Avenue, used by Herzberg, was landscaped to have the 'appearance of a pathway', despite not being a designated pedestrian crossing; Hind, 'Machinic Sensemaking in the Streets'.

39 Paola Tubaro, Antonio A Casilli, and Marion Coville, 'The Trainer, the Verifier, the Imitator: Three Ways in Which Human Platform Workers Support Artificial Intelligence,' *Big Data & Society* 7.1 (2020): 1-12, https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720919776.

mapmakers, designers, and software engineers, a care-tographic framework might serve as an evaluative tool for critical, egalitarian map design and implementation, catering to the situated needs of those who require navigational assistance the most.

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FAILURE IS INEVITABLE IN CARE ACTIVISM

LEKSHMY PARAMESWARAN

I'm a care activist, designer, and the co-founder of a mission-based design practice called The Care Lab (*www.thecarelab.org*). After witnessing systemic failure in our care systems, structures, and services we set up he Care Lab. Our intention is to put care back into our systems of care by designing compassionate, proactive, and equitable experiences for people. After working internationally for more than two decades to transform the landscape of care — from social care to healthcare and education — I have found it to be both a joyous and messy terrain, one where systemic failures can often coexist alongside incredible humanity and hope.

In this chapter I explore some of the key crucial intersections between failure and care that have informed my care activism approach. Through three case studies I seek to provide critical reflection. Throughout the chapter I seed key failure provocations as points for critical reflection for care activists.

Can our biggest societal failures provoke us to rise up to become our best selves?

Our mission as care activists is to design new models of care that shift the status quo, so by default the work is disruptive. We at The Care Lab therefore encounter failure on a regular basis and I have many beautiful scars to prove it. Our approach typically involves layering different forms of qualitative design research.[1]

We develop participatory methods and tools to help us deeply understand the experiences and needs of people involved in any given care experience.[2] This may include frontline care teams, patients, family caregivers, and their communities, as well as private, public, and non-profit care provider organizations. Since the work is about systemic change, we increasingly find ourselves working alongside city councils and local or national government teams whose decisions shape our experience of care.

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1 Peter Lunenfeld, *Design Research: Methods and Perspectives*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003.

2 Much of our methodology is informed by the interdisciplinary approaches across health, care, and design. Some key relevant texts include:, Renjith Vishnu, Renjulal Yesodharan, Judith A. Noronha, Elissa Ladd, and Anice George, 'Qualitative Methods in Health Care Research,' *International Journal of Preventive Medicine* 12 (2021); Sheryl Coughlin, David. Roberts, Kenneth O'Neill and Peter Brooks, 'Looking to Tomorrow's Healthcare Today: A Participatory Health Perspective.' *Internal Medicine Journal*, 48.1 (2018): 92-96; Nathalie Delbrassine, Oscar Dia and Joan Escarrabill, *The Patient's Perspective in the Health Care System*. *Shared Patient Experience*. Brussels: SPX; 2020, https://spexperience.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/SPXPositionPaper_EN.pdf.

Systems of Care

Developing new methods and tools to facilitate a creative and constructive dialogue between providers and receivers of care lies at the core of our practice and is what drives our design process and outcomes, be they new services, spaces, programs, and/or tools.[3]

The health and care domain is naturally a risk-sensitive environment where safety is of utmost priority. Careful ethical, technical, and clinical protocols and requirements frame our work. The environments in which care happens — be it nursing homes, hospitals, community centres, or individual homes — are by default unpredictable and uncertain given the complex situations, emotions, and processes at play.[4]

For instance, this may include a family grappling day-to-day with a son's severe physical and mental disabilities; a community self-organising to support their vulnerable elders; a social worker hosting an end-of-life conversation with a resident in denial of their disease; or an oncologist delivering the news of a terminal cancer to a patient and his distraught partner. As much as we might carefully plan our research and design interventions in advance, we always need to be ready with a Plan B, C, or even D. Our tools must enable us to respond quickly, flexibly, and tactfully to what is always a dynamic context of care. Adaptation is not the result of failing to be prepared, but a way to build resilience and retain agency in the face of change.

We choose to explore some of the most challenging and taboo topics in care, such as death and dying or severe disability, topics that require us as professionals to confront our preconceptions and fears and sensitize ourselves.[5] We must not get in the way of our own listening, learning, and understanding of others' pains, fears, and desires when it comes to their experience of health and care.

As a care activist, I feel a deep responsibility *not* to fail people who are already being failed by our institutional systems of care. And yet I know that failures are inevitable when we are trying to change a complex system. That's why I always wonder whether instead of trying to avoid it, we should rather embrace failure through our creative and transformative practices.

Failure Can Be a Creative Force

Reflecting on the diverse experiences we have had in different continents, cultures, communities, and care systems over time, we have developed specific design research strategies, methods, and tools that turn a fear of failure into a practical asset. This includes

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3 Liz Sanders, and George Simons, 'A Social Vision For Value Co-Creation In Design', *Open Source Business Resource,* (December 2009): 27-34.

4 Harri Raisio, Alisa Puustinen, and Pirkko Vartiainen, 'The Concept of Wicked Problems: Improving the Understanding of Managing Problem Wickedness in Health and Social Care', in Will Thomas, Anneli Hujala, Sanna Laulainen, Robert McMurray (eds) *The Management Of Wicked Problems In Health And Social Care*, London: Routledge, 2018, pp. 3-20.

5 Xue Haian, and Pieter MA Desmet, 'Researcher Introspection for Experience-Driven Design Research', *Design Studies* 63 (2019): 37-64.

tools to minimize risks and avoid doing harm during research, techniques to reframe errors as opportunities to reflect, and methods to deepen empathy and/or connection.

There is a need to liberate ourselves as care activists from the fear of failure that can at times prevent us from being as bold in our actions as we could be.[6] We have created simple but powerful rituals as a design team for working through such deep-rooted fears; a repository of methods and tools that help us to fail creatively and with a sense of confidence. This helps foster an attitude of creative reframing when it comes to thinking about risks, uncertainties, failures, and the act of failing itself.

Towards a Failurists' Toolkit: Three Projects

As a design practitioner I want to share three project stories with inherent risks of failure, coupled with three practical and creative interventions we discovered could help us embrace failure when conducting sensitive design research or systemic transformation. Even though these practice rituals are born from our work in the care space, you might consider them relevant for any work that strives to unpack a complex and sensitive topic or tries to achieve greater, more systemic impact. Take them as inspiration and starting point. There are surely many more practices and techniques possible to play with failure in a similar way.

What are you most fearful about within a current research topic and how does this affect your approach to the work?

Failurist Practice 1: Empty Your Backpack // Self-awareness and Sensitization

Project: *Hospitable Hospice*, Singapore, 2013. In partnership with the Lien Foundation, Ang Chin Moh Foundation, Dover Park Hospice, Assisi Hospice, and St Joseph's Nursing Home and Hospice.[7]

Intention: To reimagine the end-of-life experience of in-patient hospices in order to celebrate life at the end of life.

Potential Risk: Not being able to listen fully and deeply to people due to our personal fears and misconceptions of death and dying.

Practice Story: We came together as a team at the start of the project to understand the human experience of death and dying. It was the first time we had deep dived into this topic, despite it having been in the background of much of our work in health and care. Reflecting upon our individual fears and hopes related to death, we wrote them down on pieces of

6 Steven Heller, *Design Disasters: Great Designers, Fabulous Failure, and Lessons Learned,* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008.

7 *Hospitable Hospice. Redesigning Care for Tomorrow*, Fuelfor, Lien Foundation and ACM Foundation, 2013, https://www.thecarelab.org/hospitablehospice.

paper or chose specific objects to represent them. Taking turns, we expressed our fears to one another and placed the paper or object into the box. We saw we had similar fears and were not alone, but we also saw how we could better support one another, as sharing our vulnerabilities made us stronger as a team, and therefore be better prepared to enter this confronting topic and uncertain territory.

At the end of the session, we closed the box with a collective intention to place our own preconceptions and hopes to one side and make space in which to deeply listen to the stories of patients, families, and professional caregivers facing end-of-life. We also found a vocabulary amongst ourselves, and new ways to open a conversation around death and dying that we could then apply in our research with terminal patients and their loved ones.

Figure 12.1: Empty Your Backpack: A conversation toolkit to open up and reflect upon end-of-life fears, hopes, and preconceptions. Image credit: The Care Lab.

What Red Flags (warning signs) do you see on your project horizon and how could you prepare to navigate them?

Failurist Practice 2 : Red Flag Protocol // A Partnership Practice for Transformation Projects

Project: *Care Beyond Walls*, Singapore, 2021-ongoing. In partnership with the Lien Foundation, AWWA Health & Senior Care, Trisector Associates, and IELO Architects.

Intention: To demonstrate a new community-based model of dementia care that creates the conditions for persons with dementia and their caregivers to thrive within their neighbourhood.

Potential Risk: To overly focus on the bold, aspirational goals of the project and neglect to monitor the multiple and messy factors that are difficult to control but that can be crucial for project impact.

Practice Story: The kick-off of any new partnership project tends to focus on creating a positive vibe amongst everyone convened and a recap of the group's shared objectives. But when the work involves implementing a new model of care in a sector where standards of care have been well established and deeply embedded for decades, there is a need to acknowledge the very real risks and pain that might be felt in any process of transformation.

So aside from asking everyone's expectations and personal motivations for the project, people shared the risks they saw and the potential failures we may face along the way. These were captured alongside the hopes and without judgement or shame. We created the idea of a Red Flag Protocol that would support a team ritual of reflecting on risks at key moments in the project, and gave permission for any partner to raise a Red Flag, so that it could be discussed collectively and either mitigated or used to better prepare us to navigate the uncertainty.

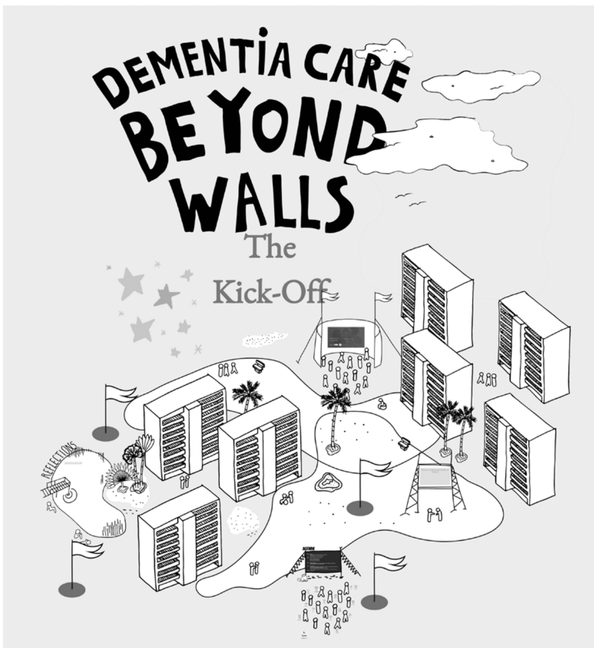

Figure 12.2: Care Beyond Walls Kick off Meeting Space: Online space where the project partners can safely share expectations as well as identify and discuss potential risks and failures of the project. Image credit: The Care Lab.

What levels of zoom (into lived experience) might you need to confidently play inside your research landscape?

Failurist Practice 3: Combining Levels of Zoom // A Layered Research Strategy

Project: *Who Cares? Singapore,* 2016. In collaboration with NCSS (National Council of Social Services).[8]

Intention: To uplift and support the role of the family caregiver and transform the experience of caregiving.

Potential Risk: The caregiver is often an invisible 'red thread' connecting disparate services across the health and social care landscape. Understanding their needs and challenges means understanding this complex landscape at multiple levels simultaneously including policy, system infrastructure, and service touchpoints as well as community and family-based lived experiences. The danger lies in missing a crucial piece of this vast and detailed picture and thereby failing to find the most significant opportunities to provide support to and serve the needs of caregivers.

Practice Story: It was important to work at different scales of insight for such a transformation project. We created a Landscape Map (Figure 12.3) that acted as a visual framework with which we could see the caregiving journey across various silos and sectors, placing key service providers and resources into the picture. This helped us to have a panoramic-level of zoom and to identify where the systemic gaps in caregiver support were. Video ethnography (Figure 12.3) was then used as the most intimate, eye-level of zoom to reveal gaps in supporting lived experiences.[9] We spent hours accompanying and getting to know ten different families each struggling with complex caregiving situations, creating a set of films documenting and revealing the seven emotions of caregiving.

These lived experiences revealed the impact that the overarching system of policies, structures, and services were having on caregivers' quality of their life. A research toolkit that enabled us to achieve different levels of zoom helped to hold the bigger picture in mind, even whilst empathising at the most fundamental human level; it held the complexities and uncertainties, whilst also giving us room to reflect, explore, play, co-create, iterate, and design with the confidence that we could thereby define a more holistic and complete ecosystem of new support solutions and strategies.

8 *Who Cares? Transforming The Caregiving Experience in Singapore.* National Council of Social Service and fuelfor, 2016, https://www.thecarelab.org/whocares.

9 Dalia Aralas, 'Extending Video Ethnographic Approaches', in *Methodological Developments in Ethnography* Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2007.

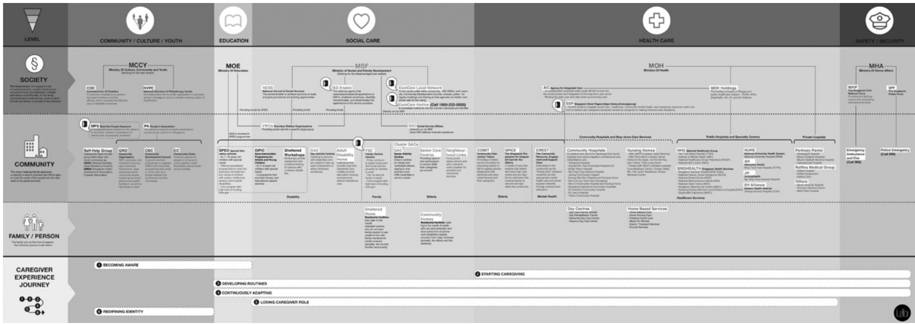

Figure 12.3: Landscape Map and movie still (side by side). Landscape map of caregiving support in Singapore (left). Mr. Neo, one of the patients we accompanied during the video ethnographic research. (right). Image credit: fuelfor/The Care Lab with National Council for Social Service.

Failure Can Build Our Capacity to Drive Change: Personal Reflections

I have provided three projects in which care and failure have been part of the critical making and reflection. As I have suggested, while practitioners might be learning to be more comfortable (and less fearful) around failure and failing, knowing its power to drive creativity, this approach seeds a series of further provocations.

How do we convince communities, organizations, and funders to commit time, money, and effort towards a cause?

How do we demonstrate that it is possible to reimagine new systems of care by offering a process of social innovation and a toolkit of design research practices that can be trusted to navigate risks and complexities and facilitate the creativity needed to achieve social impact?

How do we apply such practices to empower ourselves, our teams, and our partners to see failure as natural consequence of such structural transformation, and yet also build the confidence and spirit to work productively and playfully in spite of the risk of failure and the consequences of failing?

As a practitioner and care activist I believe that if we can answer some of these questions related to failure, we may discover more effective ways to spread and scale new models of care, and thereby help to drive forward a social movement to transform care.

Our systems of care are broken, it *will* take courage to redesign them.

On a more personal note, I think it is important to stay awake to the fact that you can still fail even after working for decades in a specific area or topic. In fact, experience can make you confident to be bolder, to risk failing more spectacularly in order to achieve a greater impact. But it can also make you complacent and less exploratory or playful, relying on past deep experience. So, I feel that by learning to acknowledge and work constructively with failure, you can ensure that you stay humble and yet always open to learn and grow.

So, wear your scars with pride.

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A DAY FRACTURED FOREVER, AND ENSUING CHANGE: THE SUMMER UPRISINGS OF 2020 AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FRONT LINES

SYRUS MARCUS WARE

It was summer — hot and dewy. Black Lives Matter had spent weeks planning the action after a successful action on Juneteenth of 2020. It was the middle of what we now lovingly refer to as the summer uprisings of 2020. People were becoming politicized and getting involved in actions and activisms around the world in the name of racial justice. In Tkaronto (the Mohawk name for Toronto, Ontario, Canada), we gathered 80 people — artists and activists on 16 June 2020 to paint a large-scale 7,200 square foot mural on College Street in downtown Tkaronto.

Figure 13.1: DEFUND THE POLICE street mural drone footage. Credit: Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO).

Right in front of the Toronto Police Headquarters, the mural screamed 'DEFUND THE POLICE' in massive pink, queer letters. We had taken over the intersections of Bay and College Streets along with College and Yonge Streets and painted the large strip of letters between — along the block of College Street, using rollers and huge buckets of bright pink paint. As I stood there painting on that hot summer morning, I was worried; worried we would be attacked by the cops standing and watching our progress or that there would be charges laid. Instead, the action went off without a hitch. Thanks to some incredible 40-foot (12.2 m)-wide banners made by local artist and abolitionist Jenna Reid, we held the intersections for about an hour — allowing the paint to dry in the hot sun.

Our mural offering was the start of an action-packed day with marches and rallies in the name of Juneteenth[1]. It was documented with drone footage and photos and remained in situ untouched for several weeks following its creation. I even had an anonymous inquiry from a friend working at the city asking if the paint was water based. If so, they wanted to leave the mural. They had been trying to get the city to agree to paint a Black Lives Matter (BLM) mural after similar large-scale BLM-focused murals had been created in Washington and across the USA.

Figure 13.2: DEFUND THE POLICE street mural drone footage. Credit: BLMTO. Used with permission.

1 Juneteenth is a moment commemorating the signing of the emancipation proclamation, or theatre the last state to adopt it formally adopting this proclamation. It also commemorates some significant Black uprisings that happened in June.

Figure 13.3: Banners and mural. Credit: Syrus Marcus Ware.

In the weeks following our mural creation, a sister mural was created by community members in Kensington Market — on August Street — proclaiming loudly and in bold colors that 'Black Lives Matter'. In the public sphere, this message was being taken up by organizations all over Turtle Island (as referred to by many Indigenous communities in North America). On what came to be known as Black Out Tuesday, organizations and galleries blacked out their social media profiles and made solidarity statements about Black lives. Black artists and activists were charged with Instagram takeovers and demonstrative actions that made the organizations look good — even throwing some work towards Black folks often shut out of the arts and these organizations.

We entered July planning, thinking about how to address the monuments to slavery and colonialism spread across our city and province. The largest of these monuments was the policing and prison system, which grew directly out of slave labor camps and slavery. We met in parks to avoid surveillance and talked through possibilities. We decided to do an art project beautifying and addressing three monuments in the city:

-> the statue of known racist, slaver, anti-Indigenous first prime minister of Canada, John A. McDonald;

-> the statue of racist and architect of the residential school system in Canada Egerton Ryerson, whose system of violence resulted in thousands of deaths and millions displaced, and was exported and used to create the apartheid system in South Africa- affecting millions of Black people; and,

-> the statue of King Edward IV, a colonial statue taken down in India during a decolonial process, but purchased through private interest and brought to Tkaronto and installed in Queens Park.

I am hesitant to discuss the actions in detail due to the safety of the activists in my community, but suffice to say Ryerson was beautified with pink paint. I have memories of the big splash of pink leaving the buckets, pausing in mid-air and landing on his racist face, dripping down his form. Thinking back to that morning of the paint splashing action, I remember being afraid and worried, because I did not know how it would go. I remembered that I felt similar painting the street and that we were fine to continue without disruption. However, this action did not turn out the same. Despite the few victories on that day, we had arrests and police violence.

