
AFFECTIVE NOISE

KEYWORDS

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These Keywords come out of the research exchange project *Affective Noise: Atmospherics of the State of the Nation* between the NOVA University of Lisbon (ICNOVA-FCSH) and Queen Mary University of London. They emerged during two workshops held in London (QMUL, 25-26 October 2024) and in Lisbon (UNL, 15-16 November 2024), gathering artists, researchers and postgraduate students interested in how sonic and affective atmospheres shape the current political and theatrical present.

This ebook is a way of sharing our intense and lively debates with a wider community. We hope it can somehow begin to build a critical cartography that plots and traces the atmospheres of our particularly charged political times, and in thinking them through affect and sound come to listen to and feel a renewed sense of cultural community.

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PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Ana Pais (ICNOVA, FCSH / NOVA University of Lisbon)
CO-INVESTIGATOR Martin Welton (Queen Mary University of London)
POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHERS Rita Barreira (IHA, FCSH / NOVA University of Lisbon), Sebastian Milly (Queen Mary University of London)
GRAPHIC DESIGN Marta Anjos
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fct Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia
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Queen Mary University of London

AFFECTIVE NOISE

ATMOSPHERICS OF THE STATE OF THE NATION

In English, the ‘state of the nation’ refers to both the political order and to collective national affects; the ‘state of the nation play’ has long been an aesthetic register of these correlative concerns. ‘Being in a state’ refers jointly to one’s geographical, emotional and climatic conditions.

In Portugal and the UK, recent populist politics have sought inflection points through which wider ‘culture wars’ can be prosecuted. They frequently involve the amplification of affects of rage or anger towards marginalized social groups such as climate protestors, trans people, or refugees. At the same time, it is suggested that equally marginal groups — such as small farmers or working-class men — not only legitimately hold these affects, but in doing so also speak legitimately of social feelings more broadly. As neither the source nor the target of these affects can properly contain the scale and volume at which they are articulated, the ‘noise’ from them escapes the immediate battles of the culture war to infuse the atmospherics of the state of the nation. The divisive use of immigration as a wedge topic before and after the Brexit referendum in the UK, and by the far-right party Chega, in Portugal, are symptomatic of this.

These public feelings can be socially perceived as affective atmospheres — the particular tone or ‘feel’ of a social spaces, events or nations. This project has sought to both a) diagnose populist atmospheres and related public emotions to foster debate about these elusive influences that shape our existence, and b) explore unconventional means with which to restage, frame or embody these feelings. Through workshops in London and Lisbon and our resulting keywords texts, we seek to provide tools for raising awareness of affective conditionings as background noise and naturalized interferences that endanger democratic societies. //

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ATTENTION

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SÍLVIA PINTO COELHO ATTEN

ATTENTION ATTENTION!

The word ‘attention’ affords an inclination (*ad tendere*)[1] reaching towards somewhere, or someone, or something. Projecting in-space or inside ourselves.

Like a ramp indicating a metastable balance or a direction, we are no longer just and only somewhere but tending towards something that has been set in a process. That is the march of attention. It moves, mobilises, dances, and channels the attention of others, too. It can be regulated or manipulated by something or someone. Attention and attention span are among the most precious assets of the 21st century. Attention is also in the eyes of major investments that attract greedy manners.

However, attention and tenderness have the same etymological root. From attention as care to the tension of attention — ‘watch out!’ — some prefer to pay attention to attention as in praying. But the ‘Practices of Attention’ are not always meditative exercises. They are inherent in the most varied artistic practices where we place our calm, urgency, and critical attention.

[1] The root of the word ‘attention’ is the Latin ad tendere, which means ‘to stretch towards’. ‘Tendere’, or ‘stretch’, comes from a Proto-Indo-European root ‘ten’ with the same meaning, ‘to stretch’. Many other words share this root, but amongst them is, of course, the word ‘tender’.

PRACTICES OF ATTENTION

In 2012, the *Demimonde* collective of artists invited their peers to submit proposals for utilising space in the Boavista gallery. The event, titled ‘Ora Bolas, há espaço vamos ocupá-lo!’ [Come on, there’s room, let’s fill it], fostered a collaborative atmosphere that engaged numerous artists and collectives.

During that period, I was engrossed in my PhD studies and lacked the time to cultivate artistic proposals suitable for public sharing. To address this, I initiated a daily morning meeting referred to as ‘Practices of Attention’ in tribute to the work of Lisa Nelson, which I had recently begun to explore. I designated the time slot from 10 am to 12 pm as a potential gathering point. The proposal was a collaborative class in which participants were willing to share a practice they usually do to prepare their attention for work. Each day, one person proposed their practice. For example, trying to ‘write down a dream you had that day’ [a psychologist’s proposal], imagining the space your body occupies while still and with your eyes closed, in great detail, or exercises such as ‘walking with your eyes closed’, listening to music and moving slowly, drawing someone’s movement, doing dance warm-ups, or voice exercises.

The proposal I followed up later was a ‘Practices of Attention’ class in which I used (and still use) the tools of various choreographers and teachers of performing arts and techniques with whom I have studied over the years and which I have integrated into my career. I taught ‘Practices of Attention’ in the AND_Lab summer courses (since 2016), sometimes making Lisa Nelson’s exercises interact directly with exercises from Fernanda Eugénio’s *Modus operandi AND*, but above all, emphasising the adequacy between what the group seems to ‘need’ and what I can offer to relate to that moment. It is a game of relevance and challenges I have wanted to honour since 2012. //

FULLESSNESS

CARE

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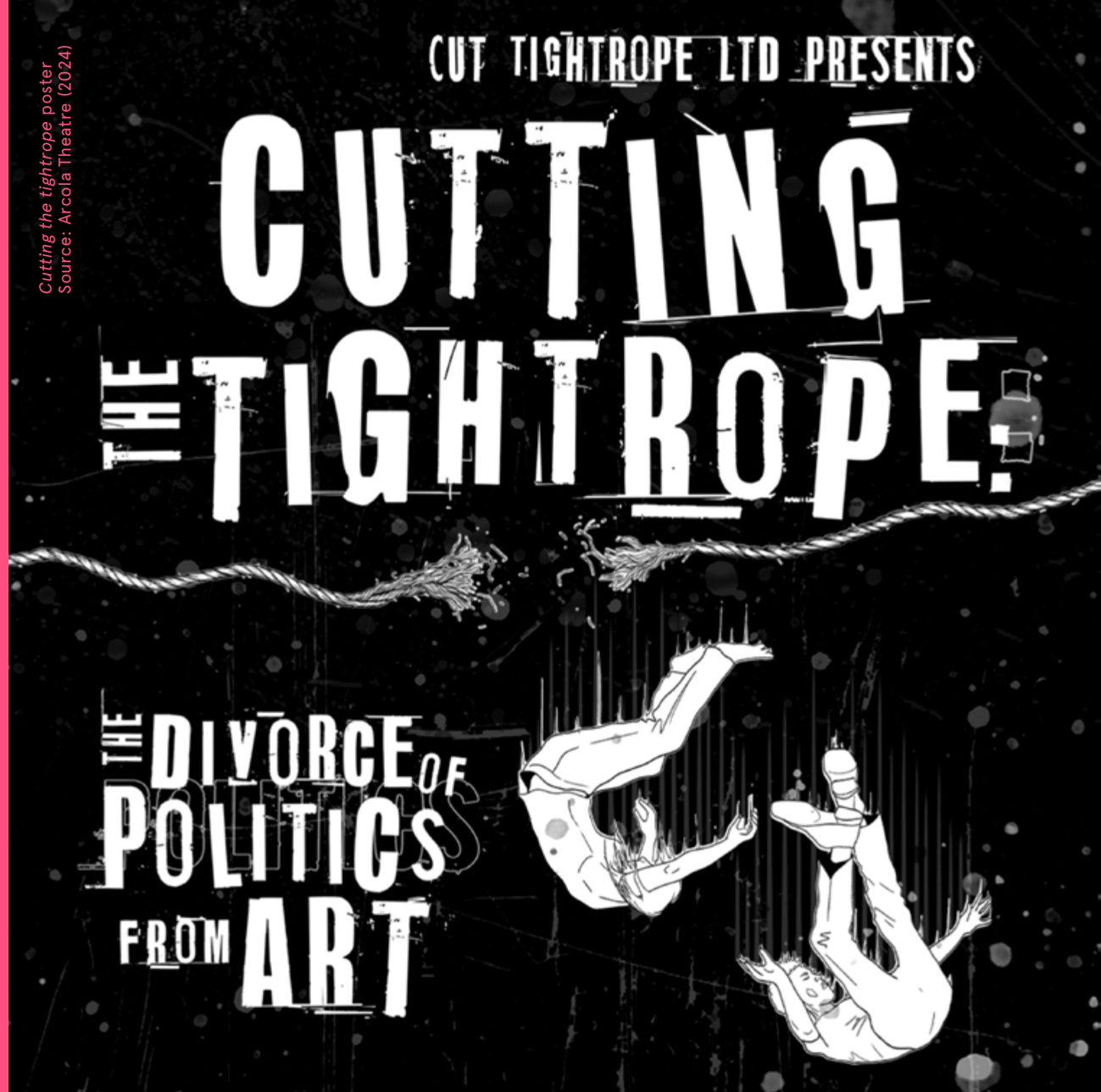
PEDRO PÉREZ ROTHSTEIN