Figure 13.4: Ryerson 'monument' beautified. Photo credit: Syrus Marcus Ware.

The action started beautifully. My memories are like snippets; fragments fracture from a day of traumatic events. Colorful beautification with banners tied onto the base of the statues reading 'TEAR DOWN MONUMENTS TO SLAVERY AND COLONIALISM' in pink and neon green. Spray-painted stencils reading 'abolish the police' and 'end white supremacy' were scrawled on the sidewalks and across the statue's base. There was a march behind a big pink banner — a swath of pink fabric body proclaiming our presence — from one site to the next. There was chanting and hope in our voices. I remember us arriving at John A. McDonald and a similar action happening; banners tied and paint landed.

Figure 13.5: John A. McDonald 'monument' beautified. Credit: Syrus Marcus Ware.

Our final site was the statue in the park — an area where we could be cornered. In mid-action at this site, the police surrounded us. They stopped the activists near the van with the paint, detained and arrested three attendees at the protest. We all scattered. A BLM leader on the megaphone encouraged people to disperse and disappear quickly.

I took off down the street and was chased by cops on foot and on bicycles. I got away in ways I won't repeat because I may need these strategies again in the future. It took three hours for the cops to drive the arrestees from Queens Park down to 52 division, six blocks away. They drove them around, handcuffed in the back of separate police cars in hot temperatures with windows closed, no air conditioning, and no access to washrooms.

The activists present at the action did a huge call out and got a couple of hundred people down to the exterior of 52 division and began a vigil until we could get our people out. We had food donations and supplies dropped off. People began making signs, covering the police station signage and the windows at the front of the station. As the day wore on and we had no knowledge of how long it would take to get our people out we called for a 6pm rally. At 6pm, we had drummers and guest speakers talk about justice and prisons and policing and the racist monuments and more. I was shaking with grief. I was full of rage watching the smug police officers watching us and our rally at their stationed posts at the door. I was scared for my comrades who were inside and in danger. I knew what I had to say — something bubbling up — a mixture of all of these emotions at once. I got on the microphone and said this:

> Defund, Disarm, Dismantle, Abolish! We are winning — we have already won. That's why they are so afraid of the defund movement. The movement to defund and abolish the police is a global movement. People are screaming it from their homes, painting

it on statues and on the streets in such vibrant and bright colors that you can see it from space. They're holding our comrades in there. These people are our beloveds. They have put their lives on the line in support of Black lives, in support of Black freedom. They have joined with activists saying 'no more' to statues of colonialism and white supremacy [. . .] Our people are in there. They are holding a Mad[2] woman in there — they're denying her access to her medications. They're denying her access to a doctor. We know what the police do. We must have her free tonight! She will be coming home with us tonight. The police and prison system do not make our communities safer or more secure. They have never meant safety for Black people, for Indigenous people, for trans people, for disabled people, for Mad people, for migrant people, for sex workers, for HIV positive people, and for drug users. They do not mean safety for any of us. They are the violent ones! They are the violent ones! We will not leave until they are free. Free the three people being detained here! Tonight, the police are not protecting them. They are not protecting you, they are not protecting us. We say ENOUGH! We say disarm the police, we say dismantle the police, we say abolish the police! They will not take another Black person! They will not take another Mad person. We will not let them. The days are over of police picking us up and driving us around for hours in cars, and booking us and leaving us to disappear from our communities. That time is over. We will come out here every fucking time you take one of us. You will not take any more of us. We will not let you. Defund! Disarm! Dismantle! Abolish!

Figure 13.6: Police headquarters (52 Division) sign covered with placards and protest signs. Photo credit: Syrus Marcus Ware.

I felt relief speaking these words, and hope, more and more hope as they resonated throughout the crowd and people started clapping and chanting back, a call and response.

2 In Canada and across North America/Turtle Island, 'Mad' is a term that being reclaimed and is a political and empowering term for folks labelled with psychiatric diagnosis's and who have been in the psychiatric system.

Others gave speeches like mine — some people sang and chanted. Local DJs came down and set up a dance party in front of the cop shop. We cheered and yelled and rallied. And while we did, they slowly and quietly moved the activists from 52 division to other police stations across the city — three different sites.

It was 3am before we got word through the legal team that they were being released and we made plans to gather them. Everyone cheered and celebrated their release. We packed up and left the police station.

Shortly after, the police started casing my block. I live on a small street with two buildings on it and there is no need for anyone to drive down the street unless you live there. However, in the days following the arrests, the police were everywhere on my tiny street. My neighbors were worried — why were there police everywhere? They held a town hall meeting for the building. Together, we crafted a no police rule for the building to provide safety for Black families and racialized and marginalized folks living in the building. Indeed, there were so many in our building who were rightly freaked out by the cops being everywhere and trying to get into our building from time to time.

It was decided that the best decision was to get me out of the city for a while, so under the cover of night I got in an Uber booked by someone else to a second location, where I switched cars and got in a second Uber, before finally arriving at my destination. I stayed in the safe house for about a week, growing more and more anxious about what was coming. I felt a profound sense of failure. We had done countless actions — taken over police headquarters for a 15-day sit-in in 2016; taken over the Special Investigations Unit in 2016, stopping all work there that day; and other demos throughout the years. We had never had arrests prior.

Together, our team went over what could have been done differently to prevent what happened in the future. The three arrestees faced charges and lived through a year of surveillance and restrictions on their movement and living before their charges were finally dropped in July 2021.

It's now the summer of 2022 and the uprising has quieted down a bit, though racial injustice continues and Black deaths at the hands of the police continue too. Most recently, a Black food delivery driver was shot 90 times by police during a traffic stop, while a week later a white person who shot up a crowd was taken into custody safely and carefully with no injury. Black lives are still being targeted by policing, this monument to slavery and colonialism, this violent enterprise designed to uphold white supremacy across the nation state.

I am ready for more actions. Based on our study of the 'failure' in 2020 and the resulting trauma these arrests caused in our lives and the lives of the arrestees, I feel both ready for action and unprepared for what may come. But I am holding onto hope through the words of Assata Shakur in her 1980 address to the people after her escape from prison:

> Sisters and brothers, the first thing I wanna say is that I love you, and the second thing I want to say is that we can win. We will win our liberation. And in order to win our liberation we have got to think positively. We have got to believe that we can win. And if we don't believe that we can win, we are whipped before we start. We've got to realize what dangers exist and we've got to look at those dangers realistically. We can't afford to have a subjective distorted irrational fear. We've got to look at the obstacles to our liberation coolly and clearly and to develop ways to get rid of those. For us to struggle, for us to fight for our liberation, and for our nation.[3]

We have to believe that winning is possible, and reflecting on the arrests and the action I wonder if perhaps this is how we avoid future failures — actions gone wrong, people's lives affected — by believing we can do that which has not been done before, and by learning from our mistakes as we go.

We have to believe that it is possible to upset this violent and wicked system. How do we get to abolition? To thriving in an abolitionist community? We get there by believing it's possible to have safety, security, and solutions to conflict, crisis, and harm without carceral violence and punishment. This action was a spark, something that ignited discussion and led to significant changes. Perhaps the action was not a complete failure in that several statues have been removed officially and unofficially since our actions that day. The statue of John A. McDonald in Montréal was pulled down in a protest in 2020. Satisfyingly, the statue's head popped off when it hit the ground. Similarly, the statue of Egerton Ryerson that was splashed was pulled down in an Indigenous Resurgence protest about residential schools. These protests marked the discovery of the remains of 215 children on the grounds of residential 'schools' in Northern Turtle Island (this count is now at over 10,000 remains found). The statue's head was severed with a skill saw and put on a spike at 1492 Land Back Lane — a site of Indigenous resistance in the province of Ontario. The university named after Egerton Ryerson officially changed its name in 2022 to Toronto Metropolitan University to address the white supremacy and violence of its namesake and to distance the university from this figure in history. Why did it take arrests and brutality towards our people to push people to see we needed a change? I've spent the last two and half years reflecting on what went wrong that day and what could have gone even worse had conditions been different.

Change is starting to happen. The arrests drew attention to these statues and ultimately created an essential dialogue in our community. The police violence that day with the arrestees proved our point further about their racism, violence, and ableism. More and more people got turned on to the problems of policing, the violence of the system, and the attack on the right to peaceful protest. Still, this experience rings alarm bells about the right to protest being dismantled and under attack and the criminalization of dissent is on the rise. This is happening all while previously gained rights and justice successes are at risk or taken away. We have more and more to protest, and less and less of a right to do so. Change needs to be won, and from this reflection from the front lines I'm offering that we have a lot to learn about

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3 Assata Shakur. "Clips from her 1980 Address to the People after Her Escape from Prison." *The Freedom Archives*, https://search.freedomarchives.org/search.php?view_collection=132&format=mp3#.

losses, as we strive for Assata Shakur's 'winning' and for Black justice. We are still on the front lines, pushing for change and for justice and moving steadily towards a Black affirming Afro Future — a speculative imagining made real through our change-making actions today.

Conclusion

We started with artists, and we end with artists.

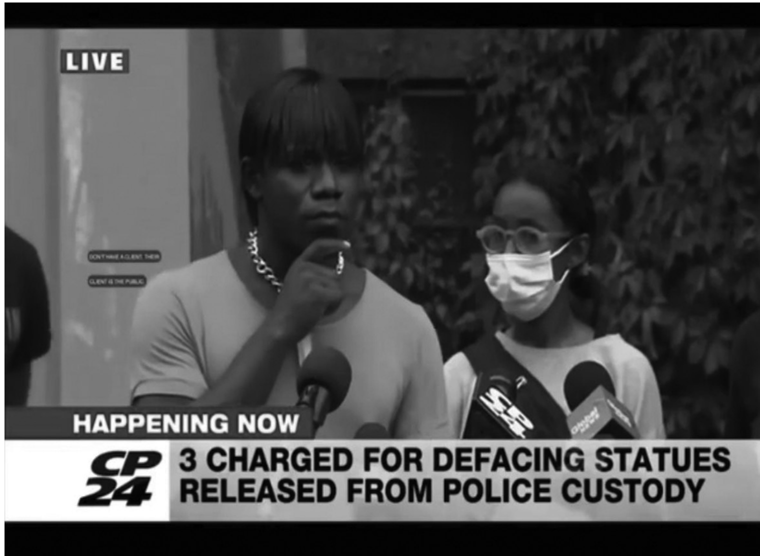

Figure 13.7: Screen capture of Ravyn Wngz talking on CP24. Photo credit: Syrus Marcus Ware

Much happened in the days and weeks following the arrests, and even more in the years following. Artists, many of whom joined us in painting the street on Juneteenth, wrote an open letter calling for charges to be dropped and garnered almost 3000 signatures in two weeks. People who heard activist Ravyn Wngz's speech at the press conference following the arrests were moved and politicized. Her speech was shared almost a million times. Will this influence more people to consider the monuments to slavery and colonialism and to consider abolition? Time will tell.

We continue to scream from every rooftop 'Defund, Disarm, Dismantle, Abolish!' until we are all free. Until we have all won, as Assata encouraged. Until we all have self-determination. And until all of the monuments to slavery and colonialism have been torn down.

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SECTION III:

CREATIVE-CRITICAL INVENTIONS

FAILURE IS A PROJECT[1]

NANNA VERHOEFF AND IRIS VAN DER TUIN

> An independent, diamond open-access journal redefining failure.[2]

This is the tagline of the *Journal of Trial* & *Error (JOTE)*, a journal set up and run by graduate students in the two-year master's program History and Philosophy of Science at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. *JOTE* publishes short empirical articles that zoom in on the question 'what went wrong?' in research projects across the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities and in interdisciplinary settings. 'Empirical' here is broadly conceived as the articles are meant to conceptualize 'empirical and experimental studies which have produced null, unexpected, negative, or mixed results', 'incomplete findings', or findings that cannot be brought to 'a closed, cohesive narrative'.[3]

The journal then invites senior researchers to comment on the disciplinary aspects of the research that is reported on as well as inviting scholars from science and technology studies (STS), sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK), and history and philosophy of science (HPS) to reflect practically and/or fundamentally on the structure of situated experimentation and on the sources of concrete cases of 'error.' *JOTE* itself is an example of the third type of articles that the journal publishes: meta-research articles that reflect the tradition of the research of academic research. Here, one may think of the science of team science (SciTS). Additionally, the journal publishes rejected grant applications and peer-reviews so as to — in the tradition of STS — open the black box of scholarly work and academic functioning even further. Grant applications are published for three reasons:

> First, they are valuable in and of themselves as pieces of preliminary research. Second, they contain metadata that catalogue the ideas, hypotheses, and theoretical perspectives within an academic field. Third, they offer historians insight into the non-linear development of scientific ideas and can therefore be used as metadata on the trends and biases in the process of awarding grants.[4]

What is interesting about the last-mentioned category specifically and about *JOTE* in general is the attitude as it comes across. The online journal breathes youthfulness or 'science in the making',[5] which is to say that things like the 'replication crisis' in science, the demands of the Open Science movement, or the folding of preliminary research (past) into industrial and tech applications (present) and/or the funding of future research are taken up confidently as defining features of 21st-century scholarship and academic life.

1 This is an extended version of the entry 'Failure' in our book: Iris van der Tuin and Nanna Verhoeff, *Critical Concepts for the Creative Humanities*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022.

2 *Journal of Trial and Error* https://archive.jtrialerror.com.

3 *Journal of Trial and Error* https://archive.jtrialerror.com/faq.

4 *Journal of Trial and Error* https://archive.jtrialerror.com/faq.

5 Bruno Latour, *Aramis, or the Love of Technology*, trans Catherine Porter, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1993] 1996.

By affirming that the metadata of research must be captured for historians and brought into circulation today as well as that science develops non-linearly, *JOTE* consciously situates itself in the 'algorithmic condition'.[6] After all, today's science is being conditioned by and adds to the computational procedures that drive the workings of the internet as the global and dynamic externalized collective brain that stores, makes accessible, and transmits knowledge, information, data, and, indeed, affects.

In the contemporary world in which both *JOTE* and scholarly research in general are situated, and within which we, as scholars, peer-reviewers, and, quite simply, individuals live our professional and private lives, change is the new stability. This characteristic aspect of the algorithmic condition renews the academic, artistic, and activist interest in failure as paradox. Failures are both obstacles and sites of movement. They are blockages as well as a generative force. This being the case, the negative connotation of failure itself (failure vs. success) needs adjusting.[7] This is precisely what the students behind *JOTE* are teaching us when they write that they are concerned about 'the publication pressures that researchers face — especially junior investigators — in their pursuit of a career in science'.[8] According to their second tagline, '[t]here is a gap between what is researched and what is published. *JOTE* aims to close that gap'.[9] What gets published usually goes accompanied by an air of linearity, success, and grandeur, whereas the latter features are not the features of science as it is daily done. The students write:

> Publicly, science is thought of as an unambiguous set of operations that gleans truth from chaos. By applying a set of specialized methodologies in a well-delineated process, the 'blooming, buzzing confusion' of experience can be quantified, categorized, and systematized. But in practice, science is quite messy. Experiments rarely work on the first try or as expected, results rarely falsify hypotheses directly, and knowledge is gained in small, incremental steps instead of great leaps. This process of fine-tuning is at odds with the public image of science as an enterprise designed for consistent large-scale discovery.[10]

In the reality of science in the making, failure is, quite simply, daily practice. Only when the public image of science — an image that also features in university lecture halls and in popular news media — is projected back onto the everyday reality of lab scientists and desk and archival researchers do their experiences with 'chaos,' 'confusion,' 'mess,' 'incrementality,' and 'fine-tuning' come to carry negative connotations of failure. When the starting point is practice, a symmetrical approach of alternating successes and failures comes within reach. This approach seems to drive *JOTE,* as well as the algorithmic condition per se.

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6 Felicity Colman, Vera Bühlmann, Aislinn O'Donnell, and Iris van der Tuin, *Ethics of Coding: A Report on the Algorithmic Condition [EoC]*, Brussels: European Commission, 2018.

7 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

8 *Journal of Trial and Error* https://archive.jtrialerror.com/faq.

9 *Journal of Trial and Error* https://archive.jtrialerror.com/.

10 Sean Devine, Max Bautista Perpinyà, Valentine Delrue, Stefan Gaillard, Thomas F. K. Jorna, Martijn van der Meer, Lottricia Millett, Chelsea Pozzebon, and Jobke Visser, 'Science Fails. Let's Publish,' *Journal of Trial & Error* 1.1 (2020): n.p. *https://doi.org/10.36850/ed1*.

The field of science and technology studies has long been interested in research and development failures. Research and development failures form an excellent entry point for a symmetrical anthropology that does not want to import assumptions about binaries such as old-new, true-false, and good-bad into its analyses, refraining from imposing value on the networks studied. In *Aramis, or the Love of Technology*, anthropologist of science Bruno Latour discusses the innovative public transport system, Aramis, that was prepared for use in Paris from the late 1960s until it was suddenly abandoned in the early 1980s. Latour assembles as many voices about this sociotechnological failure as possible. Failures linger in the space between 'started' and 'finished,' and as such they remain projects. 'About technological *projects*', Latour argues, 'one can only be subjective. Only those projects that turn into objects, institutions, allow for objectivity. [...] Projects drift; that's why they're called research projects'.[11] The well-functioning transport innovation died a premature death because of a lacking number of sustained linkages between, and crossings of, social and technical systems. The innovation ended up not being networked enough and it is only possible to retroactively pinpoint why Aramis had to fail by combining as many test reports as possible. For one thing, Latour's multivoiced systemic functional analysis into who killed Aramis demonstrates that the project has indeed produced a lot of viewpoints.

'Projects drift; that's why they're called research projects', wrote Latour. And this is precisely what the students behind *JOTE* want to embrace. They write '"trial and error" is an inherent and fundamentally collaborative mechanism of the scientific process, whereby scientists share knowledge of both successes and failures to inform future endeavors. To know what is, we must know what is not'.[12] What graduate student Sean Devine and his peers write is, indeed, refreshing, but it is also conceptually precise and, in the algorithmic condition, incredibly up to date. Distinct from failure as lack (a deficiency) that is at risk of getting essentialized and taken for granted as a trait, failure as a verb (an act of failing) refers to unexpected moves, glitches, or hiccups in bodies, interactions, or relations with often productive consequences for those humans and nonhumans involved. Owing to such unforeseen happenings and unlooked for results, 'failures' are characterized by change and transition rather than stability.

Given that glitches often occur today in all-pervasive human-computer systems interaction, change is the new stability indeed. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai and media theorist Neta Alexander define 'habitual failure' as 'that which changes nothing: the non-event or the rapidly dismissed encounter with the helplessness of users and consumers'.[13] Appadurai and Alexander do acknowledge that, in the contexts of digital and financial systems specifically, acts of failing have an impact on today's user or consumer subject who gets positioned as 'a perennial tester, a reporter on failures'.[14]

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11 Latour, *Aramis*, 75, 91, emphasis in original.

12 Devine et al., 'Science Fails. Let's Publish'.

13 Arjun Appadurai and Neta Alexander, *Failure*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020, 9-10.

14 Appadurai and Alexander, *Failure*,12

Acts of failure are temporary defeats or final failures that nevertheless perform in unexpected ways. Returning to such acts ('glitches') in digital systems, writer and curator Legacy Russell argues:

> Herein lies a paradox: glitch moves, but glitch also blocks. It incites movement while simultaneously creating an obstacle. Glitch prompts and glitch prevents. With this, glitch becomes a catalyst, opening up new pathways, allowing us to seize on new directions [...] glitch is something that extends beyond the most literal technological mechanics: it helps us to celebrate failure as a generative force, a new way to take on the world.[15]

What Russell demonstrates here is that in acts of failing on the internet, for instance, oppressive regimes of power go hand in hand with positive identity transformations. Acts of failing must be analyzed as such: symmetrically between oppression and transformation. And the paradoxes can be mobilized for activist art and other projects that work toward designing for social and ecological change. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, queer theorist Jack Halberstam demonstrates that mundane happenings in everyday (queer) life can have the same potential, provided that we leave the binary between successful and failed life behind, a binary that heteronormative, capitalist societies want us to use as a yardstick in evaluating the lives of ourselves and others. With financial markets collapsing and divorce rates skyrocketing, Halberstam demonstrates that we must change our measures of success in order to be able to see 'more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world'.[16]

What, then, could be a 'final failure'?

What would it mean for a failure to be even more than a temporary research, artistic, or design result that deserves publication or installation so as to do justice to the science as it was practiced in the past, just so that present-day and future researchers and 'researchers of research' or 'researchers of making' can make good use of it on empirical, anthropological, or foundational registers? Here, indeed, the creative fields of arts and design come in. In design contexts, for example, it is very well possible that a failure is final or that, at least, it has more than temporary value and comes to be part of the urban fabric. In their 2013 reflective essay 'Final Draft: Designing Architecture's Endgame', architects Gretchen Wilkins and Andrew Burrows ask the following question: 'Isn't keeping things unfinished the most open and the best way of getting things done?'[17] The answer to their own question: '[...] this all depends on what is meant by "done", and the reasons to stay undone are changing'.[18]

In their essay, 'final draft' is a concept. This concept allows us to think of 'done' and 'undone' as the two sides of one and the same coin. The concept introduces the possibility of working

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15 Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, London: Verso, 2020, 30.
16 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2-3.
17 Gretchen Wilkins and Andrew Burrows, 'Final Draft: Designing Architecture's Endgame,' *Architectural Design* 83.1 (2013): 98-105, 98.
18 Wilkins and Burrows, 'Final Draft', 98.

in an out-of-control key: is multi-directional 'drafting' the primary process that 'completion' necessarily reduces to univocality and unambiguousness? In order not to reduce, Wilkins and Burrows stay with drafting, so that even a completed product remains 'open.' Why do they go through such pains? Because they have the goal of persistently stimulating innovation (in design), creation (in art), and creativity (across all cultural domains at once (and for all)). This brings us back to the impetus of the *Journal of Trial & Error*; a journal that situates itself right in the middle of the making of scientific truths as well as untruths that have truth-value in that they rule out certain things that once had great potential.

The non-reductive and complex work of Wilkins and Burrows affirms that every creative product, scholarly or design — their text, this short chapter, this collection, their architectural projects, *all* architecture even when it has won some important prizes — is a final draft. They conceptualize that final drafts are, firstly, material. They consist of raw or movable material; they are located in, and as, places that allow for many things to happen there. Secondly, final drafts are representational. They will have to be finished, one day, or they will have to be interpreted academically or aesthetically. It is possible for people not to come to an agreement on the meaning — historically, aesthetically, communally, etc. — of such unfinished objects or places. Thirdly, final drafts are material-discursive projects.[19] Examples are functional designs that are looking for a function, or open-source software requesting to be adopted for use. In other words, final drafts are 'creatively incomplete'.[20] And remember, pushing Latour to the extreme, for Wilkins and Burrows, *all* objects, text, images, and places are creatively incomplete projects!

Whereas the two architects take an ontological standpoint about the unfixity of the seemingly fixed, they also have an eye for how final drafts are developed in practice. They affirm that in collaborative (and) design processes, we can differentiate two paradoxical movements or forces.[21] On the one hand, there is the process that hopefully leads to the bringing about of meaning. This is a process that abounds in ambiguity and is fundamentally conversational. On the other hand, Wilkins and Burrows acknowledge that collaborative (and) design processes are intended to come to a conclusion, a model, or a plan. As such, the processes are fraught with ambition and the urge to control. In our times of economical, ecological, and social crises, it is all the more important to embrace the inherent tensions in the design process as a *project*.

Ultimately, they suggest for us to 'do as Detroit', which is to say: 'assert [your] "draft" state as "final" in order to perpetuate continued innovation'.[22] They suggest for us to try to search for the unfinished, even in seemingly finished contexts, so as to be able to constantly mobilize the 'frays' for innovation, creation, creativity, and, eventually, change. Wholly in line with *JOTE*, they want us to embrace an attitude of 'construction-as-research'.[23]

19 Donna J. Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,' *Feminist Studies*, 14.3 (1988): 575-599.
20 Wilkins and Burrows, 'Final Draft', 100.
21 Wilkins and Burrows, 'Final Draft', 101, 105.
22 Wilkins and Burrows, 'Final Draft', 101.
23 Wilkins and Burrows, 'Final Draft', 103.

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ON THE JOYS OF ADMINISTRATION: OR RACE, FAILURE AND THE NEOLIBERAL ACADEMY

OLIVIA KHOO

In Australian academia — where diversity hiring and affirmative action has not (yet) been institutionalized — the visibility of 'race' in the academy has been all but completely erased, transmuted onto the student body as a 'problem' of international students. While student diversity is hypervisible in marketing brochures — reflecting a rapidly changing student population — academic culture has been much slower to change. For more than six years since my hire in 2010, I was the only non-white, full-time female academic in my school.[1] I have been told by a colleague that I am a 'triple threat' — Asian, female, and queer — as though I have surely sung, danced, and acted my way into a reasonably successful mid-career.

This opening paragraph may read like a complaint, and it both is — in Sara Ahmed's terms[2] — and isn't. It is also a meditation on academic performance and 'productivity' in mid-career. In the last several years I have taken on more administrative roles in the university — from directing research centres and the school's postgraduate program to more mundane forms of administration: replying to ever growing mountains of email, editing other people's work, and filling in endless bureaucratic forms.

I have been reflecting upon the consequences of this 'retreat' into administration in terms of the roles available for senior women in the neoliberal university. The thing is, I am *great* at administration: I have an eye for detail and I am organized and efficient with my time. Administration, I find, is soothing — a way of clearing out junk. It provides a semblance of structure and productivity when time for research is scarce. Ann Cvetkovich writes:

> Academics too often struggle with long-term projects such as dissertations and books while squeezed on the one hand by an intensely competitive job market and meritocratic promotion and reward system and driven on the other by a commitment to social justice that often leaves us feeling like we're never doing enough to make a difference.[3]

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1 Nana Oishi surveyed over 400 Asian-born academics in Australian universities. She found that Asian-born academics were highly represented in IT (34.4 per cent), engineering (33.3 per cent), and management and commerce (26.6 per cent), but under-represented in the creative arts (5.3 per cent) and education (5.3 per cent), and across most senior management positions. Nana Oishi, 'Workforce Diversity in Higher Education: The Experiences of Asian Academics in Australian Universities', Melbourne: The University of Melbourne, 2017.

2 Sara Ahmed, 'Complaint as Diversity Work', *Feminist Killjoys*, 10 November 2017, https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/11/10/complaint-as-diversity-work/; Sarah Ahmed, 'Snap!', *Feminist Killjoys*, 21 May 2017, https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/05/21/snap/

3 Anne Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Durham and New York: Duke University Press, 2012, 19.

Hence the joy of administration, an immediate sense of accomplishment *that meets the needs of others*. However, the 'joy of administration' — as I call it — also belies a loss of confidence, particularly in my direction as a researcher and educator in mid-career. I don't want to *lean in*, I want to disappear into emails, into administration, into details. A question I often ask myself is: is administrative work unproductive, or worse: counterproductive to teaching and research? Or is it a necessary part of both? The answer probably lies somewhere in between: if one is buried in administration, it becomes impossible to do much else, but the academy cannot function without the distribution of administrative tasks among academics.

As to who is doing the bulk of this work, in *Counterproductive*, Melissa Gregg writes that much of the history of productivity is gendered: 'Pioneering productivity studies focused on the repetitive manual labor of young, often migrant workers, many of whom were poor women. Assumptions typical of the era established class, gender, and ethnic biases that continue in management theory and practice today'.[4] As with other organizations and institutions, universities are increasingly obsessed with measuring productivity, marked by a shift from a focus on numerical indicators (citations), to a discourse of 'engagement and impact'. In the arts and humanities, where I work, these indicators are also complemented by 'altmetrics' (alternative metrics, or non-traditional bibliometrics), which are captured by a variety of sources, most notably by the eponymous website *Altmetrics*.[5] *Altmetrics* promises to 'discover the attention surrounding your research' and present this in a 'single visually engaging and informative view of the online activity surrounding your scholarly content', represented in the form of a rainbow 'donut' (this food-based imagery and terminology is the company's). This donut data does not offer insight into the conditions that enable or hinder productivity in the workplace, including institutional structures of gender and race. Yet within the existing neoliberal framework, it is a form of failure to not be motivated by a drive towards productivity. And as an Asian female academic, failure is not really an option.

Eleanor Ty's book *AsianFail: Narratives of Disenchantment and the Model Minority*, offers a humorous and critical commentary on the stereotypes linking Asians to productivity and success. She discusses the #AsianFail and #failasian hashtags on Tumblr, Instagram, and Twitter, which feature pictures and anecdotes of Asians who 'fail' at doing things Asians are meant to be good at, like maths, playing the violin, and using chopsticks.[6] As an Asian who has 'failed' at many (of these) things, most spectacularly at keeping a same-sex marriage alive, I have returned to queer theory, to find solace in how negative affects can also create new forms of sociality and affiliation. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam points out that 'success in a heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation'.[7] Halberstam suggests looking again at failure, which 'allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behaviour'.[8]

4 Melissa Gregg, *Counterproductive: Time Management in the Knowledge Economy,* Durham and New York: Duke University Press, 2018, 10.

5 https://www.altmetric.com/

6 Eleanor Ty, *AsianFail: Narratives of Disenchantment and the Model Minority*, Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2017.

7 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Durham and New York: Duke University Press, 2011.

8 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2.

Is being 'good' at administration a form of failure in the academy for female researchers, particularly given the gendered history of female productivity? Or, as Gregg[9] questions, is productivity even the right measure for work at all?

As a senior female administrator, a significant part of my role involves emotional labour and the management of 'emotion work'. As Arlie Russell Hochschild[10] has famously argued, the management of emotional labour falls predominantly to women. In the context of the academy, which has become increasingly corporatized, we are told to work in the service of our 'clients' (formerly known as 'students'). The corporate agenda permeates all levels of teaching, from undergraduate to postgraduate, and the voices that publicly rally against the facelessness of the current system are few. Raewyn Connell has offered an alternative vision of higher education in her book *The Good University*, and in her earlier writings on postgraduate supervision as the long-term negotiation of a human relationship, with all its ups and downs, rather than an activity that follows a prescriptive formula.[11] We do need to keep some of our more difficult feelings in check in this relationship, but this does not mean subscribing to a lifetime of bondage in what Angela McRobbie refers to as 'the smile economy in the teaching machine'.[12]

McRobbie writes:

> The smile economy in the classroom translates into a kind of measured self-management style of pedagogy, one which is constantly alert to the need for good scores in the end of term evaluations, which in turn are based on almost day-to-day performance factors. [. . .] [The] seeming need for wall-to-wall cheerfulness, a happy smile [is] more likely to be expected from women than from their male counterparts for whom an 'Eeyore' or melancholic stance in the seminar room could be construed as a mark of erudition. So the requirements of heterosexual femininity were also quietly encoded within the academic version of 'customer care'.[13]

The containment of less 'seemly' emotions — anger, frustration, disgust — is bound up in a culture of self-regulation that is distinctly gendered female within the neoliberal discourse. Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad detail the growing cult(ure) of confidence that permeates all aspects of women's work and social life. The suggestion is that 'both the causes and solutions of confidence culture lie in women — individually, as opposed to collectively' yet

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9 Gregg, *Counterproductive,* 4.

10 Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012 [1983].

11 Raewyn Connell, *The Good University: What Universities Really Do and Why it's Time for Radical Change*, Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2019; Raewyn Connell 'How to Supervise a PhD', *Vestes: Australian Universities Review*, 28.2 (1985): 38-41.

12 Angela McRobbie, 'The smile economy in the teaching machine: undoing neoliberalism in the academy today?', *Verso Books*, 24 August 2018, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3989-the-smile-economy-in-the-teaching-machine-undoing-neoliberalism-in-the-academy-today

13 McRobbie, 'The Smile Economy', n.p.

is inclusive of every woman regardless of race, class, sexuality, or age.[14] The implication is that environmental and structural factors need not change but women themselves must aspire towards greater confidence and success — not by accepting failure but by 'thinking positively.'[15]

Don't get me wrong, I am grateful for the opportunities that my university has afforded me in developing my leadership skills. However, the rhetoric of leadership 'training' needs to change. I have been invited to participate in a series of leadership workshops with titles including: the Strategic Leader, Crafting Your Leadership Presence, Master Storytelling, Courageous Conversations, and Strategic Resilience. That the words 'strategy' and 'mastery' appear in several of these titles is not without significance. The word 'strategy' has roots in military theory (from the Greek *stratēgos*, *stratos* 'army' + *agein* 'to lead').

Against whom am I leading an army as I rise in the ranks of academia? The blurb for the Strategic Resilience workshop states 'Building your strategic resilience is not just about capably responding to a crisis or rebounding from a setback. It's about cultivating your ability to respond and adapt to ongoing change.' Sadly, *ongoing* change is a reality in most higher education institutions, and the expectation of individual cultivation of adaptive responses (including admonishments against overly 'emotional' responses) is arguably gendered. As Gill and Akane Kanai note, 'women must become ever more adept at fielding new affective obligations'[16] as corporate structures continue to shift under our feet.

I am of course reminded of Michel de Certeau's famed distinction between strategies and tactics involved in the resistance to power. Strategies are a function of place, involving institutions and structures of power.[17] By contrast, 'a *tactic* is a calculation determined by the absence of a proper locus [...] The space of the tactic is the space of the other'.[18] As Ian Buchanan notes:

> the essential difference between the two is the way they relate to the variables that everyday life inevitably throws at us all. Strategy works to limit the sheer number of variables affecting us by creating some kind of protected zone, a place in which the environment can be rendered predictable if not properly tame. [...] Tactics, by contrast, is the approach one takes to everyday life when one is unable to take measures against its variables.[19]

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14 Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad, 'Confidence culture and the remaking of feminism', in *New Formations* 91 (2017): 17-34, 29.

15 Hochschild, *The Managed Heart Commercialization of Human Feeling*; Barbara Ehrenreich, *Smile or die: How positive thinking fooled America and the world*, New York and London: Granta, 2010.

16 Rosalind Gill and Akane Kanai, 'Mediating Neoliberal Capitalism: Affect, Subjectivity and Inequality', *Journal of Communication* 68 (2018): 318-326, 323.

17 Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 35-6.

18 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 36-7.

19 Ian Buchanan, 'Strategies and Tactics', in Ian Buchanan (ed), *Michel de Certeau: Cultural Theorist*, London and New York: Sage, 2000, pp. 86-107, 89.

Strategic resilience, then, seems to imply that one should be selective about the kinds of challenges one will make against the university, to be 'battle ready' by smiling, adapting, and being conciliatory towards a higher leadership. Strategic resilience advocates self-monitoring over resistance, personal adaptation over political or structural change.[20] With so few women (of colour) in leadership positions, the imperative to play the game becomes even higher. Perhaps then it is useful to view failure as a call to collective action; a tactic that has its place in the many ways we negotiate academic work and practice resilience.

The term 'academic feminism' has been used to describe the 'historical project of challenging the university by institutionalizing new knowledge formations'.[21] Yet as Robyn Wiegman notes, 'to conjoin academic to feminism today is almost always a distinct insult, an accusation that draws its blood precisely because politics and academics have come to be so firmly opposed'.[22] Academic feminists such as Judith Butler have been criticized for 'luxuriating in theoretical pleasure and thereby abandoning practical politics'.[23] Wiegman analyses the failure of academic feminism and notes that the 'problem' for academic feminism is that it has institutional power.[24] She continues:

> Failure, it seems to me, is the unavoidable consequence of imagining political transformation, especially in the context of the differentials that collate around investments in institutions, social practices, and various kinds of critical agencies and projects.[25]

I, too, embrace the feminist use of the idiom of failure in the context of academia, failure in a more tactical sense. As 'Women's Studies' and 'Gender Studies' programs have been decimated across Australian higher education institutions, only to be tentatively re-launched with the resurgent success of academic feminism, the lessons of various forms of institutional 'failure' are surely that we must find new ways to be in the academy, new forms of *emoting* (of smiling and meaning it, and being emotional (if we want)). The academy may be a strategic institution but with real feminist struggles that need to be tackled through theory *and* practice.

It is important to consider (and collate) personal stories of success and failure in the neoliberal academy (however we measure these) and the institutional struggles women have faced to arrive (or end up) in these positions, and to make these stories more visible. This is a form of administration, but one that I feel is worthwhile. Ahmed refers to the 'snap', which can be sudden, or 'the gradual sapping of energy when you have to struggle to exist in a world that negates your existence.'[26] While I have certainly considered resigning in feminist protest —

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20 Gill and Orgad, 'Confidence culture', 32
21 Robyn Wiegman, 'Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11.3 (1999): 107-136, 108.
22 Wiegman, 'Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure', 108.
23 Wiegman, 'Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure', 110.
24 Wiegman, 'Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure', 112.
25 Wiegman, 'Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure', 130.
26 Sara Ahmed, 'Complaint as Diversity Work'.

like Ahmed and Marina Warner so boldly did[27] — I have more recently begun thinking about alternatives, of how to harness the power of exhausted women, women who fail, who have snapped, who are fragile, who are shattered.

In Australia, where 'institutional diversity' barely goes beyond a numbers game — women stacked up against men in graphs and tables and in committee meetings — it is important to remain mindful of the hidden nature of racism, of the lack of attention paid to sexuality, and to call for specific and localized forms of feminist intervention where necessary, without always defaulting to a generalized 'intersectionalist' approach that may not be able to cover it all. I am often asked by international students if I am Chinese. They seek a particular, embodied form of connection through a shared ethnicity. I have been reflecting on my role in how to make a difference through my various forms of difference.

Institutionalizing the 'work' of diversity may not be the path for Australia, but it is important that we start by looking at the messy, ugly affects that arise from unacknowledged forms of diversity work in the academy. Alison Jaggar writes that 'emotions play a vital role in developing knowledge'.[28] I would like us to think about this statement broadly, as a way of harnessing sensitive emotions to our collective academic pursuits, and in the service of the often neglected yet important task of administering tactical and localized change. Might we think of failure as a tactic of new knowledge formation, embodying emotional resilience, and providing opportunities for us to imagine new ways of 'doing' the university differently outside of the institutionalized mandate to continually succeed and be productive?

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27 Sara Ahmed resigned from her position as Professor in Gender Studies at Goldsmiths College in 2016 in protest over the alleged sexual harassment of students by staff at the university. Marina Warner resigned from her position as Professor in the Department of Literature, Film and Theatre Studies at the University of Essex in 2014, condemning moves towards 'for-profit business model' universities in the United Kingdom.