CARE FULLESSNESS

On the evening of the 5th of December 2024, I went to see the show *Cutting the tightrope: the divorce of politics from art* at the Arcola Theatre in East London, followed by a Q&A with members of the cast and other guest speakers[1]. After a first run at the Arcola in the summer, this collection of short plays returned for a longer run in their main space Studio 1 with a couple more texts added to the original production[2]. The plays touched on a myriad of themes, including the war on Gaza and the conflict between Palestine and Israel (including discussions on Zionism, antisemitism and Islamophobia), the 'invisible' genocide and humanitarian crisis in Sudan, dictatorship, democracies and freedom of speech (including a recent situation in the UK parliament where Labour MP

[1] The panel included Yasmin Ashraf (Palestinian Youth Movement – Britain), Hassan Mahamdallie (Muslim Institute) and Joel Samuels (Bet'n Lev Theatre) and it was moderated by Dr. Jaswinder Blackwell-Pal (QMUL).

[2] This version of the show was directed by Cressida Brown and Kirsty Housely and featured 10 min scenes or short plays by the following writers: Hassan Abdulrazzak, Mojisola Adebayo, Phil Arditti, Sonali Bhattacharyya, Nina Bowers, Roxy Cook, Waleed Elgadi, Ed Edwards, Afsaneh Gray, Dawn King, Ahmed Masoud, Joel Samuels, Sami Abu Wardeh and a final devised piece inspired from an idea by Nina Segal. The cast included the actors: Issam Al Ghussain, Jessica Murrain, Joel Samuels, Mark Oosterveen, Ruth Las, Salman Akthar, Sara Masry, Waleed Elgadi (Arcola, 2024).



Cutting the tightrope poster
Source: Arcola Theatre (2024)

Diane Abbot was systematically silenced by the Speaker of the House), the daily life of a florist in Rafah and his stories of hope and love, gender-based violence, transphobia and censorship in the arts, everyday life racism and political apathy, as well as a mention to various colonial and imperialistic conflicts in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Interweaving the different plays, there was a running act between two of the actors — one as a cautious presenter (Joel Samuels) and another one as a careful disrupter (Issam Al Ghussain), dressed in a spandex pink suit with Palestinian scarf and carrying a watermelon. This was a commentary on the cancellation of Stef Driscol's production of Shakespeare's *Midsummer's Night Dream* by the Manchester Royal Exchange in 2024 which had its Arts Council funding removed a few weeks before opening because it featured a watermelon and a Palestinian flag and some placards for trans rights (Artists for Palestine, 2024). The absurdity of this blatant censorship because of a watermelon denotes the state of the nation and the health (or lack thereof) of the British theatre industry[3]. In *Cutting the Tight Rope...*, the watermelon was an icon of resistance: from inside, a Palestinian flag came out and was waved around drawing the crowd to cheers; furthermore it was a reminder for the important political struggles that we — audiences, people, citizens — should all care about and the joys of fighting: the careful disrupter offered the cautious presenter pieces of watermelon and they both ate a slice of the fruit.

In one of the short plays, there was a questioning of the role of theatre programmers in filtering what plays deserve attention and a space to be produced gets disregarded.

[3] The Arcola is one of a handful of theatres in the UK to publicly condemn the genocide in Gaza.

Who cares about a watermelon? Photo by Ali Wright.

How much do theatres in the UK care about certain political subjects? Are programmers being too careful to avoid polemics and backlash, but in doing so, being careless with urgent stories that feel too political and therefore, get vetoed. In the post-show talk afterwards, there was an open critique of role of the Arts Council in funding (or not funding) projects based on their (explicit) political content[4]. Or because they create particular political atmospheres that are not desired by the funders and the interests of the government or the ruling elites.

[4] The current ACE guidelines welcomed work that talked about Ukraine, but refused work about Gaza (Berkeley Square Barbarian, 2024).

Of course, there is a wider state of the nation atmospherics surrounding not only cultural policy but public discourses more generally and are interlinked: Britain's place in the current world and grappling with its imperial past and classist society; the rise and fall of Brexit as magical solution for complex, structural problems; the experience of the Covid pandemic and its effects on the ways we work, live, communicate which are still resonating; inflation and the cost of living crisis impacting families and communities across the country, coupled with the dismantling of the welfare state; the climate emergency; political corruption and lack of accountability of leaders; and the rise of an international far right movement that has become mainstream and is rebranding Nazi symbols and ideas into a type of 'cryptoneofascism' that has Donald Trump[5] and Elon Musk[6] as poster characters: the TV personality turned president and a tech billionaire who dreams of colonising Mars. The cultural wars of MAGA and other extreme political movements carefully target Diversity, Equality and Inclusion policies, LGBTQ+ rights, immigrants and women and actively seek to create affective atmospheres for redefining, othering, excluding these identities and political communities. They combine a strategy of 'flooding the zone' with fake news and outrageous bravado and the use of moral panics against minorities to create an atmosphere where the main political emotions[7] are fear, anger, mistrust, resentment, despair. In turn, these political emotions reshape the shared collective political atmosphere to legitimise further violence and push the boundaries of what's acceptable or tolerable — vis a vis Hannah's Arendt's banality of evil.

Going back to the Arcola Theatre, the short plays did create a different political atmosphere. By challenging censorship and silence, they helped Palestinians and other groups to gain public recognition on stage and for their emotions (political and else) to be valued and prioritised. They were using theatre and performance as the means to democratise those emotions, to level the playing field and generate an affective atmosphere of solidarity, of empathy, of connection and care. Being political is an act of care. Not caring about the suffering and struggling of the Gazans or Sudanese is a political choice. Downplaying their situation is a careless act. Caring more about a watermelon onstage — as a symbol of creative defiance — than the actual matters and subject it represents is nonsense. When one of the scenes extended the scene to the auditorium, the whole audience became actors and subjects, we all became part of the same community and we shared an affective atmosphere of radical hope, of fight for justice and creative freedom. We were all watermelons. We cared. //

[5] In February 2025, standing next to Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, President Trump declared that the United States should 'buy' and 'own' the Gaza strip to rebuild it as the 'Riviera of the Middle East'. All Palestinians would be forcibly displaced to Egypt and Jordan in a shameful attempt of ethnic cleansing.

[6] Musk, who bought the social media platform Twitter in 2022 and turned into X, has been supporting far right movements across the world, including the neo-Nazi party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany and Nigel Farage's Reform UK in Britain.

[7] For more on how political atmospheres influence political emotions and vice-versa, see Osler & Szanto (2022).

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FLAGS

ANGHARAD CLOSS STEPHENS

FLAGS

FLAGS

Last August, my children and I were lucky enough to spend some time in Paris. The Parisians leave Paris in the summer. And in 2024, they left in droves — one result of Paris hosting the Olympic Games. My children knew very little about the Games and I don't have much to say about sport. In any case, I found myself lucky enough to wake up every day, for several days, where my only task was to find activities for us to do around Paris for less than 15 Euros. It was in this period that the three of us spent time at the *Jardin du Luxembourg* — large, formal gardens, in the 6th arrondissement, not far from the *Panthéon*, that we headed to each afternoon to hide from the sun. There, we watched and played with the miniature sailboats that float on the basin of water that stands in front of the palace, with each sailboat representing a different national flag.

Palais du Luxembourg. Photo by the author.

Les Voiliers de Luxembourg. Photo by the author.

The Gardens were first acquired by Marie de Medici (1614-1631), who was responsible for building the Luxembourg Palace. But the gardens also have a connection to Baron Haussmann, who led the vast and brutal programme of urban development across Paris on behalf of Napoleon the III, and as part of that, designed the very ordered and spacious layout that remains in these gardens today. At the centre, in front of the palace, lies an octagonal pond, *le grand bassin*, where visitors can rent sailboats, watch them travel in the wind, and use large sticks to push them away from the edges, or away from other boats. On this hot day, we rented two boats so that my children could play, and I watched with interest which countries they would choose. There weren't that many left to choose from, but nevertheless, they found ones they could affiliate with. My daughter chose the red and white striped flag (red on top, white on bottom) of Poland — likely a nod to her best friend, who speaks Polish at home and Welsh at school. My son proudly chose Ukraine — this again has two stripes, with yellow on bottom and blue on top. This flag had only become familiar to him because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and the political response across Europe, which has often focused around flying or reproducing this flag. My son has seen it on display outside government buildings including the Senedd (the Welsh parliament), in protests in city centres, and for many months, this flag was reproduced in people's homes, as a poster in the window, or as a flag flown outside. This in itself is quite striking, considering we live in Swansea, South West Wales, and nominally quite far away from Ukraine. He might have also remembered the day in March 2022 when the children in his school were asked to come dressed in the colours of the Ukraine flag — a request that must have left the children from Russian families in Swansea feeling uneasy, and which left many others of us perplexed at how solidarity with the people of Ukraine had been marshalled into a mass display of one flag.

The sailboats at the great basin in the Luxembourg gardens seem an opportune place for thinking about flags. This is because of how the flags appear both static when stacked up on the trolley, waiting to be hired, but also work in motion, using the simple combination of wind and water. Flags are the modern day symbol of an independent country, which includes both sovereign nation-states that have a seat at the United Nations (e.g. United Kingdom, Australia, India) and nations without a state (e.g. Palestine). Some of those flags have a long history (the British flag was formed around the time of the French revolution, as a variation on the tricolour); others (such as the flag of Kosovo) are very new. In both cases however, they are designed to seem as though they have been around forever: as Eric Hobsbawm notes, 'ancient materials' are used by nations to 'construct invented traditions' — including festivals, folk songs and flags (1983: 6). On the sailboats, the fabric of the flags was strong enough to make them suitable outdoor toys for the main part of the year, and light enough to allow them to flitter and flap in the wind. This duality of their materiality is central to flags: they must be able to appear constant, powerful and authoritative, and yet, move enough to show they are active, and have the potential to motivate and mobilise a 'people' as distinct and separate from another people.

Later that day, we walked on to Bastille square, where we saw a version of the Olympic rings, which were at this time reproduced in all the major parks and sites of Paris, including at the *Jardin des Tuileries*, also the site of the Olympic Couldron, at the *Hôtel de Ville*, and on the Eiffel tower. The Olympic rings, in this case travel with the idea of national flags, often appearing alongside one another: national flag bunting features in cafes and restaurants. The rings also suggest longevity, and suggest the enduring nature of this idea of a world made from nations representing individual territories, that can compete against one another. But whilst the rings appear prevalent at a particular

Place de la Bastille. Photo by the author.

moment, they also quickly disappear again, reminding us that there are many other ways, outside of an identitarian politics, of understanding how we live in common. As we walked closer to the large rings on Bastille square, I recognised behind it the flag of Israel. This was being held as an act of protest, by around a dozen people that had gathered and held a blue ribbon between them, to protest against the 251 hostages taken following Hamas's attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. The families of those taken hostage or missing protested regularly in Tel Aviv and across the world during the war that followed the 7 October attacks (at the time of writing, a temporary ceasefire is in place, and some hostages have been returned in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners). In this protest, the Israeli flag was used to signal a community organising against the national government of the day. This reminds us of how the flag can be used by the people of the nation against the government. This is a point made especially vivid by Bastille square, a site made famous by the storming of the Bastille prison on 14 July 1789, a key event in the French revolution, and which signalled a struggle by the people over the very meaning, governance and future of France.

Flags are often in the background, part of the material fabric of everyday life, and we may not pay much attention to them. Take the British flag that forms the background of the UK Global Health Insurance Card that I carry in my purse, or the Welsh flag that flies outside Fulton House, the main campus building at Swansea University. Across this city, the Union Jack flag flies outside the police station and the prison: I walk past them most days and take no notice. When I tasked students in my Political Geographies class with going out to look for flags, they pointed out to me how Welsh flags were on many food items in the campus supermarket, indicating that meat or cheese was grown locally, and that posters of flags were for sale as part of the students' union annual poster sale. None

is particularly contentious; these blend into everyday life. But flags become interesting when they pop up on campus, introducing surprise or disruption. This can be for the purpose of making a larger claim, such as when the rainbow colours of the LGBT Flag are flown in celebration of Pride month. Alternatively, when students formed a camp in May 2024, to protest their solidarity with the Palestinian people, who in Gaza were being killed in their thousands at this time, the Palestine flag was planted to draw connections between our lives here and elsewhere (the United Nations reports that more than 45,000 Palestinians were killed by December 2024). The Palestine flag was drawn on sheets of cardboard and on students' faces, as Swansea Students' Union supported the camp, their call for a ceasefire, and an end to Antisemitism, Islamophobia and racism.

Flags can blend into the urban landscape, and they can also be set in motion to interrupt everyday journeys, and call for reflection or action. This point is woven into the fabric of flags, which is generally durable but can also move. Flags therefore emerge both as a static symbol, and as animated in time and space. The use of colours and symbols provide meaning and significance, allowing us to read them as texts, designed to symbolise a nation, an identity, and a people with connection to land. But flags also emerge as part of temporary gatherings or in response to a politicised moment; they can acquire an affective intensity. They must be read, then, as both text and as a performance. They can symbolise a connection between people and land, or be flown to contest, challenge or query that connection. They invite us to consider the relation between here and elsewhere, such as thinking about Kiev from Swansea, or of Tel Aviv and Gaza from Paris. They can suggest the longevity and permanence of the nation, in their seeming timelessness; but they can also interrupt time, to demand a change in the present, as in the demand: Ceasefire now! or Bring them home. //


IN
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INFUSION
DIFFUSION

One thought is enough to poison our blood. Think of a tea bag dipped in boiling water. Inert and apparently harmless, the tiny envelope containing soaking leaves contaminates the environment in which it is submerged. An herbal aroma gradually dilutes, gently meandering in small waves until all the water is tinged. In just a few minutes, the whole teapot turns a different color. This is a good image for infusion: to introduce a new element into a medium that will fuse-in with it.

The same can happen with our thoughts that can transform the emotional tone of our body. Unannounced, a negative thought popping into your mind, silently diluting itself and diving into your blood system without you realizing it. Unaware, your whole body is tinged with the emotional charges by that thought and, like a filter, they infuse our behavior and actions from then on. We acquire the emotional tone of that thought, a sudden silent intrusion that probably remains undiscerned while we deal with everyday things, thinking we are in control and figuring it all out. The thing is: our thoughts as well as our emotions are not just 'ours' (Brennan, 2004); they are permeable to external influences that infuse them with different affective tonalities, making us believe they are ours. In a sense, infusion is a kind of affective noise.

In contemporary global and mediatized societies, we are immersed in fluxes of information, images, soundbites and affects that intersect and complicate the way we live our private and public lives. Like spongy screens, our bodies (and I am including our minds and bodily knowledge here) are part of the medium where millions of tiny flickering elements circulate and infuse them with a particular sensorial imprint, easily transmuted in forms of thought, feeling or belief. What was primarily a fleeting noisy particle is diffused in our being to such an extent that it becomes one with it. At this point, the infused particle is assimilated and spread in our bodies making infused thoughts, feelings and beliefs our own. Hence, the humming affect that first touched us dissolves into an invisible amalgamation of inside and outside.