28 Alison Jaggar, 'Love and knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology', *Inquiry* 32.2 (1989): 151-176, 171.

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WHO CAN AFFORD TO FAIL? ART AND RISK IN AN ERA OF PRECARITY

GRACE MCQUILTEN

Failure is often associated with risk taking and an entrepreneurial spirit, indelibly linked with the ruptures and expansions of contemporary capitalism. As Slavoj Žižek writes, 'capitalism, which can survive only by incessantly revolutionising its own material conditions, ceases to exist if it "stays the same," if it achieves an internal balance'.[1] Like other aspects of capitalism, the opportunity to take risks and fail is not equally distributed; who can afford to fail?

In the arts, a healthy tolerance for failure is set against a backdrop of increasing institutional managerialism, risk management, and conservative curation that prevents failure before it has the opportunity to take a breath. This is particularly evident in institutions such as art museums. As Frances Ryan argues:

> Museums operating as first modernity institutions that seek to control risk parameters concentrate on the collective and governable audience through directing conversations and limiting boundaries and base many of their curatorial decisions with their target demographic audience in mind.[2]

A counter-interest in conceptual, unrealizable projects like *Unbuilt America* provides a 'safe' ground for artists and curators to explore failure — without true risk.[3] In parallel to the safe risk-taking of art galleries and museums, individual artists and independent-run spaces operate in such highly unpredictable, precarious conditions that the reality of failure is a constant drum-beat that tests the very possibility of making an art project, let alone a living (Raunig 2011). How much can we ask people to contribute — both in a human capacity and through income — to realize a risky project, and risk failure?

This chapter engages with this central tension between risk and failure through a reflection on my curatorial responsibilities across two very different and ambitious projects: *Remote-Controlled Terrorist Coffin* (2015) by US artist/architect Adam Kalkin and *The Magic Tent* (2011), a community building public art project by The Social Studio. Both projects brought the excitement and transformative potential of embracing both risk and potential failure. On the flipside, both projects brought to bear the potential costs and human impacts when projects fail, both mildly and spectacularly. In the context of the power structures of contemporary capitalism, these challenges raise a central question: is failure a privilege of those who have the resources and capacity to fail?

1 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object Of Ideology*, London: Verso, 2008 [1989], 52

2 Frances Ryan, 'Australian Museums in the 'Age of Risk': A Case Study', in *Museum Management and Curatorship* 32.4 (2017): 372—394, 381, https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2017.1345647.

3 Alison Sky and Michelle Stone, *Unbuilt America: Forgotten Architecture in the United States From Thomas Jefferson to the Space Age: A Book*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.

Adam Kalkin - *Remote-Controlled Terrorist Coffin*

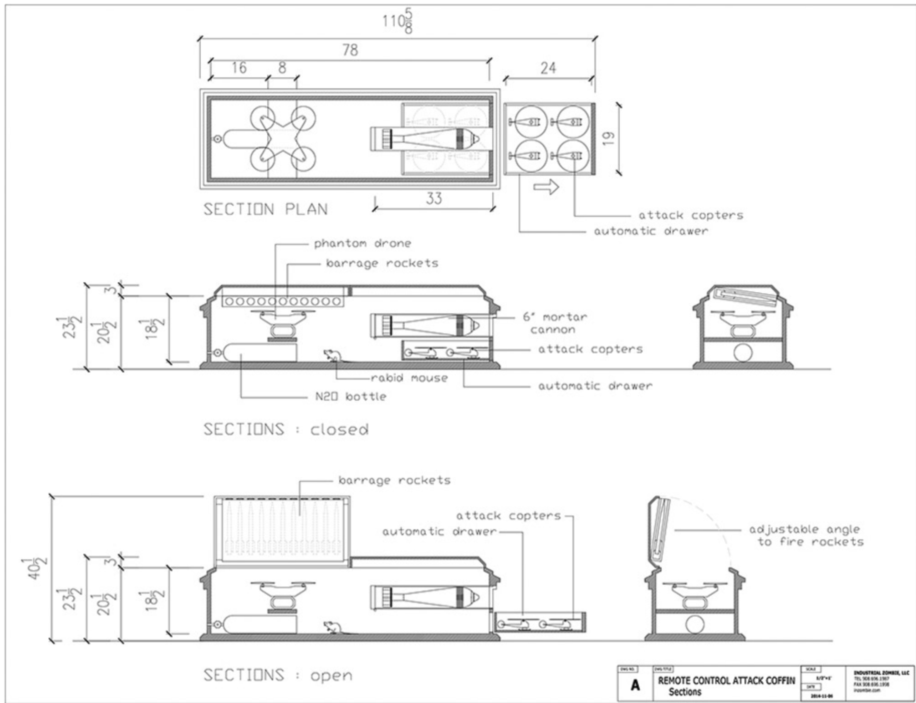

Figure 16.1: Adam Kalkin, Remote Controlled Terrorist Coffin Sketches, 2015. Courtesy of the artist.

In 2015 I collaborated with New Jersey-based artist and architect Adan Kalkin to bring to life a complex and ethically high-risk project: *Remote-Controlled Terrorist Coffin* (*RCTC*) — a coffin engineered with a variety of weapons that could be remote-controlled via the internet. Kalkin was interested in the unregulated development of new technologies with potential application in military conflict — for example, drones — and questions related to the ethics of design. The artist collaborated with engineer Aaron-Ray Chrichton to reverse-engineer consumer products readily available on the market, including hobby drones and pyrotechnic equipment.

It was my task to organize the shipping of the coffin and associated technologies from the USA to Australia, and then make the artwork available to audiences. We developed the work as an independent project and proposed it for an exhibition at Project Space/Spare Room Galleries, a small arts space for experimental works at RMIT University in Melbourne. Here unfolded an extraordinary complex dance with bureaucracy, common sense, risk management forms, ethical questions, and, inevitably, compromise with the distinct taste of failure.

Figure 16.2: Adam Kalkin, Remote Controlled Terrorist Coffin, installation view, RMIT Project Space/Spare Room Galleries. Courtesy RMIT Culture.

Project Space/Spare Room Galleries are located on Swanston Street in Carlton, on the edge of Melbourne's CBD, with a shopfront that engages audiences including University staff and students and general passers-by. For the exhibition, we set up the gallery to look like a funeral viewing: rows of bench seats lined up to face the centrepiece of the show, the radically re-engineered coffin, which at first glance looked like a quite traditional wood panelled coffin. It was resting on a waist-height trolley. The coffin was fitted with an automatically opening/closing compartment at the base and an automatically opening/closing half-door on top. Audiences who were unaware of these components would be startled when it randomly opened, stayed open for a time, and then randomly closed again. Inside, the coffin was fitted with a range of both conventional and unconventional 'weapons' sourced from the consumer market — including a spy drone, a large bore mortar cannon, a truth gas dispersion unit, an attack helicopter squadron, cyber coercion technology, and an innovative bio-pestilence feature. The coffin was accompanied by an instructional video for its potential use, which included the artist testing its different capacities, including firing a cannon on location in New Jersey.

The first moment of potential failure for this project involved getting the work through customs: miraculously, and perhaps concerningly, it did make it through customs, although not without being stopped and tagged before release. The gallery had an anxious wait with no Plan B if the work was held indefinitely, or indeed returned to the artist. The next issue was establishing what components of the coffin could be fully operational within the setting of a gallery.

This is where the compromises began.

While the work was meant to be fitted with a range of different chemical and mechanical components, in reality the only way that occupational health and safety (OH&S) staff would allow the work to be on display was through the de-activation of these components. The canister of nitrous oxide was empty. The more explosive part — a cannon that fires — was similarly present only in a symbolic and entirely non-operational form. Was this a failure of risk and artistic conviction? Yes, it probably was. On the other hand, the potential for harm to the public, although extremely minimal, caused significant distress for the technical and gallery staff involved. At what point is the ambition that comes with a risky project like RCTC worth the emotional toll it takes on those involved?

Other parts of the work were more successful. The artist and engineer were able to operate the coffin by remote-control from the USA, including unleashing the helicopter drones within. Despite the ominous sounding title of the work, in effect, the coffin was both absurd and comical. The idea of a coffin that unleashes laughing gas or a squadron of 'attack helicopters' that were smaller than the size of a hand was ridiculous. As Kalkin himself explained at the time:

> A lot of the stuff I do is narrative, 'what if?' propositions. What if I were a terrorist? I'm not even sure that's the proposition [. . .] [but] I was thinking a lot about terrorism and this do-it-yourself entrepreneurial spirit that these kinds of people have.[4]

And yet despite the obvious absurdity — and the impossibility of the work being activated for malintent — the artwork and art project nevertheless caused high degrees of anxiety across the university. What this revealed was that the idea of 'terror' in and of itself elicits terror. The exhibition was held more than a decade after the 9/11 attacks in the USA, and yet the psychological and ideological 'war on terror' was continuing. The issues around risk, critique, and censorship came to a head when the gallery prepared a media release for the exhibition; a media release that was never to be released.

Despite the internal challenges of presenting and promoting a show dealing with issues of terror, war, and the design of military weapons, a nuanced public program opened up a space to carefully and critically explore this terrain. The program brought together academics, designers, artists, and the public. The RCTC raised important questions about the role of design in the emergence of military technologies, big data, surveillance, privacy, freedom of movement in public space, regulation of technology, terrorism, and the potential risks posed by the social 'outsider' with access to the internet. It also traced a line from games to warfare in consumer society. However, without a significant appetite for risk, from the artist to the gallery and technical staff, the project would never have been realized — and what was realized, in the end, was compromised.

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4 Adam Kalkin, cited in Dylan Rainforth, 'Artist Builds Missile-Decorated 'Terrorist Coffin'', *The Age*, February 22 2015, https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/artist-builds-missiledecorated-terrorist-coffin-20150223-13leub.html

The Magic Tent

Figure 16.3: The Social Studio, The Magic Tent, Federation Square, Melbourne, 2011. Courtesy The Social Studio.

The public are welcome to watch the artists at work each week day in the Magic Tent, or learn traditional craft techniques in a series of creative traditional workshops.

The second project that forms the critical reflection for this chapter involved a radically different set of ethics, possibilities, and challenges. *The Magic Tent* was a public art project presented by The Social Studio, a non-profit social enterprise in Melbourne, Australia that brings together art, fashion, and design to create training and employment for young creatives from refugee and migrant backgrounds. I worked with the team at The Social Studio to produce *The Magic Tent* for the Craft Cubed Festival and Melbourne Spring Fashion Week in September 2011. It involved a 14-square metre tent-like structure suspended from the atrium of Federation Square in Melbourne's CBD. The tent was made entirely of 600 metres of hand-dyed silk; the beautiful and gentle swaying fabric created an ethereal effect.

Once installed, *The Magic Tent* became a community art, craft, and design studio where emerging artists from The Social Studio and its community of creatives became teachers. 'Super Maker' workshops were offered that enabled artists to share their skills in sewing, jewellery design, weaving, fabric dyeing, traditional tailoring, and draping. The project aimed to bring visibility to the talents of emerging artists while addressing public perceptions about issues of migration and displacement through asserting the value of cultural and creative difference. Over the space of two and half weeks, *The Magic Tent* became a creative hub that featured learning, knowledge exchange, social gathering, and performance and brought art

into the public domain. At the end of the August, the hand-dyed silk fabric that composed the tent was deconstructed and repurposed into The Social Studio's Spring Fashion Collection; enabling the tent to have a long life both physically and symbolically.

Figure 16.4: Artist Almaz Gebru inside The Magic Tent, 2011. Courtesy The Social Studio.

While there was so much to love about this project, it also involved a high degree of financial, personal, and interpersonal risk. With only minimal funding secured to realize the ambitious project, staff at The Social Studio had to work above and beyond their limits to achieve the scale required. Hand-dyeing 600 metres of silk fabric required not only a significant amount of time and manual labor, but also space — for weeks the studio spaces at The Social Studio were overtaken and blanketed by metres upon metres of silk fabric, interrupting usual patterns, teaching, and other material requirements for the staff, students, and visitors to the space. There were points in time where it seemed the scale was simply unachievable. But the greatest risk of all came at the time of installing *The Magic Tent*. A team of riggers were contracted to help install it overnight at the Atrium. However, it wasn't until the team arrived that the full reality and complexity of the project struck. Not only did the lengths of fabric need to be carefully hoisted (silk is a relatively fragile material) over the supporting beams, but the design plans as drafted did not meet the structural reality of the atrium space.

A re-design was required in-situ, along with an enormous amount of hand-sewing on the spot, to enable the lengths of fabric to fit to the size of the atrium beams. Failure danced with *The Magic Tent* that night. It was an extremely long night for the team involved in installing the work, and the only thing that stood between success and failure was the individual persistence of one staff member who stayed through the night to make it work. This involved a kind of physical and emotional labor that can't be captured in a project plan, and that couldn't be properly renumerated in dollar terms.

The final result, *The Magic Tent,* was powerful, magical, ethereal, and moving. And yet, I can't help but ask myself a number of questions arising from the process. Was the stress involved for the Social Studio team — those weeks of dying fabric by hand and upending the school and studio activities, and that gruelling night of extremely high stakes and low reward — was it truly worth the benefits that came in the final creative product, a work that was only in public for a few short weeks? What would have been the impact on creativity and morale if the work had failed to be installed that night — a reality we came so very close to? It is one thing to take on personal risk; another to transfer that risk to a team of collaborators who may or may not have financial and personal resources required to withstand the impacts of failure. And finally, who might not be able to take on these kinds of risks?

Conclusion

Artists who are already struggling with the precarity of making a living — the norm is to live well under the poverty line — and with the stress and responsibilities of self-employment, are much less likely to risk failure than galleries and institutions with more financial and human capital.[5] And yet if large scale and risky projects are left entirely to larger institutions to realize, then it is extremely unlikely that projects like *Remote Controlled Terrorist Coffin* or *The Magic Tent* would ever have happened. Without such individual and community-led ambitious and bold ideas — what Gregory Sholette describes as the 'dark matter' of the art world — then the art sector continues to repeat its own motifs to a small and narrow audience.[6]

However, to cultivate creative risk and support independent artists' agency requires enormous effort with little funding and support — the paradox of the *independent project*. As the economic and social crises of the arts continue to deepen in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the scope for entrepreneurialism, risk-taking, and failure increasingly narrows for individual artists and independent artist-run spaces. Yet risk and failure in the arts are needed now perhaps more than ever.

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COLORING IN THE VOID: ON ABSURDITY, FALLING, FAILING, AND CONTEMPORARY ART

CHANTAL FAUST

Boo Boo Bird is a song, or a poem perhaps, or a song and a poem, by the Scottish poet, songwriter and humorist Ivor Cutler. This wistful ballad describes the plight and flight of a mythical bird, the Boo Boo bird. What we discover through the song is that the Boo Boo bird has no defining features, in fact — it has no features at all. The Boo Boo bird is invisible and recognized only by its call: 'boo boo, boo boo'. The repetition of the word is important, and the absurdity of the invisible bird is amplified by its childish double name; boo boo, like an infant's first attempts at vocalization, or that informal way of referring to a failure, a mistake, a booboo. There is something haunting about the way Cutler sings to this impossible creature and it is this element which makes the work so compelling; that it can be simultaneously ridiculous and also very moving.[1] It straddles a certain border between irony and sincerity. And it is this border, or rather the oscillation between the states of irony and sincerity and between falling and failing, that features in the works discussed within this chapter, tracing a line between things and what is at the outermost edge of things, namely, the void.

> The unlimited begins on the external border of the limit: and it does nothing but begin, never to finish.[2]

This essay revolves around the expression of a thought, an idea that revolves around certain concepts within the philosophy of the absurd, drawn from the writings of Albert Camus. It also revolves around a selection of durational performance works, made between the 1970s and today. These examples have been selected as a way to help think through a questioning of failure within contemporary art and to offer a consideration of a new kind of absurdist tendency that might be emerging, or perhaps it is re-emerging. This 're-' as a prefix suggests once more, and again, and as an image; from Sisyphus rolling his boulder, to Bruce Nauman walking around his studio,[3] and onwards. The repeated gesture will be a reoccurring element in this chapter. Repetition, it seems, opens up a way of thinking about, and re-presenting, the *failuristic* tendencies that abound in absurdity.

> I was already feeling uneasy. All at once, the silence stopped breathing.[4]

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1 With thanks to Sarah Jones for the reference.

2 Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Sublime Offering,' in Simon Sparks (ed), *A Finite Thinking*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, 223.

3 *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square* (dir. Bruce Nauman, 1968).

4 Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, ed. Richard Zenith, London: Penguin, 2002, 355.

The word 'want' stems from *vanta*, an Old Norse verb that means 'to be lacking'. We want something that we feel we are missing. Immediate pleasures in some cases, ambitious prospects in others, and unattainable fantasies for many. All contain within them something of a hope, a vision of a possible future that we might like to enjoy or visit or come home to. But from the want of a bar of chocolate, to wanting to spend time in the studio, to wanting to be happy, attractive, caring, or powerful, to even wanting to be wanted: there is something else that we would need to want above all of these desires, for without it, they are nothing. All of these desires are based on life. We need to want to live.

And yet, we must live knowing that at some time we will no longer be living. The journey between birth and death will have been our life and all our other hopes and wants are measured against this end bracket that is undefined yet indisputable. When reminded of this issue of time and finitude, certain desires can be put into perspective against our own life spans and against the historical backdrop of so many brackets that have opened and closed before us and before them. If we choose to really think about the details of our lives, the wants and needs that occupy our thoughts and determine how we choose to fill the hours of each day, and if we choose to think about these as tiny flecks of molecules floating in an ever-expanding universe, many things that have so much meaning for us can suddenly appear a little strange and insignificant. Meaningless. For Albert Camus, it here at this moment of conscious awakening, in this act of looking in and asking 'why', that absurdity is first recognized:

> It happens that the stage-sets collapse. Rising, tram, four hours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, according to the same rhythm — this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. 'Begins' — this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows.[5]

And if and when the stage set collapses, and we are asking *why* and choosing to consciously face the absurdity and meaningless of existence, one might wonder: is there anything we can do but weep? The Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader cries silently and alone. *Too Sad to Tell You* is the handwritten note that introduces this short 16mm film shot in 1971. He just weeps and weeps — we do not know why. Endless crying on infinite replay. Why is it that such prolonged gestures, repetition stretched out to looped eternity, can cause us to question the very nature and entrapment of gesture itself?

There he is now swinging from a tree, arms stretched to the point where it is a matter of the inevitable 'when' he is going to splash into the river below. Off he goes on his bike headed straight for the canal. Watch as he falls off his chair that is precariously balanced on the peak of a roof and is soon to come crashing to the ground. These are choreographed falls, we know

5 Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, 19.

from the films' titles what to expect. As soon as the artist has fallen, the clips end. When asked why he made these works, Ader's response was that he was overpowered by gravity. As with life, falling too involves a beginning and an end. Ader's falling works are set up to fall, to fail, and to fall again. Of course, this ongoing repetition of a task that is inevitably doomed to fail and is performed over and over and over again could also describe the famous punishment of King Sisyphus, who according to Greek mythology, was condemned to roll a giant boulder up a mountain, only to have the rock roll back down again every time he reached the top, and to repeat this act for eternity.