The pivotal term here is exposure (or vulnerability, or permeability, or metabolism). Exposure of bodies and minds to environmental sound and affects, an encompassing experience usually remaining in the background of consciousness. Margarida Mendes'

sonic work on deep ecology, introduced to us in an inspiring session on the first day of the Lisbon workshop, emphasizes the importance of the body in processes of exposure to atmospheric sounds and how they affect us. One of the projects Mendes presented is her artistic-activist-research project 'Sounding the Mississippi', based on fieldwork in Louisiana (the Lower Mississippi 'Cancer Alley', in interviews with scientists and activists. With a group, she canoeed for ten days recording sounds, trying to make connections between immunology, territories and the ecosystems of the river. She used the term sonic metabolism to name the undiscerned process by which our bodies are exposed and affected by background noise (either loud sounds or low frequency vibrations as it is 'sensed through the body's fascia, limbic system, respiratory system, primo vascular system, blood and nervous systems, through muscular and chemical reactions in our body fluids and vital energy' (Mendes, 2025). Unheard and unnoticed, these processes are ways through which the body metabolizes exposure to the environment, namely to sound spaces. Sonic metabolism evidences the amalgamation of information our bodies are mutely processing to respond and adapt to environmental contexts. One of the alarming aspects about sonic metabolism is that, even if the body response damages its own survival and homeostasis, it will nevertheless act against it because it is bound to the relational ecosystem it inhabits, as much as the river.

Perhaps sonic metabolism can help us think through affective atmospheres as environments of intensified vibrations to which our bodies respond and become one with. Such atmospheres are constantly being infused with new flickering particles; hence, our bodies are also permanently exposed to such tonality shaping flows, infused in the body and diffused in social spaces. Affective metabolism is infused from the outside but grows inside, as if it belonged to us.

Infusion and diffusion as affective metabolism techniques are performative. Take the case of security issues in the political arena. Although Portugal is statistically one of the safest countries in Europe and despite the actual figures of the Portuguese Police force (demonstrating a decrease of criminality in recent years), current populist Party Chega and its leaders constantly send out the idea that there is more violence and criminality, connecting it explicitly with migratory communities. Hence, the link between crime and immigration is established to infuse a sense of threat which is diffused both in their social media (through which they post random and mostly fake videos of violence said to happen in Portugal) and in their discourses in parliament, hence subsequently broadcasted in the news. Threat becomes palpable due to the repetition of such narratives, spreading a sense of fear, building a sense of vulnerability to a perceived threat that is not objectively real. However, the fact that it is not real does not diminish the impact of the diffused fabricated scenario or the affective metabolism it produces, unnoticed yet effective. //

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LEAK

MOLLY MCPHEE

LEAK

Some bodies are going to be undone. Whether government institution, civic infrastructure, or bag of bones, leaks presuppose a boundaried body; a disciplined body; a functional containment; a functional anything. You can't think leaks without spills, slips, spoils, tears, secrets, document dumps, sewage, radiation, orgasming flows carrying you away. Born of the endlessly proliferating power of adjacencies, leaks transgress bureaucracies of gender, of state and of environment. They are affective forms of unfolding, nascent scandal; slicks of affect imparting and capturing other affects: embarrassment and desire (Dango), feminised abjection (Shildrick), metaphysical anguish (Kipnis); the collapse of a stiff upper lip (Dixon). These are complexly enmeshed with a messy, confessional 'letting go'. A leakletting.

A drip of menstrual blood. Some leaks now considered highly gendered were once not only ungendered, but humoral proximities to holiness: in Europe throughout the 17th century, everybody menstruated (Pask, 2017). Then, as Enlightenment delineations of private and public infused cultural experience, men started to find menstruating stressful, inconvenient and (most critically) disordered: they found that they could control their menstrual leaks, where women could not. As bodies became understood as machinic circulations of input and output, those leaky bodies who could not meet ideal forms became abject. Margrit Shildrick observes that this turn against the leaky generated two powerful paradigms of bioethics: healthcare as a corrective of disorder, and leakiness as a shared identity. 'What matters, in bioethics, and more generally for the ethical affirmation of the feminine, is that an acceptance of the leakiness of bodies and boundaries speaks to the necessity of an open response' (Shildrick, 1997: 217). Such an open response intends to deterritorialise closed-systems thinking around not only gender, but around all identity categories — a 'fluid liberatory mode' (Kipnis in Dango 2017).

At once the imaginary of leaks revolves around the 'source' and radically detaches from considerations of source. In *Them Goon Rules: Fugitive Essays on Radical Black Feminism* (2019), Marquis Bey craves the leak a means to arrive at 'illegible shadow genders': 'A way out resides inside an outside. [...] Legibility is the price of the proverbial ticket. Punching that ticket has promised wholeness, yet it has dealt us sheer *extimacy*, a determinative engendering from without that bears a hostile relation to the ways we want to leak out' (Bey, 2019: 136).

We want to leak out, and we want to leak in protest. Tracing the flows of the Pentagon Papers of 1971 through to the dawn of WikiLeaks, Dango (2017) argues for intelligence

leaks as a genre, drawing on Lauren Berlant's 'waning genre', in which the waning indicates the decomposition of what a public expects a genre to produce: shared affect, awareness of commonality. Legibility. Everything, including genre-led dramaturgies of public and private, is drawn into a flow through institutional leaks. As vast rafts of government documents are released at a time, a variegated shadow of Bey's illegibility emerges: the rush of these leaks mean they can't possibly all be read. Dango notes that it is in this sense that leaks become 'primarily affective rather than material or even epistemological modes' — 'there is something in the nature of a leak that its revelations will be of things you already knew, or [...] at least you *felt* you knew' (2017). Feeling you know, particularly in the current political climate, is a very dangerous proposition and now a common pivot point for action. As a mode, can the leak hack its own fantasies? //

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SOMATIC LISTENING

MARGARIDA MENDES

SOMATIC LISTENING

The formulation of listening as deterritorialised across different sensing organs is important to my research, as I attempt to re-think how listening practices and conscious ecopolitics can foster better interspecies and intersensory community relations. For this purpose, I am developing an expanded understanding of how listening takes place in the body, beyond the cochlear space. This reconceptualisation enlarges our understanding of the auditory processes and sensing mechanisms that reframe listening as a somatic experience. I do so by speculating about sensorial similarities in how different organisms perceive sound, nominally by looking into fish audition and the nerval distribution of human beings. Perhaps this analysis of different hearing mechanisms and audition processes may reshape how we perceive listening protocols and auditory spaces.

Fish sense sound as pressure waves through their lateral lines, organs with pounding fluids stretching across their bodies. Similarly, humans have crucial nerval junctions and body parts that register incoming signals, like the vagus nerve, the abdomen, and the fascia, an elastic membrane stretching around muscles and organs, where pressure signals travel, deeply affecting the nervous system. Establishing diagrammatic equivalences between different sensorial organisms, I re-interpret the spaces where auditory events travel as vibrational impulses causing physical and behavioural consequences, while still being considered unheard or inaudible.[1] The vibratory continuum overlaps with the dimension of the aquatic commons, where sometimes sonic trauma unfolds, and numerous forms of sensorial dispossession take place.

To consider listening acts, sensing mechanisms, and the insufficiency of our knowledge about their overlapping functions might reframe how we devise sonic ethics and forms of restorative acoustics across ecosystems. Bearing this in mind, my research has led me to develop an auditory concept that I term somatic listening. Somatic listening is an expanded form of audition that understands the whole body as an auditory system, capable of sensorial register and attunement to environmental transformations. It is an understanding of bodies as porous and co-emergent, subsumed to the rhythmic interpellations of a vibratory world in continuum. This form of listening, as woven with expanded sensorial action, registers the world and its many fluxes through different sensing registers, pulses and actions. Conversely, by analysing the causal connections of distributed sensing through the body, one can reflect about the different registers of environmental trauma and the relation between bodies and their surroundings.

[1] This would be exposure to low-frequency vibration per example.

Similarly, somatic listening is an interscalar form of audition, as messages and energetic signals are interpreted on multiple timescales and lived as effective reality, as sonic memories and traumatic impulses awaken the body with its reverberations. It is my argument that in re-reading and analysing deeply how acoustic events are occurring and delocalised through the body, one can re-trace the ethical implications and power dynamics of certain infrastructural and logistical implementations upon the spaces occupied by sensoriums.

Through somatic listening one can expand on what is unheard, and inaudible; sounds that linger in time, accounting for the body as a space of environmental register. This extrapolation of the impacts of environmental sound on the body was similarly explored by composer Pauline Oliveiros, who has developed the concept of the sonosphere through her energetic and composing practices.[2] Oliveiros explores the planetary dimension that weaves the biospheric layer with the technospheric, to refer to the energetic place that sound occupies, travelling through multiple bodily parts and environmental dimensions alike.[3] She is interested in how this channel of electroreception is in communication with the sonosphere and the energetic pathways of the cosmos, and also how sound travels across imaginary dimensions in the body, nominally through dreams, memories and visions, as for her, imaginal sounds have an important role for our existence. //

[2] The practice of chi kung was a rather important practice for Pauline Oliveros, who involved energetic work on her listening practices. For more information please consult Pauline Oliveros, Quantum Listening (London: Ignota Books, 2022).

[3] 'The sonosphere is the sonorous or sonic envelope of the earth. The biospheric layer of the sonosphere is irrevocably interwoven with the technospherical layer of the sonosphere. Humans sense the sonosphere according to the bandwidth and resonant frequencies and mechanics of the ear, skin, bones, meridians, fluids, and other organs and tissues of the body as coupled to the earth and its layers from the core to the magnetic fields as transmitted and perceived by the audio cortex and nervous system' Pauline Oliveiros 'Auralizing in the Sonosphere: A Vocabulary for Inner Sound and Sounding' in Journal of Visual Culture, August 2011.

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MESHWORK
RACHEL VOGLER
MESHWORK

MESH WORK

The following represents an attempt to trace some lines around the term ‘meshworks’, which I broadly conceive as a mode of insisting on the interconnectedness of all things. In this vein, I want to suggest that the term ‘meshworks’ might be considered an invitation towards crashing. Against the backdrop of a world that makes few promises other than to siphon us off from each other, that we might get to meet each other (in bars, in rehearsal rooms, in organising spaces) emerges as a form of potent promise. Herein lies a hope for the great enmeshment of our lives. May we crash gloriously, may we spill and leak and leave traces — records of our binding, reminders of our being led back towards each other.

The question of accounting for how we have been together — in which configurations, doing which kinds of labour(s) — are enquiries that permeate fields of sociology, gender studies, and performance studies, to name a few. Research from these fields is generally premised upon collective configurations, such as theatre companies in the rehearsal room or collectives of organisers engaged in direct action.

A meshwork, as conceptualized by Tim Ingold (2011), is a dynamic and entangled field of relations formed through movement, growth, and lived experience. Unlike networks, which are often understood as composed of discrete nodes linked by connections, meshworks emerge through interweaving lines of becoming — paths of entanglement rather than points of connection. Ingold emphasizes that meshworks are not structures imposed from above but rather processes of relationality that unfold through time. As he writes, ‘life is not in things but in the way things join with one another in the process of formation’ (2011: 4). A meshwork, then, is not a pre-existing structure but a way of being-in-the-world that arises through ongoing entanglements.

Expanding this through Donna Haraway’s thinking, a meshwork can also be seen as a site of situated affective entanglements, where entities — human and more-than-human — become with one another in ongoing processes of world-making. Haraway’s notion of *staying with the trouble* invites us to recognize that these entanglements are not neutral or harmonious but dense with histories, affects, and responsibilities. As she puts it, ‘we are all responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of terrible histories’ (2016: 29). Meshworks, then, are sites of becoming-together, where relations are not merely functional or instrumental (as networks often imply) but carry material, ethical, and affective intensities.

Theatre and performance offer rich sites for engaging with meshwork thinking. A rehearsal room is not simply a space for enacting a predetermined script but a site of lived entanglement, where gestures, voices, and bodies spill into one another, forming a web of relational intensities. In this sense, performance does not simply represent meaning but enacts a world-in-the-making, a lived and affective meshwork. To think theatre through meshwork is to travel beyond the idea of a linear production process, to consider performance as a continual process of entanglement — across actors, audience, space, and history.

Tom Conford's work on rehearsal spaces reinforces this entangled view, suggesting that 'the rehearsal room is never neutral; it is always a space of negotiation, of power and possibility' (Six, 2021: 38). This framing resonates with the meshwork model, in which a space is not an empty container but an active participant in the web of relations that shape creative work. Similarly, Lola Olufemi (2021) reminds us that imagining otherwise requires an attentiveness to these entanglements — to the histories, structures, and material conditions that make collective creation possible. Theatre-making emerges as a site of becoming, of crashing together in ways that leave traces, that drip with our desire for something better than All Of This. //

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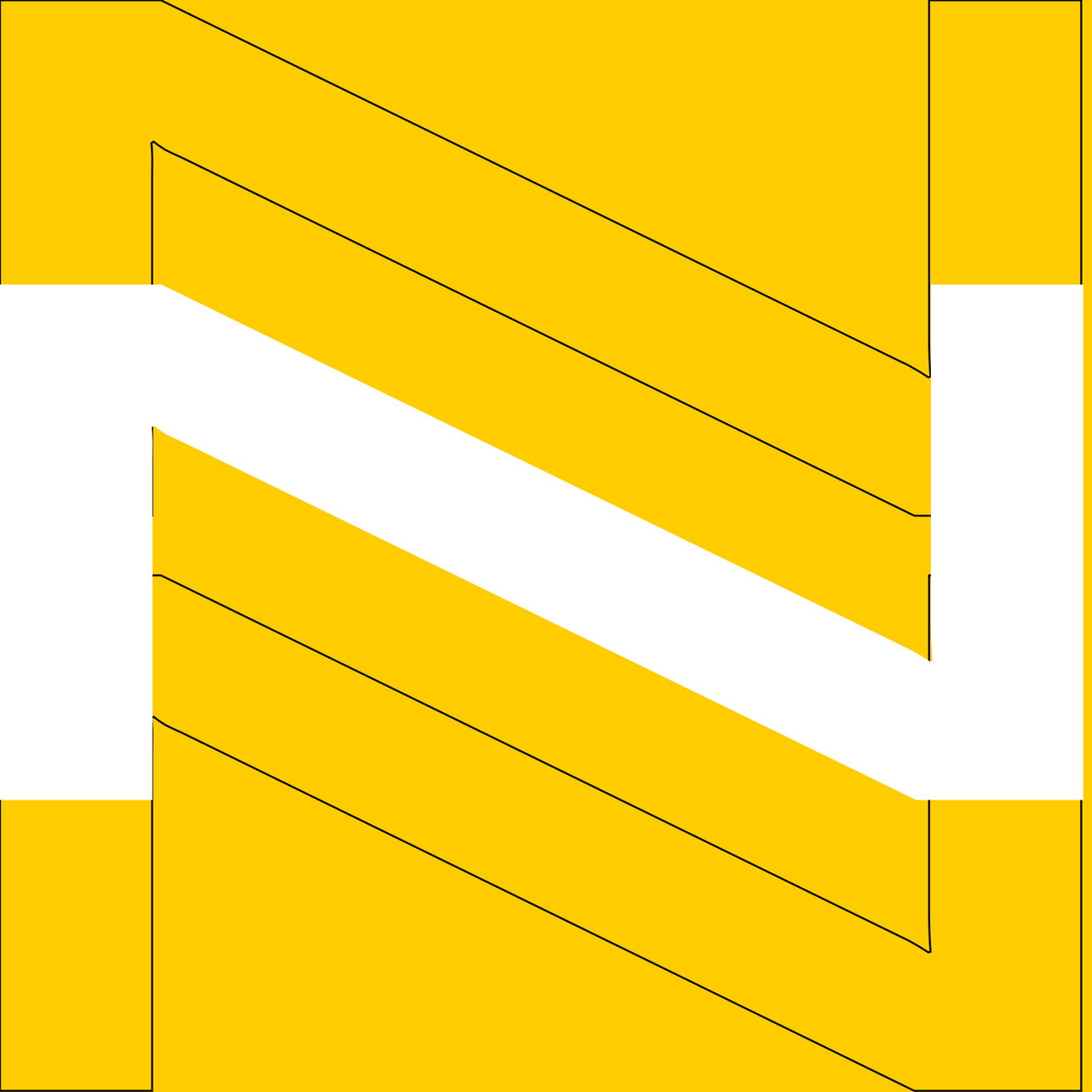
[1] Writing as Cornford.



MARTIN WELTON

NO

We cannot 'be' outside of atmosphere — or at least not without the extraordinary technical interventions of aqualungs and oxygen tanks, devices which themselves rely on it for return and replenishment, or for becoming filled in the first place.[1] Without sustenance drawn from within a body enveloping gaseous air, our own bodies cannot respire, and without which, we cannot be. Even the prenatal infant, their own lungs filled with amniotic fluid, must rely on the atmospheric exchange of their mother's before leaving the womb, mouth wide open, to first receive the air, and then project it back out again as a cry — a bodily expression as and in atmosphere.