For Camus, Sisyphus offers an archetypal portrait of the absurd hero. What particularly interested Camus was that moment when Sisyphus is watching the boulder rush down the hill. As he heads down the mountain, briefly free from his labor, he is conscious and aware of the absurdity of his fate:

> The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.[6]

This figure of Sisyphus, sentenced to toil for no reason and towards nothing, as a metaphor for the human condition has been echoed in artworks and continues to do so in various guises: from Marina Abramović's 1975 black and white video *Art Must Be Beautiful / Artist Must Be Beautiful,* through to Francis Alÿs's 1997 durational performance *Paradox of Praxis 1 (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing*), to Rebecca Moss's *Frog* from 2016, which sees the artist adorned in a frog suit and jumping on a lurid green pogo stick, desperately trying to remain upright as she boings, slips, and splats across a large puddle in the English countryside.

In the iconic *Exergie — Butter Dance* work by the Indonesian performance artist Melati Suryodarmo, the artist walks into a dark gallery towards a carpet of butter block bricks gleaming treacherously under a spotlight. Standing with her back towards the audience, she then turns dramatically to the front and begins stepping on top of the butter. As she performs her dance to the audience, the butter melts and spreads below her scrambling, high-heeled feet. The moment of inevitable crash is spectacular and violent. It certainly must have been painful, yet up she gets, again and again. Drawing on her experience of training in Butoh dance, Suryodarmo has described the work as a short kind of 'haiku', a poetic action with only three basic movements: dancing on the butter and standing up, with the fall happening somewhere in between.

It is an intensely powerful — and painful — performance, one which seems to encapsulate what it means to be a woman, an artist, or simply a person in the world today. The choice of butter as a material was a comment on the artist's relocation from her homeland of Indonesia to Germany. Suryodarmo has said that she both loves and hates butter at the same time. It is not something that is commonly consumed in Indonesia and it has changed her body since arriving in Europe, in that she developed a hypothyroid condition that became active at the

6 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 111.

time of her moving across the world. The butter thus represents the cultural confrontation she is experiencing, on the one side adjusting into the culture she is living in and on the other side experiencing a number of rejections; in this case, an apparent bodily rejection to this foreign substance. In a comment that seems to be highly related to the idea of Sisyphus as proposed by Camus, Suryodarmo notes that in the piece, she was seduced to enter a particular time, an instance where her body related with a very specific delicate moment — that of the instant just before falling down. She says: 'in that moment all my consciousness controls my body, but at the same time the risk becomes unpredictable. I might lose control, but the will to get up again is more important to me'.[7]

We could certainly these rather nihilistic approaches: performances that perform the undoing of meaning demonstrate a sense of futility. The point is pointlessness, yet pointlessness is still a point. It could even be said to have become an unthinking style. But how else can the absurd be represented? Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* contains a chapter specifically on the absurd creator or artist. Art is an expression of freedom, according to Camus, because it highlights and helps relate the meaningless of existence. It is an absurd act of rebellion, and it offers no answers to the absurdity of life:

> Art can never be so well served as by a negative thought. Its dark and humiliated proceedings are as necessary to the understanding of a great work as black is to white. To work and create 'for nothing', to sculpture in clay, to know that one's creation has no future, to see one's work destroyed in a day while being aware that, fundamentally, this has no more importance than building for centuries — this is the difficult wisdom that absurd thought sanctions. Performing these two tasks simultaneously, negating on the one hand and magnifying on the other, is the way open to the absurd creator. T[he]y must give the void its colours. [8]

Give the void it colors. It's quite a beautiful notion. One that exemplifies Camus' stance that we must not have hope, yet we cannot anguish over the hopelessness of it all. We should live without appeal, he says. But how is it possible to color in the void? How do we color in a lack, openness, a vacuum? How do we color in the endless and unknowable expanse of empty space that lies beyond the outline of our own limitations? Camus was careful to be very clear that he certainly was not suggesting that art should become a sterile illustration of absurd notions. However, he did believe that if we are to accept absurdity in the rea l world, then it must not be denied in an artist's fictional world. For the absurd artist:

> It is not a matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing.[9]

The Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson often features in his own work, but for the durational performance piece *A Lot of Sorrow,* it is the band The National who take centre stage. For this

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7 *EXERGIE – butter dance* (dir. Melati Suryodarmo, 2000), https://www.melatisuryodarmo.com/works_Exergie_Butter_Dance.html.

8 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 103.

9 Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 87.

event, Kjartansson invited the band to play their three- minute song titled *Sorrow* repeatedly for six hours as part of MoMA PS1's Sunday Sessions in 2013. The lyrics, which begin with '*Sorrow found me when I was young / Sorrow waited, sorrow won*', speak to the yearnings of unrequited love, of '*not wanting to get over you'* and endless, unsatisfied desire and waiting. Playing such songs on repeat, over and over again, at the end of a relationship or just for the thought of wanting more, is not such an unusual occurrence. But staging it so the actual band is playing the song for you over and over on repeat causes something quite different to happen.

'*I don't want to get over you*', the ultimate refrain of the song, speaks to exactly what this act of musical endurance is about. It is like an extended moment of heart bleed. '*I don't want to get over you*'. But it's not quite a perfect act of repetition, is it? We watch the band, The National, in all their human and physical and vulnerable forms become tired and sweaty and perhaps even start to go out of their minds at the task. And then finally, hours in and towards the end, something seems to change, even within this act of monotonous repetition. The performers become reinvigorated. They feed off the audience, the audience who have mostly stayed and endured this durational performance with the band. It's the audience who sing most of the final song. *The one and only encore.* Within this endless loop, we still see some kind of arc. From initial readiness for the task, to exhaustion, breathlessness, and bewilderment, to some kind of communal elation at having achieved something, something quite absurd, together. Meaning is made, broken, and remade through the repetition. And perhaps, not surprisingly, this leads us back to Camus and that certain type of conscious awakening that he describes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

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The choice to stop wanting does not lie in a magic potion, in willpower, or even in refusing the world of the living. To stop wanting, we must fail at believing in wanting. An awareness of the absurdity of a system of seeking value in horizons that are continually shifting inside out does not negate the idea of values themselves. For Camus, the value lies in our individual freedom, passion, and revolt. To stop wanting is to recognize the character of Sisyphus within ourselves. But again, if we are able to choose to fail at wanting, this will not necessarily result in despair. To recognize absurdity, to see such *failurism*, is to call present reality into question. The embodiment of absurdity continues to be called upon by artists and writers as a response to global anxiety, inanity, and horror. As Jennifer Higgie states, 'absurdity is both a challenge to convention and a reflection of what it is to be human: has anyone ever lived a truly rational life? How could we, on such a messy planet? And *why* should we?'[10]

Remember Camus' words: one must imagine Sisyphus happy. Art is seen as a means to support and sustain a lucid consciousness in the face of absurdity and of failure. *What appears absurd to us today calls our present reality into question — provided we see something as absurd at all.* To be absurd is to be out of tune, the etymological roots of the word tell us this. Out of tune, and therefore irrational. Failing to follow the right footsteps, falling, and flailing in the act. In a world that increasingly feels out of tune, it is possible that what we might have

10 Jennifer Higgie, Chantal Faust, Hardeep Pandhal, and Bedwyr Williams, 'Talk: Absurd Cosmos,' *Goldsmiths CCA*, https://goldsmithscca.art/channel/absurd-cosmos/.

previously associated with absurdity is no longer absurd at all. It could be that absurdity-as-failure is invisible, like the Boo Boo bird. Or perhaps it is constantly shifting in form. And it needs to do this. Let's not forget that when Donald Trump made plans to buy Greenland in 2018, of all the insults he received, the one that irked him the most was when the Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, called his idea absurd. Absurdity retains its power still. Do (not) fail to use it wisely.

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ERRONEOUS INTERVENTIONS INTO INFRASTRUCTURE | *THE <<< PIRATE GIRLS >>> SAY...*

NANCY MAURO-FLUDE

The <<< Pirate Girls >>> say... is a performance installation embracing Wi-Fi meshing assemblage and concrete poetry driven by a software collage of venerable email protocols and up-to-the-minute open AI code for conversational agents (Figures 17.1 and 17.2). The process of making the work incorporates an openness to the fruits of the fiasco of failure when techno-socio-cultural imbroglios of networked communication infrastructure malfunction (Figure 17.3). Rather than tiptoeing around obstructions in fear of a crash, the ethos of failure is embraced, as it carries with it a chance to think otherwise.

The <<< Pirate Girls >>> say... enacts interventions in technical infrastructure against its habitual grain through aesthetic and critical actions that extend beyond the practical function of the code. Flagging the value of failure to the so-called common sense of the smooth user experience (UX), the work offers the public a reverse-engineered glimpse of counter-technology. These counter-cultural sites became contested locations of lavish agonistic debate where catastrophe is foregrounded. The intentionality of poetic assemblages of broken chatbot prose trip up capitalist expectations of puritan tropes of literal repair and recovery (Figures 17.3, 17.4, and 17.5). The potency of such failure makes visible the seams and fissures of the concealed undercurrents and schemata of web server infrastructure. To conclude, *The <<< Pirate Girls >>> say...* is an intervention into infrastructure, embracing failure and mayhem, and as a techno-socio-cultural site of rupture. Is there a prototype here to be developed?

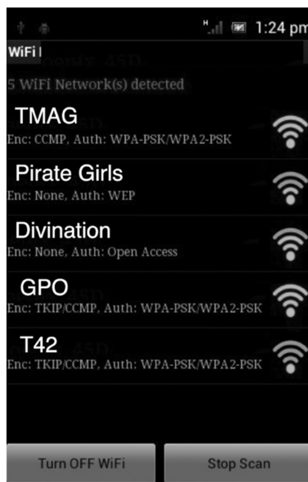

Figure 17.1: WI-FI scan featuring Pirate Girls WI-FI access to captive portal to enter the performance, as viewed from a mobile device. Photo: Mauro-Flude.

Figure 17.2: The <<< Pirate Girls >>> say.... Pirate girls ethernet hub, Pyrate Queen Paraphernalia, installation detail, in the exhibition 'Caught Stealing' curated by Jamie Tsai at the National Art School Gallery, Sydney . Photo: Mauro-Flude.

The Pirate Girls say…

• **Pyrate Queen <pirategirls@divination.cc>**
Monday, 24 June 2019 at 10:00
• n.mauroflude@gmail.com
Show Details

This message is flagged for follow-up.

Ahoy! The Pirate Girls say...

Ourselves we know what
know what we like,
we like, our errors
our errors and distracted excursions are

.and distracted excursions are
..excursions are illuminations. we

......illuminations. we
........are black cat dancers of black
............cat dancers of black
......................of black
........................cat people. should we really want

............................should we really want to know
.....................................really want to know

....to know what herbs,

....what herbs, tinctures things are about

....tinctures things are about
....are about

Salutations
The Pyrate Queen

--
@Pyrate_Queen divination.cc

If you want to walk the plank - email pirategirls@divination.cc with the request "Unsubscribe".

Figure 17.3: Email example of The Pirate Girls say. . . chatbots masquerading as wayward pirate girls in the emails of audiences through inbox repetition, hesitation, gaps and pauses in an email reply, and spatial composition of text stating if you want to receive transmissions and share mutinous sentiments email with the request to subscribe and follow the instructions in your inbox. Photo: Mauro-Flude.

Figure 17.4: A map showing the 'Pirate Grl' WIFI ethernet hubs located in popular bars and galleries of the city of Hobart as locations for unsuspecting audiences to join in the erroneous performative exchange. The locations are shown here by the orange skull and crossbones schema for a large-scale performance live code work Divination: A Romantic Mutiny in a Maelstrom of Data (2016-9), of which The <<< Pirate Girls >>> say... formed a component and premiered in 2016 as a part of Museum of New and Old Art's Winter festival Dark Mofo. Photo: Mauro-Flude.

Figure 17.5: Dark Mofo festival audience documentation and Instagram post about Terms and Conditions of The <<< Pirate Girls >>> say... . Photo: Mauro-Flude.

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SECTION IV:

PLAY AND THE SENSES

FAILURE IN PLAY: BOREDOM AS MEANINGFUL LUDIC MOMENT

SYBILLE LAMMES

Introduction

This chapter is about boredom as a particular kind of failure *in play*. I contend that boredom is not necessary failure of play — rather it breaks with a dominant paradigm in play studies that play is an activity and movement. Such an approach obscures possible translations between play and boredom and feeds into the assumption that boredom is a failure of action that needs to be avoided by players, as well as a failure in how games are designed to keep the 'flow' going.

A reconsideration of boredom *in* play is important because we live in an age in which it becomes increasingly untenable to think of play as a delineated practice as it is part of fluid assemblages. This also presents us with instances of hybridization between play and boredom. Furthermore, the tendency to sever play from boredom rests on a moral judgement in which play is applauded and boredom is perceived as a moral failing belonging to the realm of lazy people and under-achievers. This ethical and binary approach reflects our post-capitalist ideology in which play has become a virtue[1] while boredom is something undesirable, despite paradoxically also embedded in the post-capitalist condition.

But What is Play?

Not only players, but also scholars, easily get lost in play. Definitions of play are manifold: from play more related to games and rules, to play as a state-of-mind,[2] to behavioral approaches (play as flow). The debating of terms is of course part of any scholarly debate and can even be productive. It's part of the game. Should we, for example, make a difference between play and games (a distinction that not every language allows us to make)? Is play a delineated activity (Huizinga's magic circle), or should we speak rather of a lusory attitude? Or should we, as some game designers would prefer, approach play as a closed formal structure?

Yet however different the stakes and opinions may be about what play is, isn't, or should be, there is one particular premise in the field of game and play studies where academics seem to be less at odds about. Their approaches, fields, and disciplines may be diverse, and this may sometimes even lead to contradictory ideas (e.g. is play medium specific?), but there is one trait on which scholars seem to close rank, and that is that play is about *doing* and *action*. For example, Starbuck and Webster write that play is 'a socio-cultural involvement in activities that give participants

1 Miquel Sicart, *Play Matters*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014, 2.
2 Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*, Cambridge. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.

pleasure'[3], while play-scholar Miguel Sicart writes that 'play is brought by people to the complex interrelations with and between things that form daily life'. [4] Game scholar Schell asserts that 'a game is a problem-solving activity, approached with a playful attitude',[5] and play designer Jane McGonigal defines play as 'the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles'.[6] From a communication studies perspective, Bateson understands play as 'the exchange of the metacommunicative message[. . .]These actions, in which we now engage',[7] and Walz states that play is about pleasure and 'is grounded in and executed through movement'.[8]

This small anthology may be somewhat confusing, again showing the width and variety of approaches to play depending on field, theory, and research object. Yet what is striking about these diverse conceptual approaches to the ludic is that they all stress that play is about doing and the pleasure that this doing or acting can bring. To extract the kind of verbs and words predominantly used by game and play scholars from these definitions: activity, attempting, bringing, pleasure, exchange, engage, movement.

Hence what play seems *not* to be about, according to such definitions, is about *not* doing, unattempting, non-engagement, stillness. Although not explicitly indicated in the above, some leading scholars in the field go a step further and firmly state that play fails when activity ceases. Being lost in play, or in the flow, is for them about anything but nothingness or stillness, let alone boredom. Most famously, social psychologist Csikszentmihalyi proposed a theory of play in which one enters a state of flow which ends — and thus fails — when boredom takes over. As he wrote with his colleague Bennett:

> Play may stretch over longer or shorter periods of time but is not characterised by boredom or anxiety.[9] (emphasis added)

Similarly, Mathwick and Rigdon, when discussing online searches as play, believe that play falters when boredom takes over**:** 'Boredom during online information search should be associated with reduced perceptions of play'.[10] Also, according to Walz, the cut-off points of play can be summarized as either over-reaction under-reaction.[11] What is intriguing is that such scholars indicate that when boredom kicks in play always fails. But what if we consider the possibility that play *includes* or *invites* boredom? In other words, does play necessarily cease to exist when boredom takes over as a failure of action?

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3 William H Starbuck and Jane Webster, 'When Is Play Productive?', *Accounting, Management and Information Technologies* 1.1 (1991): 71—90.

4 Sicart, *Play Matters*, 2.

5 Jesse Schell, *The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses*, CRC Press, 2015, 47.

6 Jane McGonigal, *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*, London: Penguin Press, 2011, 55.

7 Gregory Bateson, 'A Theory of Play and Fantasy', *Psychiatric Research Reports* 2 (1955): 39—51.

8 Steffen P. Walz, *Toward a Ludic Architecture: The Space of Play and Games,* Pittsburgh: ETC Press, 2010.

9 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Stith Bennett, 'An Exploratory Model of Play', *American Anthropologist* 73, no. 1 (1971): 45—58.

10 Charla Mathwick and Edward Rigdon, 'Play, Flow, and the Online Search Experience', *Journal of Consumer Research* 31.2 (2004): 324—32.

11 Walz, *Toward a Ludic Architecture*.

Play in Boredom

Many scholars have drawn attention to how our Western culture has become more openly playful since the so-called digital turn and how play has become more interwoven with areas that have traditionally been viewed as non-playful. Some have called this transformation a ludification of our culture[12] and others a gamification[13] of our post-capitalist culture.[14] Pivotal to this cultural transformation is that, through our engagement with digital technologies, play has become less distinguishable from other daily activities or occupations. This ludification and the merging of play with 'other' cultural domains can manifests itself in different ways. For example, applied games are often used to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods, or how work in offices has become transformed to 'playbour',[15] or how running and exercise that take place on the streets or parks of cities are shared through location-based games.[16] Through the user interfaces of digital media, we engage with the ludic anywhere we are and whatever we do and form dynamic networks of connections. Playfulness has thus left the traditional playground and has become an important part of many other daily activities.

Since the digital turn we can also observe a surge of different playful engagements that combine play with boredom. Waiting for a connection, getting lost in *Grand Theft Auto*, waiting for our turn on Tinder: it seems to become increasingly tricky to think of play as always being the opposite of boredom and of boredom as a failure of play. This is, for example, foregrounded in so-called casual games, like *Candy Crush*, *Mini Metro*, *Farm Heroes*, or *Bejeweled*. These are games with simple rules, that you can dip in and out of while waiting or passing time. Such games are often not very complex and are easy to learn and can be played to manage — so not necessarily to counter — boredom, while on the go.[17]

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12 Joost Raessens, 'Playful Identities, or the Ludification of Culture', *Games and Culture* 1.1 (2006): 52; Valerie Frissen et al. (eds), *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Media Cultures*, Amsterdam: AUP, 2015; Anne Dippel and Sonia Fizek, 'Ludification of Culture: The Significance of Play and Games in Everyday Practices of the Digital Era', in Gertraud Koch (ed), *Digitisation: Theories and Concepts for Empirical Cultural Research,* London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 276—92.

13 Stefan Deterding et al., 'Gamification. Using Game-Design Elements in Non-Gaming Contexts', in *Proceedings of the 2011 Annual Conference Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, ACM, 2011, pp. 2425—28; Mathias Fuchs, Sonia Fizek, Paolo Ruffino, and Niklas Schrape (eds), *Rethinking Gamification*, Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2014.

14 Julian Dibbell, *Play Money: Or, How I Quit My Day Job and Made Millions Trading Virtual Loot*, New York: Basic Books, 2006.

15 Sonia Fizek, 'Gift Players or Playbourers? Who Is Playing Citizen Science Games?', in *1st Joint International Conference of DIGRA and FDG* (DiGRA, 2016); Raul Ferrer-Conill, 'Playbour and the Gamification of Work: Empowerment, Exploitation and Fun as Labour Dynamics', in *Technologies of Labour and the Politics of Contradiction,* Springer, 2018, pp. 193—210.

16 Emma Witkowski, 'Running With Zombies Capturing New Worlds Through Movement and Visibility Practices With Zombies, Run!', *Games and Culture*, 2015, 1555412015613884.

17 Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson, 'Playing the Waiting Game: Complicating Notions of (Tele) Presence and Gendered Distraction in Casual Mobile Gaming', COST 298 Conference: The Good, The Bad and the Challenging, Copenhagen, Denmark, 13-15 May, 2009; Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson, *Gaming in Social, Locative, and Mobile Media,* Springer, 2014; Larissa Hjorth, Jean Burgess, and Ingrid Richardson, *Studying Mobile Media: Cultural Technologies, Mobile Communication, and the IPhone*, Routledge, 2012.

In addition, social platforms and apps have affordances that make users oscillate between inert play and risky play. Dating apps are an interesting case in this respect. As a user of Tinder aptly explained, 'But sometimes I also swipe in a public-private place, such as in idle moments, when I commute, for example', and 'It is a little guilty experience, I guess, and a little paradoxical. I feel it is between casting or fishing and playing roulette. I do not know… Tinder sucks […] (laughs)'.[18] Here we see that users play the game of Tindering to pass time during idle moments. It is described as an oscillation between the act of fishing (as a slow and sometimes boring pastime) and roulette (as a heightened, risky, and exciting activity).

Failing Awareness

Media scholar David Berry suggests that there is an intricate relation between the repetition, automation, and hyper-connectivity within contemporary cultures and the ways we experience boredom.[19] Or, as Heidegger famously wrote in relation to modernity:

> The man of today has no more time for anything, and yet, when he has free time, it immediately becomes too long. He must kill long periods of time by whiling them away through pastimes [...] In this 'ennui' nothing appeals to us anymore, everything has as much or as little value as everything else, because a deep boredom penetrates our existence to the core. Is this possibly our final condition, that a deep boredom, like an insidious fog, creeps to and from in the bottomless depths of our existence?[20]

What Heidegger describes can help to substantiate the paradox of ludo-boredom[21] at this time and age further. Indeed, already when Heidegger was writing about our modern existence, there was this ontological paradox at work in which we need to have leisure time but don't know how to deal with it when we have time off. We have no time to do anything else but work, but we also fail to know what to do when we are not working.

Translated to our times, as Berry points out, one could say that this ennui has taken a new turn. We are now alienated from a *computerized* and automated world, not in touch with how this determines our actions and how dependent we are on the networks of control in which we are embedded. We are never offline and always in the matrix, therefore not noticing that we are part of it.[22] We are hyperactive, hyper-embedded, and hyperconnected, without even noticing it and we need to be bored *and* play to be weaned off this. Yet — and this is crucial — what we engage in when we try to disengage is all too often a reverberation of work. We mimic the tedious practices of labor in our free time.

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18 Gaby David and Carolina Cambre, 'Screened Intimacies: Tinder and the Swipe Logic', *Social Media+ Society* 2.2 (2016): 2056305116641976.

19 David M. Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital,* Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2015.

20 Cited in Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital,* 98.

21 Sybille Lammes et al., 'Ludic Boredom: Discussing a Manifesto', in The 12th Digital Games Research Association Conference (DIGRA), 2019.

22 Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital*.

What we can learn from Heidegger — but also from Horkheimer and Adorno — is that work and play bleed into each other and that we often mimic boring chores we do for work in our time off work.[23] Hence crushing candies, minding cattle, driving trucks, clicking buttons, swiping screens, looking at others playing on YouTube. One could assert that neologisms like 'playbor' or 'weisure' literally capitalize on this idea that play is the prolongation of work, hinting at a merging of play and labor or work and leisure and propagating a lifestyle in which work is fun and play is work.

Play is a way to counter our culture of habit and repetition, but can at the same time reinforce a late-capitalist mentality.[24] So, *play-repetition* is a way to keep things nicely ticking over and not make ideologies fail. It is trying to keep boredom at bay, but inviting it back in through the backdoor. Over and over again we do the same tasks, and we replicate that in play, from Tindering to *Candy Crush*, *Harvest Moon*, and maybe even sometimes in breathing in and out for meditation or while swimming. Play and boredom can become merged or hybridized through such repetitions, which may result in a failure of awareness, but not necessarily in failure of play or ideology.

Waiting as Ludo-Boredom

Yet sometime things do not go as we expect them to go. The technologies we use to play fail, for example. No connection with the server, an error in the software, a flat battery, a stolen phone, a wet phone, a white spot without reception. But also waiting: waiting for our turn in a conversation on a new media platform, when playing a turn-based game, when fishing for possible date. When we allow or have to allow waiting in play and we don't engage in Tindering, Facebook scrolling, or clicking cows, a state of being emerges which is different from repetition.

Unlike repetition, waiting during play, I would argue, opens up space for a far more reflective state in which boredom and play can merge. This can, for example, be a place in which to develop a new strategy, or to stand as an invisible still hunter waiting for prey, but also for a play scholar to analyse what's happening.[25] These moments are important points of reflection and can lead to creative and reflective thinking. This may be what Benjamin meant when he asserted that 'boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience'.[26] It may also be related to recent research that suggests we underestimate the creative merit of boredom, often just dismissing it as a failure of doing. We are, after all, culturally conditioned to think of

23 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry as Mass Deception', in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (eds), *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979, pp. 94-137, 43.

24 Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital*; Clancy Wilmott, Emma Fraser, and Sybille Lammes, ''I Am He. I Am He. Siri Rules': Work and Play with the Apple Watch', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 21.1 (2018): 78—95.

25 Sybille Lammes and Stephanie de Smale, 'Hybridity, Reflexivity & Mapping: A Collaborative Ethnography of Postcolonial Gameplay', *Open Library of Humanities* 4.1 (2018): 1—31.

26 Carlo Salzani, 'The Atrophy of Experience: Walter Benjamin and Boredom', in *Essays on Boredom and Modernity* (Brill, 2009), 127—54; Bernard Suits, 'Tricky Triad: Games, Play, and Sport', *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 15.1 (1988): 1—9.

boredom as a negative condition that is for the underachievers, the losers, and the inert. We are conditioned to thin of boredom *as the opposite of happiness.*

Yet as philosopher Elpidorou pointed out, it may be a very good thing to be bored: 'In the absence of boredom, one would remain trapped in unfulfilling situations, and miss out on many emotionally, cognitively, and socially rewarding experiences'.[27] 'Boredom is both a warning that we are not doing what we want to be doing and a "push" that motivates us to switch goals and projects.'[28] From this perspective, one could not only conclude that play and boredom have more in common — as they share this capacity to push us to new creative interventions — but also that the dichotomy that is often introduced in play-studies between boredom and play partly rests on a moral judgment that applauds play and disapproves of boredom, and sees it as a non-desired state of being, a state of failure.

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28 Vivian Giang, 'How Moments of Boredom Help Us Achieve More', *BBC,* 19 July 2017, https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20170719-how-moments-of-boredom-help-us-achieve-more.

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FAILURE IN THE FIELD: ETHNOGRAPHY, ITERATION, MULTISPECIES/ECOLOGICAL RELATIONALITY AND GRIEF

LARISSA HJORTH

I fail all the time.

Methodologically.

Epistemologically.

Research translation.

Research creation.

Multispecies relationality.

And each failure I mourn.

Waves of grief.

I sit with them.

I listen to them.

I learn from them.

Prologue

In this chapter, I explore some of my various ethnographic failures. As I explore the limits of ethnography, I also examine how failure and grief are interwoven. Rather than ignoring failure and grief, I argue we need rituals to acknowledge the failure, to sit with it for all its awkwardness, and to grieve it. I am interested in grief as a quotidian practice that can help us connect, listen, and learn. From failure and grief we can heighten our awareness, curiosity, and reflexivity to possibilities and uncertainties. Rather than grief and failure being individuated and thus neoliberal, I argue that both are practices that are embedded in our relationalities, kinning, and being in the world. Let's begin the meander. In homes. With animals. In climate disaster.

Enter the Messy Field: Failure as Iteration

Like many homes around the world, the Madisons' household in Adelaide (Australia) is playful in many ways. Some areas of the household are hubs for social activity and media use, while

other spaces are quieter and more contemplative. The emotional fabric of the household follows certain rhythms of play across the spatial organization of the lounge room, computer room, and bedrooms. In the communal space of the lounge room, the play texture becomes more complex. A range of devices and play practices can be found. This assemblage includes game consoles (Wii and PlayStation), two iPads on the lounge, and three iPhones. In the evenings when the parents and their daughter are home, the lounge becomes the focus for interaction and engagement — a highly social space for shared conversation, games, and creative play. This play sometimes includes the Madisons' cat, Bonnie, who is known to be fond of the iPad game *Cat Fishing* (Figure 19.1). As is the case in many homes, playful domestic practices often include family pets. Pets, companion animals, or what Anne Galloway calls our 'more-than-human' companions play an essential role in many humans' kinshi

Figure 19.1: Bonnie plays with the iPad game Friskers, 2015. Photo: Larissa Hjorth.

The Madison household contains many stories of intergenerational and multispecies play and playfulness. In the domestic environment, this infusion of playfulness throughout the emotional and material space of the home might be described as a kind of ambient play.[1] Ambient play is the dynamics and relationality of media, human, and more-than-humans as they move in and out of the background to the foreground and back again. When I began my collaborative ethnographic research, I thought I was studying the relationship between intergenerational humans and media in households. However, as we began to enter people's homes and talk to our participants, animals started to get in the way.

Cats siting on laptops in protest.

Dogs Skyping.

1 Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson, *Ambient Play*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020.

Cats playing games on the iPads.

The list went on.

The human participants constantly spoke and engaged with their more-than-humans. Before long, we realized that we had underestimated the more-than-human counterparts in our domestic environments. In Australia, two thirds of households have pets that the humans define as crucial family members.[2] One third of Australians prefer animals to humans.[3] We had failed. This was not digital ethnography. This field demanded multispecies ethnography. And more.

Our research question and methods failed.

We needed to revise it all.

Pivot.

Figure 19.2: #dearfuturecitizen: Cultural prompts into perceptions of data of the dead/ death data literacy, 2018. Photo: Larissa Hjorth.

Ethnography and Failure

Being an ethnographer is always about failure. Stories of failure shape the ethnographer's ability to iterate — demanding them to listen and being reflexive. Iteration has become a key tool and framework for many creative disciplines to actively engage with failure in critical and productive

2 Stephanie Dalzell, 'Do You Prefer Pets to People? So Do About a Third of Australians, According to Australia Talks', *ABC News,* Saturday 29 May 2021, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-29/australia-talks-pets-easing-loneliness-and-bringing-people-joy/100163858

3 Dalzell, 'Do You Prefer Pets to People?'.

ways.[4] It's about the failure of the research question to stand still in the movement of the field. It's about the failure of methods that need to be reworked in and through the field.

Behind every ethnography is a story of how the researcher thought they were going to study something in the field, but then the field became something else (or was something else from the beginning?). It's about playing with endless uncertainty; trying to remain true to the field — its people, its more-than-humans, its stories, its ways of being. It is this failure that is crucial to doing ethnography. It involves a deep listening and reflexivity that means we, as ethnographers, are contingent to the field. As I will suggest, multispecies ethnography can help us to acknowledge failure as it moves in and through life, death, and afterlife continuities, resetting our attunement to relationality.

For James Clifford, ethnography — anthropology's methodological approach — has always been interested in 'invention' not 'representation'.[5] This interventive, creative, and non-representative role of ethnography is taken up by Philip Vannini in his 'animating lifeworlds', in which he argues '(n)on-representational theoretical ideas have influenced the way ethnographers tackle important methodological and conceptual undercurrents in their work, such as vitality, performativity, corporeality, sensuality, and mobility'.[6] This is ethnography that embraces uncertainty and risk as part of its methodological toolkit.

While my first decade of ethnographies were focused on intergenerational relationships in and through media, loss and disaster started to take my focus from 2011. Personal loss of a family member was proceeded by the Japanese Fukushima disaster in March of that year, followed by a series of natural disasters such as floods and fires. The world, as a field, was telling me something. I had failed to listen. I had got sidetracked on the details. I had to listen. Listen deeply. I realized that I had been failing to listen to the various levels and textures of grief — not just personal but rather cultural, social, and ecological. If I didn't listen and write these stories, the grief could become trauma.

Listening to failure.

Being attuned to failure.
Failure as a way to iterate in the field with the field.

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4 John Sharp and Colleen Macklin, *Iterate: Ten Lessons in Design and Failure*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019.

5 James Clifford, 'Paradise', *Visual Anthropology* 11.1 (1995): 92-117.

6 Philip Vannini, 'Non-Representational Ethnography: New Ways of Animating Lifeworlds', *Cultural geographies.* 22.2 (2015): 317—327, 317

Figure 19.3: #disasterintohope series: Exploring responses to climate disaster and our ability to find hope, 2020. Photo: Larissa Hjorth.

More-Than-Human Ethnography: Human Exceptionalism Failure

Multispecies researchers have challenged scholarly traditions, moving away from 'default' human exceptionalism and towards more complex relational processes. More-than-human relations have been the ongoing focus of a number of multispecies and animal studies scholars including Donna Haraway[7], Anna Tsing[8], Anne Galloway[9], Thom van Dooren[10], Eduardo Kohn[11], Rebekah Fox and Nancy Gee[12], and Andrea Petitt and Brandt-off[13], among many others, who have actively challenged traditional ways of thinking about our being-in-the-world. For

7 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 2003; Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008; Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

8 Anna Tsing, 'Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species'. *Environmental Humanities,* 1.1 (2012): 141-154.

9 Anne Galloway, 'More-Than-Human Lab: Critical and Ethnographic Experiments After Human Exceptionalism'.

10 Thom Van Dooren, 'Care: Living Lexicon for the Environmental Humanities', *Environmental Humanities* 5: 291—294.

11 Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward An Anthropology Beyond The Human,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

12 Rebekah Fox and Nancy Gee, 'Changing Conceptions of Care: The Humanization of the Companion Animal Relationship,' *Society and Animals*, 24.2 (2016): 107-128.

13 Andrea Petitt and Keri Brandt-off 'Zoocialization: Learning Together, BecomingTogether in a Multispecies Triad,' *Society* & *Animals* (2022): 1-18.

Haraway, the failure of science and technology in exacerbating rather than providing solutions to ecological destruction, challenges us to 'radically rethink' the relationship between humans and 'nature', and dilate our sense of affinity, responsibility, and care to encompass animals as co-evolutionary 'kin'.[14]

Environmental humanities has long been focused on the ethical and careful ways in which we might listen to the world as a relationality between human and non-humans. Listening here is about de-centring the human as centre and central. As Anja M. Kanngieser and Zoe Todd note, Western thought has long (and problematically) separated place, thought, and relations.[15] Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watts identify this as separating 'ontology from epistemology, knowing from being, and place from story'.[16] The relationality between humans, non-humans, and land is co-constitutive and reciprocal. Such approaches can be called a 'kincentric' approach to environmental humanities.[17]

According to Van Horn et al., we need to radically revise the relationality between humans and more-than-humans in terms of kinship and kinning.[18] For Anna Tsing, understanding multispecies approaches requires acknowledging that 'human nature is an interspecies relationship'.[19] As Tsing notes, adopting 'an interspecies frame' opens up 'possibilities for biological as well as cultural research trajectories'.[20] Anthropology has long been interested in problematising the role of representation and the politics of speaking on behalf of others — including more-than-humans and non-humans.

Galloway's 'more-than-human design' also deploys invention as a speculative proposition in which an interspecies frame is sketched through complex and intertwined ethnographies of the various actors.[21] Galloway's interest concerns 'how we might develop an understanding of non-human engagement' through speculative design and a sociology of associations and expectations, so as to better comprehend 'the productive or generative capacities of human/nonhuman relations'.[22] Galloway puts failure at the centre of her exploration — constantly iterating in hyper-reflexive ways to the various human, non-human, and more-than-human

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14 Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble*.

15 Anja Kanngieser and Zoe Todd, 'From Environmental Case Study to Environmental Kin Study. *History and Theory*, 59.3 (2020): 385-393.

16 Vanessa Watts, 'Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!)', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education* & *Society* 2.1 (2013).

17 See Nicholas J. Reo, 'Inawendiwin and Relational Accountability in Anishnaabeg Studies: The Crux of the Biscuit,' *Journal of Ethnobiology* 39.1 (2019): 66, and Enrique Salmón, 'Kincentric Ecology: Indigenous Perceptions of the Human-Nature Relationship,' *Ecological Applications* 10.5 (2000): 1327-1332.

18 Gavin Van Horn, Robin Wall Kimmerer, John Hausdoerffer (eds). *Kinship,* Canada: Centre for Humans and Animals, 2021.

19 Tsing, 'Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species', 141.

20 Tsing, 'Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species', 141.

21 Galloway, 'More-Than-Human Lab'.

22 Anne Galloway, 'Emergent Media Technologies, Speculation, Expectation and Human/Nonhuman Relations', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media,* 57.1 (2013): 53-65, 54.

actors. Failure is not a mistake. It is about acknowledging limitations. As Galloway argues, 'the ability to invoke, trouble and "inhabit" other worlds and worldviews is instrumental to qualitative research's critical and creative role in knowledge-making'.[23] This troubling of knowledge-making is crucial in my ethnographies whereby I deploy creative practice and 'research creation' (i.e. using creative methods to engage participants and research translation to engage publics).[24]

For many humans, animals are a core part of their kinship, requiring us to rethink kinship to encompass multispecies relationality as well as other ways of being and knowing.[25] According to human-animal ethnographers Petitt and Brandt-off, understanding this relationality of the 'multispecies triad' can help us developed a more nuanced model of multispecies intersectionality and kinship.[26] In understanding multispecies kinship, we need to acknowledge processes of living and also dying — requiring us to recognize the complex textures of grief involved in life's transition. We need a multispecies kinship model that allows us to witness and show the growing stories of grief, to construct a grief literacy framework that can allow productive ways to act and change our current predicament. This kinship model also needs to acknowledge other relationalities across human, non-human, living, and non-living ties. It needs to move beyond empathic failure.

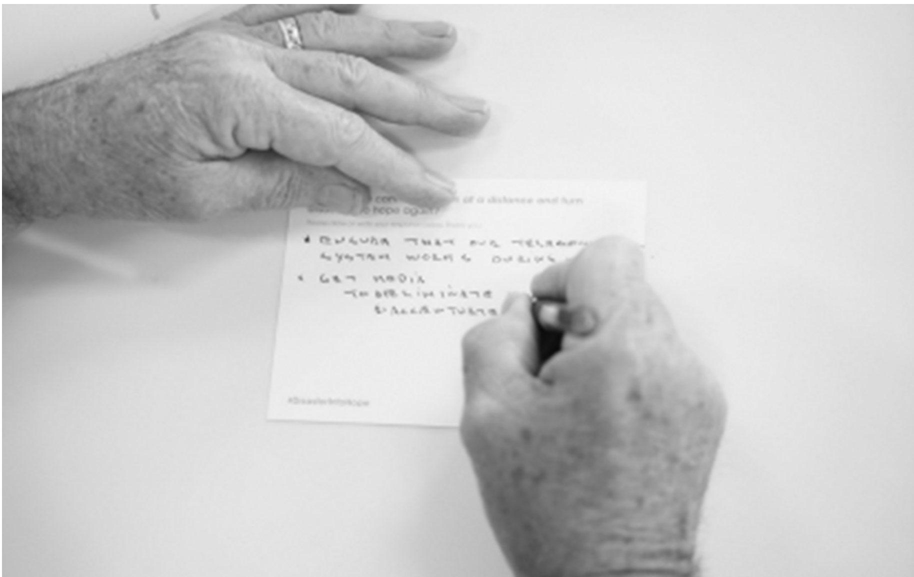

Figure 19.4: #disastersintohope postcard prompts: Writing through grief to hope, 2019. Photo: Larissa Hjorth.