In *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, Bruce R. Smith likens the opening of the infant's mouth, a space in which sound will form and resound (first as a cry and then as speech) to the 'wooden O' of the Elizabethan Globe theatre. The circles described by the open mouth and by the 'wooden O' are both spaces that open outward and shape the air within, and in doing so, are filled with sound. In doing and being so, they affect — or make affective — the atmosphere. The sound '[o:]' (the English phoneme 'o' or 'oh') is, Smith argues, 'in the most basic sense of the word, an *environmental* gesture. In crying [o:] I extend my person into "the about-me"'. The sound [o:] resounds in the space around me as I cry, against the surfaces of its features and objects, and within the fabric of the bodies it supports, all of which form 'the about-me' of the environment I move and resound within. Moreover, Smith proposes, even crying alone supposes that we might not be: 'As a cry from, within, [o:] seeks resonance from without. It seeks a listener' (1999: 14).

However, is the listener listening? Do they want to pay attention to our cries which have affected the atmosphere in which we are immersed, or can they simply not avoid the perturbations of sound and air that flow out of us and in to them? What right of refusal do they have to this 'act of aggression' (Smith: 14)? What is the move from [o:] to no?

As George Home-Cook notes, in hearing it we are *in* sound, just as we are in the air in breathing it, with the former the medium by which the latter is made sensible. Being immersed is often described as tantamount to being surrounded, under equal pressure from all sides, as if in water. 'Correspondingly', Home-Cook says 'we tend to assume, a priori, that 'being-in-sound' is synonymous with 'being immersed'; in other words, that sound is round' (2015: 140), a state of being seeming to mirror the existential act of encirclement that Smith conceives as an atmospheric first principle.

Duly surrounded and existentially contained, should we not then follow Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos and 'warn against atmospherics' (2016: 152) as acts or systems of partitioning that would otherwise seal us with an artificial 'glasshouse'? There are, of course, ways of living, breathing and feeling beyond the glasshouse, and in

[1] In *Terror From the Air* Peter Sloterdijk provides a hilarious illustration of this by way of Salvador Dali's inadvertent near auto-asphyxiation in 1936 during a performance in London, 'as a radical representative of 'Elsewhere' and in the name of the 'Other'' while bolted into a deep-sea diving suit (2009: 72-74).

looking for a window to open to the outside, perhaps it is less the medium (atmosphere) that we should try to prise ajar than its critical register — in this case, that of 'immersion'. Again, Home-Cook is instructive: 'we must understand that 'immersion', both as a concept and as a lived experience, consists of an inherent paradox. On the one hand, 'being immersed' connotes a sense of being completely enclosed within the world of experience, where self-consciousness is relinquished. On the other hand, immersion refers to a sense of plunging or sinking into a (particular) state of mind, where one is deeply involved or absorbed in 'some action or activity'. 'Immersion' thus simultaneously consists of a profound sense of passivity and an acute sense of concentration: immersion, in other words, entails both a temporary cessation and a radical seizure of consciousness' (2015: 140).

This state of being overwhelmed and yet also hypervigilant, might also describe the affective condition that progressive political thought now finds itself in as the global atmosphere swirls in the perturbations on either side of the Atlantic of a second Trump presidency and European returns to right-wing nationalism in which the [o:] is perhaps a cry of resignation of despair.

But if not immersion, then what?

For Smith, as well as the act of encirclement and the ensuing cry, there is a third theatrical rondel: 'First O, then [o:], then 'Oh'' (1999: 13). This 'Oh' is not an existential act of sounding and resounding the 'about-me', so much as it is an observational act, a questioning or interpellation into the present state of things. 'O, for a muse of fire' asks the Chorus at the opening of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, in an invitation for the audience to imagine more extraordinary circumstances than those they presently find themselves in. The 'O' (or 'Oh'), is a critical shift in the prevailing conditions, an introduction of curiosity ('Oh...') that recalibrates atmospheric affordances, such that we might move or be moved differently than before.

While the notion of 'atmospheric affordance' might seem paradoxical in appearing to lend an empirical certainty to evanescent phenomena, as Vesa Vihanninjoki notes, the notion of 'affordance', as it has emerged from the ecological psychology begun by James Gibson, has come to refer to the active means by which one acquires a 'sense of place' (2020).[2]

A 'canonical' notion of Gibsonian affordances references the immutable physical invariants that objects and their environments lend to perception. However, as Vihanninjoki argues, this perspective tends to ignore or forget the corresponding slow and cumulative perceptual processes that inform a more overall sensing of the state or condition we find ourselves in, or what he describes as 'the atmospheric background'. Vihanninjoki cites the phenomenologist Don Ihde in asserting that: 'these kinds of background relations to the affordances have 'atmospheric characteristics', in that we do not relate to them explicitly but yet we 'live in their midst, often not noticing their surrounding presence'. Such background-like affordances are thus constantly available to us, though we might not be aware of them; experientially, they comprise a form of 'present absence' or 'absent presence', being in any case 'part of the experienced field of the inhabitant, a piece of the immediate environment'' (2020).

[2] Vihanninjoki cites Ihde's Technics and Praxis (Boston: Reidel, 1979). 13–14.

Smith's 'Oh' thus both describes and provides the opportunity for a shift in the conditions of atmospheric background, for a different sort of feeling for and within the 'about-me'. However, does this really remove us from the paradoxical seizure and cessation of consciousness that Home-Cook finds in immersion? Do we not risk merely changing the degree or intensity of our conditions temperature rather than guiding our attention to alternatives.

While the theatrical O may well describe an atmospheric envelope where our own cries can resound within the bodies of others within it, as Jacques Rancière has argued, the collapse of difference that this may be taken to signal is both politically stultifying and, ultimately, curiously antitheatrical in equal measure. Rancière acknowledges the desire for an act or event of a community that 'confronts itself as a collective' (2009: 5), for which the mutual acts of witnessing amongst actor and audience presents itself as paradigmatic. By raising the latter from an assumed and individuated passivity into active participation in a mutually meaningful environment, the social and psychic alienations that beset modernity might be assuaged, even if only for a time. However, while the desire to eradicate difference might speak to a desire to reach out across distance, in its collapse, do we not risk obviating what Herbert Blau termed the 'initiatory breach' (1980: 150) by which theatre emerges from the quotidian with a capacity to reflect its oddities back to it? Moreover, the distance from the theatrical act that this breach or gap creates, offers spectators certain kinds of atmospheric affordance that are foreclosed to the all-encompassing envelope of the quotidian.

Even within the O there are dividing lines and topologies, that offer different sensory loci, and resist a collapse into an atonal or featureless perceptual field. Within the mouth that opens to cry, there is also (more often than not) a tongue that on the cusp of [o:] can be pressed against the teeth, and mutate the wordless cry into the semantics of a necessary difference: *no*. I refuse, I am, we are, and will, be different. The experience that 'apart, we are together' writes Rancière, (2009: 51) is the condition of theatre insofar as it is a practice of *aesthesis*: 'a means for producing an effect and... the reality of that effect' (2009: 59). Being together apart, is also the beginnings of what he calls a 'dissensual community' one that sits apart from and sees, thinks and feels other from the prevailing conditions: 'To the extent that it is a dissensual community an aesthetic community is a community structured by disconnection' (2009: 59).

First O, then [o:], then Oh — then *no*. //

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DIOGO ALVIM

WISE

NOISE

Beyond traditional definitions of noise (as loud sound, unmusical sound, disturbing sound, unwanted sound), *unfamiliarity* presents a particular perspective that may lead to yet another, perhaps more operative conception.

Many authors have delved into understanding the pervasiveness or the transformative potential of noise. Notably Marie Thompson, in her book *Beyond Unwanted Sound*, explores noise as something that always finds its way under any system, ubiquitous and omnipresent, a necessary component of material relations. Criticizing a subject-oriented perspective, where noise is framed as a negative judgment of sound, she proposes an ethico-affective approach, conceptualizing noise as a force-relation that can be both disruptive and generative. Noise is always already there, whether heard or unheard, unnoticed, ignored, consciously excluded from the information stream, alien to a specific structure.