23 Galloway, 'Emergent Media Technologies', 54.

24 Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, 'Creation-as-Research: Critical Making in Complex Environments.' *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 40.1 (2015): 49—52.

25 Van Horn, *Kinship*.

26 Petitt and Brandt-off, 'Zoocialization'.

Empathic Failure: Failure to Mourn in World of Increasing Disaster

Failure isn't just related to the multispecies relationality of kinship. It is also about how we connect the land and the environment in a time of the Anthropocene (i.e. increasing catastrophic impacts of human activity on the earth's climate and ecosystems).[27] For Richard Eckersely, the threat of the potential climate apocalypse takes three responses: nihilism, fundamentalism, and activism.[28] In an increasingly unprecedented precedent of climate disaster and pandemics, we need to attune and enhance our empathy and resilience through intersectional grief empathy and grief literacy.[29]

Grief reflects cultural hierarchies.[30] Some forms of grief are more visible than others and other forms of grief are disenfranchised/illegitimated (unacknowledged)[31] — that is, grief or loss that cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported. Grief needs to be witnessed[32] and can take many media forms, including affective witnessing[33] — whereby media blurs distinctions between mourner and witness — and mobile witnessing — whereby the mobile device frames the experience.[34]

And yet, there are many forms of disenfranchised grief emerging — from ecological grief (eco-grief)[35] to unanticipated futures.[36] As Spain and colleagues note, this 'occurs within a broader system of empathic failure, where social, psychological, and relational processes

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27 Kenneth Doka, *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognising Hidden Sorrow,* Lexington, MA: Jossey Bass, 1989; Kenneth Doka, 'Disenfranchised Grief', In Kenneth Doka (ed), *Living with grief: Loss in later life,* Washington, DC: The Hospice Foundation of America, 2002, pp. 159—168. Doka's work has been further deployed to explore multispecies approaches to grief and has the potential to be framed in terms of ecogrief processes.

28 Richard Eckersley, 'Nihilism, Fundamentalism, or Activism: Three Responses to Fears of the Apocalypse', *The Futurist*, 42.1 (2008): 35-39.

29 Lauren Breen, Lauren J Breen, Daisuke Kawashima, Karima Joy, Susan Cadell, David Roth, Amy Chow, and Mary Ellen Macdonald, 'Grief Literacy: A Call to Action for Compassionate Communities,' *Death Studies*, 46:2 (2022): 425-433; Lauren Breen, Samar M Aoun, Moira O'Connor, Andrew R Johnson, Denise Howting' 'Effect of Caregiving at End of Life on Grief, Quality of Life and General Health: A Prospective, Longitudinal, Comparative Study,' *Palliative Medicine* 34 (2020): 145-154.

30 Judith Butler, 'Violence, Mourning, Politics', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 4:1 (2003): 9-37; Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, London: Verso, 2009.

31 Doka, *Disenfranchised Grief.*

32 David Kessler (2020) cited in Scott Berinato 'That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief', *Harvard Business Review,* March 23 2020, https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief

33 Michael Richardson and Kerstin Schankweiler, 'Affective Witnessing', in Jan Slaby J and Christian von Scheve (eds), *Affective societies: Key concepts*, New York: Routledge, 2019; Penelope Papailias, 'Witnessing in the Age of the Database: Viral Memorials, Affective Publics, and the Assemblage of Mourning', *Memory Studies*, 9.4 (2016): 437—454.

34 Anna Reading, 'Mobile Witnessing: Ethics and the Camera Phone in the War on Terror', *Globalizations*, 6.1 (2009): 61—76; Emily Keightley and Anna Reading, 'Mediated Mobilities', *Media, Culture & Society* 36.3(2014): 285—301.

35 Ashlee Cunsolo and Neville Ellis, 'Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change Related Loss', *Nature Climate Change,* 8 (2018): 275-281; Thom Van Dooren, 'Care'.

36 Kessler cited in Berinato, 'That Discomfort you're feeling is grief'.

interact to inhibit social support'.[37] For Neimeyer and Jordan, disenfranchised grief is part of an 'empathic failure' across four levels: (a) self with self, (b) self with family, (c) self with community, and (d) self with transcendent reality.[38] For Doka, disenfranchised grief is loss is not socially accepted or recognized.[39] According to Doka, rituals like eulogies play a crucial role in allowing the 'right to grieve', which can then provide social support. If we, as Breen and colleagues argue, develop grief literacy, disenfranchised grief could become increasingly uncommon.[40]

I would like to argue that through multispecies ethnography we can glean other ways of being in the world, ones that acknowledge life, death, and afterlife continuities.[41] Many have been mourning climate change for decades — the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has been releasing report after report documenting the scientific evidence that global warming of more than 1.5 degrees is 'almost inevitable.' And yet we have also witnessed decades of disenfranchisement by politicization and misinformation from fossil fuel lobby groups. And so our mourning went unacknowledged, turning into trauma.[42] How can we find hope through uncertainty and impeding disaster?

I would suggest creative practice offers ways to channel our grief productively. For example, in Amanda Lohrey's *The Labyrinth,* a mother mourns her incarnated son by building a labyrinth in the sand. The impossible task — failure from the start — is about her journey to find people willing to build the impossible with her.[43] The layering of ecological grief (ecogrief) and the associated distress and melancholy — what has been called solastaglia — has become palpable in the text.[44] And yet there is a struggle to give this grief a shared vocabulary, to acknowledge it and connect.

37 Breanna Spain, Lisel O'Dwyer, and Stephen Moston, 'Pet Loss: Understanding Disenfranchised Grief, Memorial Use, and Posttraumatic Growth', *Anthrozoös*, 32.4 (2019): 555-568, 556.

38 Robert Neimeyer and John Jordan, 'Disenfranchisement As Empathic Failure: Grief Therapy And The Coconstruction of Meaning', in K. J. Doka (ed). *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies For Practice,* Champaign, IL: Research Press, 2002, pp. 95—117.

39 Doka, *Disenfranchised Grief.*

40 Breen et al. 'Grief Literacy'.

41 Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman, and Steven Nickman, *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief,* London & New York: Routledge, 1996.

42 Jonica Newby, *Beyond Climate Grief,* Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2021.

43 Amanda Lohrey, *The Labyrinth*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2020.

44 Glenn Albrecht, Gina-Maree Sartore, Linda Connor, Nick Higginbotham, Sonia Freeman, Brian Kelly, Helen Stain, Anne Tonna, and Georgia Pollard, 'Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change', *Australas Psychiatry,* 15.Suppl 1 (2007): S95-8.

Figure 19.5: Wait & Play cultural probe study, 2017. Photo: Larissa Hjorth.

Rather than grief being individual, as psychologists might frame it, cultural studies approaches to grief — such as Judith Butler's work — see it as a cultural practice that reflects and reproduces a society's norms.[45] Here, empathic failure can be seen in online vehicles like Twitter, which are overflowing with disenfranchised grief. Acknowledging grief can help us understand complex transitions in life and build resilience around tangible and more tangible forms of loss, from ecogrief (ecological grief) to the death of a loved one. Phenomena such as disenfranchised (unacknowledged) grief can lead to health issues.[46] The mental health impact of various forms of grief — such as ecogrief as a response to climate change loss — have become a key issue impacting our health services.[47] Grief around the loss of anticipated futures presented by the pandemic will continue to grow.[48] *Solastalgia.*

I want to argue for a hopeful future. I constantly codesign with others to make alternative possibilities. I workshop in and around failure as an inevitable part of becoming (see Figures 19.2-19.6).[49] I workshop cultural probes like postcards (Figure 19.5) that acknowledge failures, glitches, cracks,[50] in which play as a method, series of critical inquiries and

45 Judith Butler, 'Violence, Mourning, Politics', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 4:1 (2003): 9-37; Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, London: Verso, 2009.

46 Breen et al. 'Grief Literacy'.

47 Cunsolo and Ellis, 'Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change Related Loss'.

48 Kessler cited in Scott Berinato, 'That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief'.

49 See my website for further details about workshops: www.larissahjorth.net; see www.playbouring.net

50 Here I am utilising Bill Gaver's notion of cultural probes as a creative prompt that collects often tacit perceptions. See Bill Gaver, Anthony Dunne, and Elena Pacenti, 'Cultural Probes', *Interactions* 6.1 (1999): 21-29.

conceptual lens takes us through empathy and risk taking. In these workshops failure is constantly palpable. Mechanisms like postcard prompts invite us to listen.

I argue for a future that acknowledges that failure is omnipresent and, like grief, needs to be sat with; listened to, for all its awkwardness, its discomfort, its sadness. By acknowledging the limits of ethnography — even multispecies and ecological approaches — to be in the world, we are constantly remaining humble to the world. And it is failure's ability to connect us with humility that could be the success for a more caring and sustainable world.

Figure 19.6: Future Play workshops: Children collaborate to create ecological games, 2017. Photo: Larissa Hjorth.

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SNIFFS OF FAILURE: DISCOMFORT, UNEASE AND SERENDIPITY IN SENSORY COMMUNICATION DESIGN

KATE MCLEAN

Introduction

In 2018 I was I was invited to run an event to demonstrate the potential of smell in storytelling. I proposed a series of participant smellwalks, and subsequent mapping, to encourage the inclusion of smells in the stories we tell and share. My design-led practice of smellscape mapping requests participants to work through their own fear of failure in their capacity to detect and describe smells. Retrospectively I can count numerous points of failure and will highlight three that stand out in this chapter: i) failure to be able to smell (anosmia), ii) failure to record meaning associated with participant-drawn symbols (researcher oversight), and a iii) serendipitous failure in weather (rain). I will also allude to some advantages of regarding failure as an integral part of the design process. My specialist field, sensory communication design, is nascent[1]. My research into communication of olfactory perception using a range of visualization techniques and mappings has been queried and challenged since 'Smellmap Edinburgh' exhibited in at the *International Edinburgh Science Festival* in 2011.[2] While the history of mapping smells dates to the 1700s to track trajectories of disease and industrial emissions, there remains an overarching critique of representing smells due to their ephemerality.[3]

From this perspective there are more reasons to not map smells than there are to do so: smells cannot be seen and therefore cannot be verified; smells are subjective and cannot be validated; smells are ephemeral and cannot be pinpointed; smells do not have defined area of existence or static boundaries; smells do not exist — except as collections of airborne molecules — until humans differentiate them; physiological processes such as habituation and adaptation[4] affect human capacity to detect smells; humans are inconsistent at identifying smells.

Despite the series of objections, there is precedent for mapping smells in place from fields such as odor monitoring, public health, and olfactory art dating back to the 1700s in Europe and the USA.[5] Interestingly, historical smell maps point to failures of urban industrial planning to take

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1 Katherine Jane McLean*, Nose-First: Practices of Smellwalking and Smellscape Mapping'*, PhD diss., Royal College of Art, 2019. https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/3945/.

2 Kate McLean, 'Smellmap: Edinburgh | Sensory Maps', *Sensory Maps*, 2011. http://sensorymaps.com/portfolio/smell-map-edinburgh/.

3 Chris Perkins and Kate McLean, 'Smell walking and mapping', in Sarah M. Hall and Helen Holmes (eds) *Mundane Methods*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020, pp. 157–173. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2022.100905

4 Trygg Engen, *Odor Sensation and Memory*, New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1991.

5 'Map Showing Location of Odor Producing Industries of New York and Brooklyn', Charles F. Chandler

account of odors in factories as the highlight sites where the emissions impact. Recent creative approaches to sensory communication design embrace and collate numerous variables to engage meaningful dialogue about smells, and the human capacity to detect, differentiate, and describe them.

Failure in Design

While dictionary definitions of failure posit it as the opposite of success — anywhere on a sliding scale between a flop and a disaster, pertaining to both quantity and quality — failure is integral to the design process. This is especially relevant to smell mapping as design that seeks to render visible a frequently overlooked and invisible to the eye sensory way of knowing. Rothbucher and Rothbucher[6] explain that prior to defining failure, it is first necessary to consider design's function. To design something (or to actively change it) is based on a premise that the original artefact or practice is in some way lacking. Thus, failure is regarded as the initial starting point for a brief for the 'problem solver' designer. In smell mapping, the initial starting point is smells' failure to be noticed, its invisibility.

In addition to failure as a starting point for design, failure is also integral to the design process whose goal according to Friedman is to 'change existing situations into preferred ones'.[7] The design process includes scope for failure and a desire to learn from that failure; in-built is the concept of 'iteration',[8] in which multiple versions of a design can be tested and compared with each other prior to selecting and re-developing a final optimal version. Smell mapping, as a nascent field, undergoes methodological changes and design decision-making in every new smell mapping project as each site, participant group, and project outcome differs and requires constant, rapid iteration. From a digital perspective, the Interaction Design Foundation (an educational network advocating user experience (UX) design) suggests design failures are 'solutions that are outlandish or impractical'; with three potential points of failure: i) user interface design, ii) information architecture design, and iii) adoption/acceptance by the target audience.[9]

The godfather of UX Don Norman writes how 'we need to remove the word failure from our vocabulary, replacing it with learning experience. To fail is to learn: we learn more from

Papers, circa 1870. Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscript Library; Jenny Marketou, *Smell It - A Do-It-Yourself Smell Map,* 2008, SAV (wallpaper) on Sintra Mount, 120 inches x 72 inches; Hector Gavin, *Sanitary Ramblings: Being Sketches and Illustrations of Bethnal Green*, Nabu Press, 2010.

6 Bernhard Rothbucher, and Katharina Rothbucher, 'Failure in Design', in Sebastian Kunert (ed) *Strategies in Failure Management: Scientific Insights, Case Studies and Tools*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018, pp. 267–85. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72757-8_18.

7 Herbert A. Simon, 'The Science of Design: Creating the Artificial', *Design Issues* 4.1/2 (1988): 67–82. https://doi.org/10.2307/1511391.

8 Design Council, 'What Is the Framework for Innovation? Design Council's Evolved Double Diamond', Design Council, 17 March 2015, https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/what-framework-innovation-design-councils-evolved-double-diamond.

9 The Interaction Design Foundation, 'Design Failures', https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/design-failures

our failures than our successes'.[10] The process of mapping smells connects with UX in that it has an interface (albeit non-digital) and requires adoption on the part of the target audience. In requesting participants to contribute to a map of smells, a situation of fear of failure often changes into a new one of self-belief (in the capacity to describe smells without specialist terminology) and advance individual knowledge (about the smells that make up everyday lives). Such an acceptance of a 'new' interface (the olfactory system and its subsequent processing) is achieved through clear direction and guidance. In this case, the interface has three layers: sniffing and encountering smells directly, interpreting smells into language descriptions, and translating the descriptions into visual symbols that have both color and form. It requires courage to set aside insecurities and sniff potentially disgusting objects and places. Participants frequently worry that they might fail to smell anything at all. To mitigate this, every smellwalk is scaffolded by encouraging olfactory success by sharing smell encounters at regular 15-minute intervals. This reduces the fear of failure as participants become confident in their detection and description capabilities and feel empowered to sniff closer to new objects.

On a positive note, smell communication has no rule book, and rarely does Western schooling teach either descriptive or visual vocabularies. We have extremely limited prior reference for the representation of smell in either color or shape. And, as Kessler suggests, 'If you don't know the rules, you don't know not to break them'.[11] Without prior art and rules, smellwalkers are liberated to do as they please, although I have noted on some occasions that a lack of prior art can equally paralyse some participants.

Making Meaning Through Storytelling

The questions as to how storytelling might be augmented for future generations was tackled annually (prior to 2019) by a festival known as the Future of Storytelling (FoST).[12] Over three days in September 2017, this took place at Snug Harbor on Staten Island, New York.[13] FoST's goal is to change the way stories are told using immersive, interactive, and cutting-edge technological approaches. Most of the commissioned events blend digital and physical worlds; mansion rooms are given over to virtual reality experiences, in the 83-acre park marquees contain mixed reality experiences blending hologram and human interaction, the gardens host theatrical performances in which a foam-filled bathtub is the stage. FoST invites attendees to discover a range of dissemination practices; in a digital age oral traditions can be augmented by both technologies and the under-used senses. While the story might be timeless, the method of delivery alters.

10 Donald A. Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things, Revised and Expanded Edition,* 2nd revised and expanded ed, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013, 64.

11 Erik Kessels, *Failed It!: How to Turn Mistakes into Ideas and Other Advice for Successfully Screwing Up,* Illustrated edition, London and New York, NY: Phaidon Press, 2016, 43.

12 'Future of StoryTelling | Reinventing the Way Stories Are Told', https://futureofstorytelling.org/fest.

13 NYC NYC Visitor Guide, 'Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden', *NYC Go*, https://www.nycgo.com/museums-galleries/snug-harbor-cultural-center-botanical-garden

Failure to Smell

To collect data for the smell map, FoST created a sign-up list of participants for seven smellwalks over three days with a maximum of 15 people per walk. A smellwalk is a sensewalk[14] during which the primary mode of information encountered is deliberately switched from visual to olfactory and comprises of three sections with strategies for sniffing and recording the odors encountered; smell-catching, smell-hunting (see Figure 20.1), and free-smelling.[15] In each section, participants are asked to record up to four smells. A group discussion punctuates each section, encouraging the sharing of smells and conversation about similar encounters, smell associations, general queries, and a chance to unpack the new experience.

Common concerns and questions at the start of every smellwalk focus on individual inability to smell (having a poor sense of smell) and not being able to name smells correctly. Human olfactory dysfunction is assessed to affect 3-22% of the population,[16] with a range of dysfunction from complete inability to smell to slight impairment. The aging process has an impact on smell detection,[17] which means I scan each smellwalk group carefully and note who might need greater encouragement. Concerns over potential failure to identify smells, which in the Western world is poor compared to other cultures and languages,[18] I allay by explaining the purpose of the walk is to 'name' smells, rather than 'identify' them, and give examples from previous smell names such as the 'shattered dreams'[19] and 'a hard life'[20] from previous projects. Smell naming through description removes failure, drawing instead on participants' lived experience.

During one of the FoST smellwalks, a participant stopped during the smell-hunting (second) section of the walk, and when I enquired as to why, he replied that he was devastated to discover that his sense of smell was almost non-existent and that he needed to process what this meant to him. Anosmia, 'the absence of a sense of smell',[21] is rare. In 2017 just 3% of Americans had either no sense of smell or an extremely limited sense of smell.[22] Prior to the

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14 Mags Adams, and Kye Askins, 'Sensewalking: Sensory Walking Methods for Social Scientists', IAPS, 2008. http://www.iaps-association.org/sensewalking-sensory-walking-methods-for-social-scientists/

15 McLean, 'Nose-First', 90.

16 Laura, Schäfer, Valentin A. Schriever, and Ilona Croy, 'Human Olfactory Dysfunction: Causes and Consequences', *Cell and Tissue Research* 383.1 (1 January 2021): 569–79. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00441-020-03381-9.

17 Kenji Kondo, Shu Kikuta, Rumi Ueha, Keigo Suzukawa, and Tatsuya Yamasoba, 'Age-Related Olfactory Dysfunction: Epidemiology, Pathophysiology, and Clinical Management', *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience* 12 (2020). https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fnagi.2020.00208.

18 Asifa Majid, Nicolas Burenhult, Marcus Stensmyr, Josje de Valk, and Bill S. Hansson, 'Olfactory Language and Abstraction Across Cultures', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 373.1752 (5 August 2018): 20170139. https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2017.0139.

19 Kate McLean, 'Smell Colour of a Brooklyn Block', 12 September 2014, http://sensorymaps.blogspot.com/2014/09/smell-colour-of-brooklyn-block.html.

20 Kate McLean, 'Scentscape 06. 2015 – Singapore', *Sensory Maps* (blog), https://sensorymaps.com/?projects=scentscape-06-2015-singapore.

21 NIDCD, 'Smell Disorders', NIDCD, https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/smell-disorders.

22 Howard J. Hoffman, Shristi Rawal, Chuan-Ming Li, and Valerie B. Duffy, 'New Chemosensory

COVID-19 pandemic, smell loss was most often seen as an indicator of aging, or as an early warning for neurogenerative conditions such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease,[23] or an unfortunate result of an accident or infection. The effects of such a discovery during a pleasurable weekend meant that the participant decided it would be better for him to step away from the activity, seek medical advice after the weekend, and contact specialist smell disorder support groups Fifth Sense and AbScent[24] for further information. The experience brought the ethics of the smellwalk to the fore and the requirement for great sensitivity in responding to physical participation in the creation of new work. A failure to be able to smell has repercussions for inclusivity and equality of experience in smell mapping projects. In 2015 Fifth Sense conference attendees participated in a smellwalk and were paired with 'smell buddies' who described the aromas encountered.

Figure 20.1: Smellwalk participant engaged in smell hunting (smelling objects in close proximity based on other sensory stimuli, in this case the bright orange color), 2017. Photo credit: Kate McLean

Failure to Record

My concept for the smellmap was 'ephemerality', to match the fleeting nature of smell perception and the limited time span. I created a three-metre square base map of the site of Snug Harbor on Staten Island on the tarmac in the grounds using wax crayons from a gridded plan to indicate the roads, buildings, and the ocean (see Figure 20.2).

Component in the U.S. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES): First-Year Results for Measured Olfactory Dysfunction', *Reviews in Endocrine & Metabolic Disorders* 17.2 (June 2016): 221–40. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11154-016-9364-1.

23 Fifth Sense, 'Other Causes', *Fifth Sense* (blog), https://www.fifthsense.org.uk/other-causes/.

24 AbScent, 'You're Not Alone :: AbScent', https://abscent.org/insights-blog/youre-not-alone.

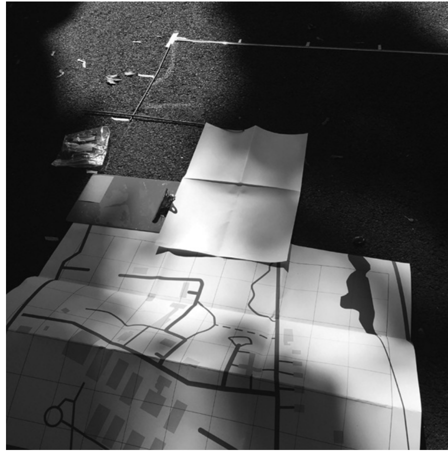

Figure 20.2: Gridded plot of the Snug Harbor site for either direct use indoors or transfer to outdoors, 2017. Photo credit: Kate McLean

The smellwalk participants were invited to the 'crayon ground map' and given an opportunity to collaborate/co-create and select from a choice of colored chalk crayons to communicate a single geolocated smell from their smellwalk. In addition to enabling the participants to consider how to communicate their smell experience visually, the reaction to the symbols were intriguing to me as a researcher. Without any precedent of a visual language for smell, a freedom in the audience responses veered in two directions; for some there was a freedom to draw anything, for others there was a paralysis. As the map filled with symbols the participants had a chance to see previous examples and could respond accordingly. The visual symbols largely represented the source of the smell; bathroom, watermelon, books, boxing gloves (see Figure 20.3), meat, an insect, a section of rope, the schoolhouse. Some participants, however, failed to record their smells. The failure to record lessened as time went on, and the stories associated with the graphics prompted imaginative leaps to enable visualization of smells as individual experiences.

Figure 20.3: Visualization of literal smell sources; bathroom, watermelon, books, boxing gloves, 2017. Photo credit: Kate McLean.

Other visuals represented a personal discover: ‘I smelled inside four bins and they all smelled different’ (see Figure 20.4). The rainbow that alludes to the range of smells encountered in a single sniff and also calls out the insufficiencies in language to describe smells adequately (see Figure 20.5). One visual, a Christmas tree, was representative of a fruit that had fallen to the ground and smelled of spices and nutmeg.

Figure 20.4: Visualization of smell discoveries: four trash cans that smelled different, 2017. Photo credit: Kate McLean.

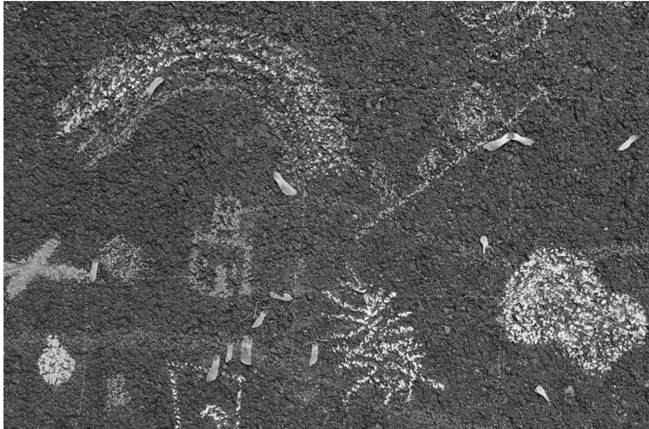

Figure 20.5: Visualization of smell discoveries: range of smells in a single sniff visualized as a rainbow, 2017. Photo credit: Kate McLean.

In total, 35 smell visuals were added to the map, but I failed to record 50% of the contributors smell graphic explanations. Reasons for my failure can be attributed to hosting a live event; at times I was in conversation with participants about their experiences, or finding materials, or answering questions, or encouraging and teasing out potential visuals, or organising and preparing for the next walk. The result of my omission is somewhere between a challenge (to guess as to the visual olfactory representation) and frustration (in trying to decipher a

green blob). To summarize, the failure to record the meaning attributed to each smell was a researcher oversight which resulted in fewer smell stories; a goal of the project.

When a Conceptual Fail Becomes Reality

My concept for the Staten Island smellmap was ephemerality; I was interested in how far I might push the metaphor for smell molecules as they disperse in air to a low concentration that the human nose can no longer detect. Everyday experiences of smells in open environments are perceived as ephemeral as the smells are sniffable and present one moment but the next moment they are gone.

In previous work I had used watercolour paints, which diffuse at the edges as paint particles are diluted by water. I looked to street art practices[25] for inspiration as to how the Staten Island smellmap might gradually dissolve and disappear, leaving no permanent record, and decided on chalk-art, which 'eventually blurs and washes away'.[26] Perversely, it would be a failure if the map left a permanent trace. Pavement chalks are large crayons of soft colored chalk, pliable, easy to smudge, and easily erased with a drop of water. As an artist I wanted to leave no trace, as a researcher and designer I decided to photograph the map at the end of each day as a record of its existence. At the end of each day I took a series of photos that could be digitally stitched together (see Figure 20.6) to create pictures of the map as it evolved

Figure 20.6: Smellmap Staten Island: end of Day 2, 2017. Photo credit: Kate McLean.

25 Sondra Bacharach, 'Street Art and Consent', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 55.4 (1 October 2015): 481–95. https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayv030.

26 Visual Methods – University of Bristol Society and Space'. Accessed 29 June 2022. https://societyandspace.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/tag/visual-methods/

I planned for the map to dissolve following the first rains after the final day of FoST. I awoke on the final day of the event to an overcast sky and puddles on the sidewalks. I hurried to the site. The basemap remained, but every chalk drawing of a smell visual had disappeared. I had made a monumental mistake in not covering the work with a tarpaulin. The smells had all disappeared, exactly as anticipated, except a full 24 hours before the Staten Island smellmap was complete.

Conclusion

The entire project was littered with additional micro-failures of time management, of leaves on the artwork, of distraction. As a designer, I assess what I would do differently next time to mitigate against such risks; as an artist I value how these made the project and the resulting stories surrounding its manifestation more poignant, intriguing, and memorable. Sensory communication design draws from both design and art's relationships with failure; pragmatic organization and structuring (from design) and an openness to doubt and serendipity (from art).

As a hybrid of performance, design, and art, *Smellmap Staten Island* demonstrated that any newly discovered malfunction of human body during research requires sensitivity and background knowledge to signal supportive resources on the part of the researcher. A lack of existing canon for smell communication can be both liberating and intimidating for participants. When it comes to drawing personal smell perceptions we have no rules, we have never learned, we can only trust ourselves to interpret what we experience. An awareness of this means it is essential for the researcher to be supportive and to construct a framework for such an exploration.

This project was the first time I deployed a street art approach to the communication of smell, and while it is limited in the colour range, it has potential to uncover symbolic associative links that participants make, and the stories that emerge from communicating a smell. This is worthy of further research, and I can draw on this work to generate similar spontaneous and agile outdoor projects. Recording the intent behind the drawings was an oversight, and next time I would be sure to note these down at the time of their creation. The simultaneous joy and sadness I experienced when discovering an empty map on the morning of the final day of FoST manifested as a more enjoyable set of smellwalks with less pressure to complete the map and more time to engage fully with the participants.

Failure is important to the creative process, whether deliberate through an iterative design process or through being able to see the benefits that arise from errors. It is an essential part of a researcher's reflexive journey.

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TWENTY TANKA: TEN AUSTRALIAN RESEARCHERS ON PLAYFUL RESEARCH PRACTICES AND FAILURE

JULIENNE VAN LOON

My contribution to this collection takes the form of a creative work – a suite of twenty tanka – and an accompanying research statement. The research statement conforms to current Australian Research Council guidelines for non-traditional research outputs, that is, it is limited to 2000 characters and accounts for the research background, contribution, and significance of the work.

Research Statement

In this non-traditional research output, phrases drawn verbatim from the transcripts of semi-structured narrative interviews I conducted with ten Australian research leaders are presented as a suite of tanka. The collection forms part of a larger study, 'The play of research: an investigation into the role of play in leading and innovative Australian research',[1] in which I explore play as a practice, as a disposition, and as a crucial element in the production of new knowledge.

The tanka or 'short song', a lyric form traditional in Japan, requires a particular line and syllable count (5-7-5-7-7), placing an emphasis on the tension between constraint and lack of constraint.[2] Here, reflections selected from the study's transcripts focus on experiences of failure in research practice and on expressions of anxiety about such failure.

This work aims to reframe how we think about the creation of new knowledge and to normalize failure as a part of the playful risk-taking that is so crucial to research practice. In a higher-education sector hampered by managerialism and performance measurement,[3] acknowledgements of research failure tend to be kept in check. Here I use tanka as method because it is a form open to lyricism even as it demands technical discipline. Accordingly, the suite experiments with the 'irresolvable gaps and tensions'[4]

1 For more information about this study see Julienne van Loon, 'Let's Play Knowledge-Makers', *Axon: Creative Explorations* 7.1 (2017), https://www.axonjournal.com.au/issues/7-1/lets-play-knowledge-makers; Julienne van Loon, 'In Defense of Play: A Manifesto Arrived at Through Dialogue', in James Oliver (ed), *Associations: Creative Practice and Research,* Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2018, pp. 149-157.

2 Owen Bullock, 'Tanka Intrigue: The Short Poem of Deep Mysteries', *TEXT* 26.1(2022): 1-16, *https://doi.org/10.52086/001c.33894*; Bruce Ross, *Writing Haiku*, North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2022.

3 Sharon Rider, Ylva Hasselberg and Alexandra Valuszewski, *Transformations in Research, Higher Education and the Academic Market*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2013.

4 Jessica Wilkinson, 'How poems make things happen', *Sydney Review of Books,* 15 December 2020, https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essay/wilkinson-how-poems-make-things-happen.

many recognize as a strength of the poetic form, while also tabling a discrete poetic catalogue of research failures.

Creative work

PROFESSOR T: PHYSICAL OCEANOGRAPHY

two-thirds of the time

it'll amount to nothing,

and it might take you

a day or three or a week

to figure out it's rubbish.

PROFESSOR V: MATERIALS ENGINEERING

that was my biggest

fear, that all these grand ideas

would be parked on the

side, because I didn't know

that it was going to work.

PROFESSOR K: APPLIED MATHEMATICS

what's going wrong and

why isn't it compiling?

why is it giving

the wrong answers and where's the

logic falling down and why?

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR N: QUANTUM PHYSICS

what I realized

was that I was counting wrong.

I was out dancing,

it was swing dancing, and I

was like, 'holy shit! that's it!'

PROFESSOR G: BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS

we spent a lot of

time and we couldn't make a

convincing statement.

a lot of people got lost:

they didn't understand it.

PROFESSOR C: CREATIVE WRITING

it doesn't always

follow. also, when your work

is rejected and

people don't like it and

you like it, it's that fine line…

PROFESSOR S: PUBLIC HEALTH

you get it wrong, of

course, everybody's wrong

at the moment, you've

got no monopoly on

being wrong. and people fail.

DOCTOR A: LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES

the problem in our

work is you can't really,

I suppose in most

work, really, mistakes are not

tolerated [that] well.

PROFESSOR V: MATERIALS ENGINEERING

of course, it's research.

not everything works out

the way intended.

so, okay, is there any

other way I can do this?

DOCTOR H: EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC

there are rules but the

rules are sort of written in

real time. you either

have to make some up, or sit

back and listen and figure.

PROFESSOR K: APPLIED MATHEMATICS

sometimes you can think

of a way of doing it,

but it's not very

elegant. it's nice to have

an elegant solution.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR N: QUANTUM PHYSICS

but I really don't

know how that happened. I mean

that was all in my

right brain, which I know is not

a real thing anymore, but...

PROFESSOR S: PUBLIC POLICY

if it is about

doing things differently,

you will sometimes fail.

you have a great idea

and it just doesn't work out.

DOCTOR A: LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES

in my previous

job I was so stressed at one

point I couldn't let

anything in, I don't think

you can. . . your brain just shuts down.

PROFESSOR C: CREATIVE WRITING

when we were talking

about play before, I was

thinking about a

very early memory

of being quite alone, and. . .

DOCTOR H: EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC

if I say, 'quiet,

delicate sounds', I have to

make it explicit

to you what screwing that up

would be, so you make a note.

PROFESSOR S: PUBLIC POLICY

. . .four years, and then we

ran out of money. so we

were continuing

on chewing gum and a shoe-

string, as someone explained it. . .

PROFESSOR T: PHYSICAL OCEANOGRAPHY

it took three to four

years, because it was being

rejected all the

time. my five best ideas

have all been rejected first.

PROFESSOR G: BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS

yeah, sure, so, the one

right next to you is full of

papers that never

got published, they went round six,

or seven different journals.

PROFESSOR S: PUBLIC HEALTH

oh dear, oh dear, oh,

dear. how much time do you have

for dreaming? is it

possible to just sit back

and say: what am I missing?

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Nancy Mauro-Flude is a performance artist and theorist. Her artistic research is driven by the demystification of technology and the 'mystification' that lies in and through the performance of the machinic assemblage. She currently leads the Computational Poetics and Choreography studio at RMIT University and is guest editor of Runway Journal, an independent peer-reviewed journal for contemporary art (Sydney). Her recent essays include *Computabilities Dancing* (2023), *A Feminist Server Stack* (2022); *Writing the Feminist Internet* (2021), and *Performing with the Aether* (2019). Her work has been exhibited at ACCA Melbourne, Kunsthall, Vienna, Transmediale, Berlin, Museum of New and Old Art, Hobart, Tasmanian Museum of Art, amd Ghetto Bienalle, Port au Prince, among other venues. Nancy is represented by Bett Gallery and is the founder of Despina's Media Coven, a holistic computing aesthetics atelier.

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Julienne van Loon is an Associate Professor with the Writing and Publishing program at RMIT University and an Honorary Fellow in Writing at the University of Iowa. Her most recent book is the essay collection, *The Thinking Woman* (2019). She won the Australian/ Vogel's Award for her debut novel *Road Story*. Later fiction works include *Beneath the Bloodwood Tree* (2008), *Harmless* (2013) and the *Griffith Review* Novella Award winning 'Instructions for a Steep Decline' (2019). Julienne is scholarly co-editor at *TEXT: Journal of Writing & Writing Programs* and the co-director of the non/fictionLab.

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Syrus Marcus Ware is a Vanier Scholar, visual artist, activist, curator, and educator. Using painting, installation, and performance, Syrus works with and explores social justice frameworks and Black activist culture. His work has been shown widely, including solo shows at Grunt Gallery in 2018 (*2068:Touch Change*) and Wil Aballe Art Projects in 2021 (*Irresistible Revolutions*). His work has been featured as part of the Toronto Biennial of Art in 2019 in conjunction with the Ryerson Image Centre (*Antarctica and Ancestors, Do You Read Us? (Dispatches from the Future*) and in 2022 (*MBL Freedom*), as well as for the Bentway's Safety in Public Spaces Initiative in 2020 (*Radical Love*).

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Theory on Demand #47
Failurists: When Things go Awry
Edited by Sybille Lammes, Kat Jungnickel, Larissa Hjorth & Jen Rae

Failure is a popular topic of research. It has long been a source of study in fields such as sociology and anthropology, science and technology studies, privacy and surveillance, cultural, feminist and media studies, art, theatre, film, and political science. When things go awry, breakdown, or rupture they lead to valuable insights into the mundane mechanisms of social worlds.

Yet, while failure is a familiar topic of research, failure in and as a tactic of research is far less visible, valued, and explored.

In this book the authors reflect upon the role of creative interventions as a critical mode for methods, research techniques, fieldwork, and knowledge transmission or impact. Here, failure is considered a productive part of engaging with and in the field. It is about acknowledging the 'mess' of the social and how we need methods, modes of attunement, and knowledge translation that address this complexity in nuanced ways.

In this collection, interdisciplinary researchers and practitioners share their practices, insights, and challenges around rethinking failure beyond normalized tropes. What does failure mean? What does it do? What does putting failure under the microscope do to our assumptions around ontology and epistemologies? How can it be deployed to challenge norms in a time of great uncertainty, crisis, and anxiety? And what are some of the ways resilience and failure are interrelated?

Contributors: Jessamy Perriam, Emma Fraser & Clancy Wilmott, Kat Jungnickel, Annette N. Markham, Anna Hickey-Moody, Linda Dement, Jen Rae & Claire G. Coleman, Julienne van Loon & Kelly Hussey-Smith, Li Jönsson & Kristina Lindström, Sam Hind, Lekshmy Parameswaran, Syrus Marcus Ware, Nanna Verhoeff & Iris van der Tuin, Olivia Khoo, Grace McQuilten, Chantal Faust, Nancy Mauro-Flude, Sybille Lammes, Larissa Hjorth, Kate McLean and Julienne van Loon.

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