The unfamiliar is a transitory process. As soon as something is consciously experienced, its unfamiliarity gradually disintegrates and becomes a faint and obscure sensation, hard to recall. Unfamiliarity is a momentary relation, a fleeting impression. It is a transient phenomenon while the experienced object remains the same. It may provoke a wide range of reactions, many times negative, such as resistance, rejection, fear or even laughter. The *familiarity bias* (or *status quo bias*) is a psychological phenomenon where individuals show a preference for the current state of affairs, often resisting change. This can be understood as a reaction towards the new or the unknown, the strange, or the alien. The familiar is comfortable. It is easier to decode, it demands a lower cognitive effort. The unfamiliar is demanding, it requires more attention and energy. There is a certain uneasiness in the unfamiliar as it threatens to disrupt our stable perception of the world. When are we curious for the unfamiliar?

The idea of unfamiliar sound may seem to push us back to a subjective-oriented perspective of noise, if not necessarily negative. The notion of noise is in fact contextual and contingent — culturally and historically. Much has been written about the scandal of Stravinsky's *Sacré du Printemps*, in 1913, or the evolution of dissonance. Also about how early electroacoustic music always evokes horror and sci-fi film soundtracks. Its unfamiliarity (uncanniness) is taken as the protagonist, not so much the play of timbres, textures, or discourse. But these are immediate superficial impressions.

In *The Psycho-analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing*, Anton Ehrenzweig suggested that inarticulate forms, seemingly chaotic, unfamiliar, become structured and meaningful through engagement over time. Inarticulate perception plays a powerful role in artistic experience, as it relates to unconscious processes that are beyond our ability to rationalize. However, through repeated exposure and cognitive adaptation, we start to give meaning to what were initially chaotic or irrational elements.

After a new sound has been heard a few times (and if it's not too disturbing), it may enter the repertoire of conventional sounds. Its acquired familiarity is a guarantee of acceptability, and even of aesthetic preference. The *mere-exposure effect* reinforces this idea by showing how people tend to develop a preference for things they are repeatedly exposed to, even unconsciously. As the object gradually yields a more pleasant sensation, we project our feelings onto it and want to experience it again, developing a vicious circle that conditions our perceptions of beauty.

If the history of music shows us many examples of centrifugal movements towards something new, today's algorithm-driven curation of digital platforms leverages passive and habitual listening, generating a centripetal movement within this vicious circle. Listeners become less flexible, creators take less risks. This process leads to a leveling of creation, and a leveling of experience, reducing or simplifying our affective spectrum.

Ehrenzweig (1975) argues that appreciating inarticulate forms requires a specific mental attitude, which he likens to the psychoanalyst's *diffuse attention*. This involves relaxing our conscious focus and allowing ourselves to be open to vague, ambiguous, and seemingly random elements.

To focus on the experience of noise, and not on the sound itself, changes our awareness of how it affects us beyond its measurable qualities. Perhaps nurturing this relation develops our ability to process complex experiences. The unfamiliar is an opportunity to exercise a broader emotional vocabulary, more nuanced, and more prepared to face the challenges of today's polarised forces. It might help us navigate the unmeasured, unquantifiable, diffuse — a smooth space in constant striation. In praise of unfamiliarity, against a *spotification* of life. (Hesmondhalgh et. al., 2023; Pelly, 2024). //

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NOURISHING

TIAGO PORTEIRO

NOURISHING

Nourishing as a physiological and bodily need is what we access first. Restoring, revitalizing, strengthening, substantiating, satisfying are, among others, verbs that are linked, all of them, to the expectation of a realization through an act of ingestion. There are several stages involved: the introduction of nutrients into the body, the transmutation of these same substances into others, which implies an underlying process of selection (separating the beneficial from the useless), and finally, the elimination of the excess. All these stages, together, aim, in short, to fulfill a desire or any need, whether for survival or pure pleasure, that restores or regenerates a lost homeostasis or vitality. On the contrary, thinking of a threshold for this whole process leads us to consider a level of malnutrition that leads to collapse and death.

And what can differentiate feeding from nourishing? Semantics, but also degrees of intensity of the phenomenon, as well as impacts with differentiated timeframes. Nourishing, in this context, will be the action whose effects are less immediate and more substantial, meaning a deeper and more global act that has repercussions in the long term. The reward that nourishing promises thus requires a more continuous effort and persistence. And as the results project more into the future, there is also a higher degree of exposure to risk. The farmer who sows to harvest later, but faces a storm that destroys everything, is an example illustrating this other reality, of vulnerability and risk, which are also inherent to the act of nourishing. The same can be said for a mother who tirelessly nourishes her offspring for some time but who, for one reason or another, finds herself confronted with the situation of considering that her offspring might not thrive in that idealized future. From the two previous examples, another condition of nourishing can also be inferred: its relational nature. This means that nourishing, to become operational, requires the involvement of exchanges and coexistences that materialize through gestures of encounter, substantiation, encouragement, welcoming, and care. As Enrico Campo states, care requires ‘a change in the subjects involved’ and a negotiation where ‘we are changed and, in turn, change through the people and the things to which we give, and from which we receive attention’ (2024: 82, my translation) The act of nourishing, in short, implies an otherness and simultaneity between giving and receiving, that is, a capacity to ‘read’ and ‘be read’ through various relational planes that simultaneously coexist and feed back into one another (the bodily, the symbolic and the imaginary, the present and the future).

Let us return to the agricultural universe to question the connection between acting and pausing through the technique of Fallowing, this ancestral knowledge of

fertilization that, in rotation, places plots of land as if to rest or ‘pause’. It is important to look at this plot not as a non-productive land, but as being in a latent state of ‘pause’ or waiting, capable of simultaneously promoting its regeneration and longevity. The shift from a more concrete reality to a more existential and metaphorical plane leads us to ask, by analogy, what is the most essential thing we can do to nourish ourselves in this current, historical-social time of deep transition?

Seeking a more relevant, more meaningful, and more lasting gesture will imply activating a capacity to re-learn to eliminate the useless and the trivial, to revive an awareness that every action has its reverse, just as knowing how to act in a sharp and interventionist way through a ‘relaxed’ gesture. These may be some of the ingredients that are part of a recipe that could nourish us toward clarity! //

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RITA BARREIRA

SCALE

The Bolivian historian Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui tells us that 'It is not within my power to think what is possible on a macro scale' (Cusicanqui, 2015: 73, my translation). Everyday politics arise from urgency and survival in the face of the colonial, patriarchal/neoliberal violence that regulates the course of things in Bolivia. The collective is a larger and more effective scale for each body to truly survive. To this end, Cusicanqui argues for a practice of autonomous knowledge that can be communalized in a social mode, based on a politics of affect and mutual support. Communalization is a social technology inscribed through self-organization among bodies and the desire for autonomy from the nation-state.

I find it exciting to think alongside Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui that it is through this small exercise in scale — from one to one among many organized — that we can break through colonial-capitalist deterritorialization: 'Seeking coherence between the private and the public', and that, in the desire to open up space, one can 'turn the private matter of consumption into a public issue, breaking down the domestic wall and transforming the streets into a space for collective socialization' (Cusicanqui, 2015: 141).

It is also through the anarcho-feminism of Maria Galindo that communalism is interwoven as a *creative* practice of collective self-determination and, of course, as a practice of questioning and disrupting state regulation: 'Creativity is a tool for struggle, and social change is a creative act.' (Galindo, 2022: 72). From one to many, it is within this exercise of scale that new historical and therefore political subjectivities are created: 'Our alliance as an invented identity, created and recreated, and therefore imperfect, incomplete, and inviting.' (Galindo, 2022: 73).

Seeking a larger scale for these kinds of autonomous knowledge, Cusicanqui, like other women, envisions alliances between communes and collectives, hoping that 'perhaps they would radiate outward and connect with other forces and initiatives.' (Cusicanqui, 2015: 141). This proposal becomes very clear when the historian questions the organization of territory through nation-states, instead proposing a territorial self-organization based on communalism (autonomous knowledge or an ecology of epistemologies). This is the premise for a relational configuration of autonomous zones from South to South, a diffraction of *ch'ixi worlds* (Cusicanqui, 2018), epistemologies of the South whose political power lies both in overcoming the binary nature of the nation-state (what it includes and what it excludes) and in transcending the monolithic

identities it produces. The *ch'ixi* world is in a state of becoming (Cusicanqui, 2018). I add and articulate: imperfect, incomplete, summoning both historical absences (the dead, the fatigued, the disciplined — as Galindo puts) and the situated creation of life for each and all.

Thinking with Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Maria Galindo, I see that small-scale politics or communalism can constitute a reformulation of social space and the (self-determined) creation of new subjectivities — a transformation in progress, clandestinely piercing through abstract and authoritarian spatializations in everyday life. //

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STATE

LUCY FREEDMAN

STATE

STATE

To address ‘the state of the nation’ as an object of study or a series of affective registers, it helps to tease out the aggregated meanings of the term ‘state’. This includes *the state of things* — that is, the material economic and social conditions under and through which people live; a generalised *affective state*, akin to what Raymond Williams has termed a ‘structure of feeling’ (1977); and the *legal and administrative state* through which ‘the nation’ is articulated.

THE STATE OF THINGS

Drawing on discussions at the London workshop, I identify Britain’s conjunctural moment as the fallout from the 2008 financial crash, a sharp descent within capitalism’s ‘long downturn’, as Robert Brenner terms it. This period includes the initial wave of austerity (2010–2015), which gutted socially reproductive state functions, and the persistence of its immiserating logics; Brexit, empowering hard-line anti-immigration conservatives amid a global rightward shift; the defeat of Corbynism; the pandemic’s mismanagement; a chronic cost-of-living and housing crisis; visible climate crisis impacts; the explosion and corporate absorption of the BLM movement after the killing of George Floyd; and governmental support for genocide in Gaza and the criminalisation of dissent, in part by the new centre-right Labour government.

AFFECTIVE STATES

In her exploration of the social and psychic experiences of political defeat, Hannah Proctor describes the 2010s and 2020s as marked by intense ‘malaise’, ‘depression’, and ‘frustration’ within the UK’s left (2024). Hers is an affective study of what Vincent Bevins calls ‘the mass protest decade’, defined by the failures or co-options of revolutions across the Middle East, Latin America, and SouthEast Asia, alongside student and Occupy movements in the UK and North America. This malaise extends beyond the left, appearing in popular culture through the trope of the downwardly mobile, perpetually adolescent Millennial, exemplified by Phoebe Waller-Bridge’s *Fleabag*.

Simultaneously, the increasingly inept governance by short-lived Conservative prime ministers has undermined the British state’s ability to fulfil what Marxist theorists term its ‘legitimation function’: maintaining state autonomy from capitalism by distinguishing between ‘the social’ and ‘the economic’ (Clarke, 1991: 6).The chaotic expansion of the carceral state and frantic alignment with right-wing ‘culture wars’ as crisis-management strategies have precipitated a resurgence of what Stuart Hall termed ‘authoritarian populism’ in 1970s Britain (1979: 15). The surge in popularity of the true crime genre, I would argue, reflects this generalised sense of suspicion and a shift towards punitive desires, driven largely by the growing realisation that the state is failing to fulfil its projected role of ensuring public safety.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

The *Marxist Keywords for Performance* entry on 'The State' describes it as 'an institutional ensemble of activities, including regulation, law enforcement, militarism, taxation, and public services' which, under capitalism, exists 'to secure the conditions necessary for capital accumulation' (Blackwell-Pal et. al., 2021: 44 and 46). The *Keywords* collective highlights that state funding of arts and culture is not purely benevolent but 'a tool to prop up industries the capitalist market undercuts', such as through gentrification, converting public money into private profit (idem: 46). Austerity-driven arts funding cuts, then, signify more than ideological withdrawal.

Inarguably, the UK's cultural industry *is* being dismantled and abandoned by successive governments.[1] However, scarce arts funding does (and will likely continue to) remain available from state bodies, but increasingly under the proviso that work undertaken promises measurable social impact. This comes amid the widespread adoption of 'social prescribing' by councils, the NHS, and others. While emphasising holistic health and social care may seem positive, this shifts responsibility away from costly, publicly-funded specialist services to non-experts in the cultural sector, outsourcing state activity and worsening services' quality and access.

[1] Between 2010-2023 Arts Council England's budget was cut by 30%, Creative Scotland's by 10%, Arts Council Northern Ireland's by 63% and Arts Council for Wales' by 21%.

The state-enforced turn to socially engaged art practices is, then, clearly symptomatic of the organised abandonment of those rendered surplus to the direct and immediate needs of capital. But it also poses existential questions for the arts in Britain: must art serve a purpose beyond the aesthetic? and if art is increasingly folded into state and quasi-state activity, what happens to its ability to provide social critique? //

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VALUES

SEBASTIAN MYLLY

VALUES

To invoke the concept of ‘values’ (Western, Christian, or traditional, for example) to gesture to a set of moral or ethical codes that ‘we’ live ‘our’ lives by is to gesture to an ‘us’, to draw an outline of who ‘we’ are. It is thus also a way of sketching, however faintly, a not-us, a ‘them’ who do not live by the same codes. As Mary Bosworth and Mhairi Guild note, ‘national identity is most frequently balanced against those understood to be legally — or culturally — foreign’, and ‘rhetoric on immigration or counter-terrorism’ is one of the areas in which ‘there has been a decisive attempt to assert a set of ‘British values’ and to define (culturally, politically, socially) the limits of a national identity that is allegedly at risk from certain categories and scales of migration’ (Bosworth & Guild, 2008: 713). Indeed, the codification of ‘British values’ into ‘democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs’ occurred first in the context of the Prevent strategy in 2011 (Department for Education & Lord Nash, 2014).

This should not be taken to mean that ‘British values’ — or ‘values’ at large — would be a mere policy framework, a list of ideals that a would-be immigrant or a suspected terrorist would have to subscribe to in order to be accepted as sufficiently British. The invocation of values affectively delineates belonging and foreignness in political discourse, drawing less on any formal definition of ‘our values’ and more on an intuitive collective sense of the national community. In Franco Zappettini’s analysis of economic pro-Brexit rhetoric, for example, the concept of ‘“British values” draws on the imaginary of British influence and independence’ and fuels a fantasy of free trade prosperity that ‘reproduces historical discourses of English/British exceptionalism and its incompatibility with the European project’ (Zappettini, 2019: 150 and 152). Here, ‘values’ frame positive aspirations for the future: the identification of ‘Britishness’ and its values allows the identification and excision of the non-British, paving way for the flourishing of the nation free from the constraints of the EU. Conversely, Rishi Sunak’s 1 March 2024 speech at Downing Street — which pronounced ‘Islamist extremists and the far right’ to be ‘two sides of the same extremist coin’ and condemned both as ‘hostile to our values’ — mobilised the concept in order to diagnose and denounce an internal threat (Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street and The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, 2024). ‘Threats of violence and intimidation’, Sunak declared, ‘are alien to our way of doing things’; the ‘divisive, hateful ideological agenda’ of ‘extremism’ (formulated here as a singular mode of politics in its own right detached from ideological origins) imperils ‘our democratic traditions’ and ‘our democracy itself’.

‘Values’ thus have a metonymic function: they stand in for something larger and less concrete than themselves and conjure that something into being by evoking not so much a particular thought or concept but a collection of affects. In other words,

values create atmospheres — atmospheres of pride, fear, grandeur, or danger, among other possibilities — that sketch the contours of an identity (in the above examples, the national identity of 'Britishness'). To Gernot Böhme, 'atmospheres are something quasi-objective [...] a floating in-between, something between things and the perceiving subjects' that is not, in itself, a thing that can be made or manipulated (Böhme, 2013: 3 and 4). 'The making of atmospheres is therefore confined to setting the conditions in which the atmosphere appears', and it is in scenography that Böhme finds an art form that is 'directed explicitly, in its concrete activity, towards the generation of imaginative representations in the subjects' (i.e. the audience); '[i]t does not want to shape objects, but rather to create phenomena' (ibidem). In a similar vein, Rachel Hann defines scenographics as 'tactical atmospherics', i.e. 'the designed conditions that repeat, project, and sustain a distinct feeling of world' (Hann, 2021: 3). The deployment of the idea of values in political discourse is every bit as 'tactical' as Hann indicates: the notion of values itself is a deliberate construct (a designed condition) that intentionally repeats, projects, and sustains affects of identity ('a distinct *feeling* of world'), self-referentially bringing into being that which it describes (to hold British values is to be British and vice versa). Read through Böhme and Hann, the concept of values is thus exemplary of the discursive scenography of affective atmospheres — of how 'quasi-objective' phenomena of affect are brought into existence via 'the tactical politics that frame a place or event as welcoming, alien, caring, or disruptive' (Hann, 2021: 10).

One could, of course, quite rightly point out that this scenographic usage of word 'values' is too broad or too vague to be useful in defining the identity it describes; that it is arbitrary, tautological, or self-fulfilling; or that it is populist in essence. None of this, however, prevents it from being mobilised. //

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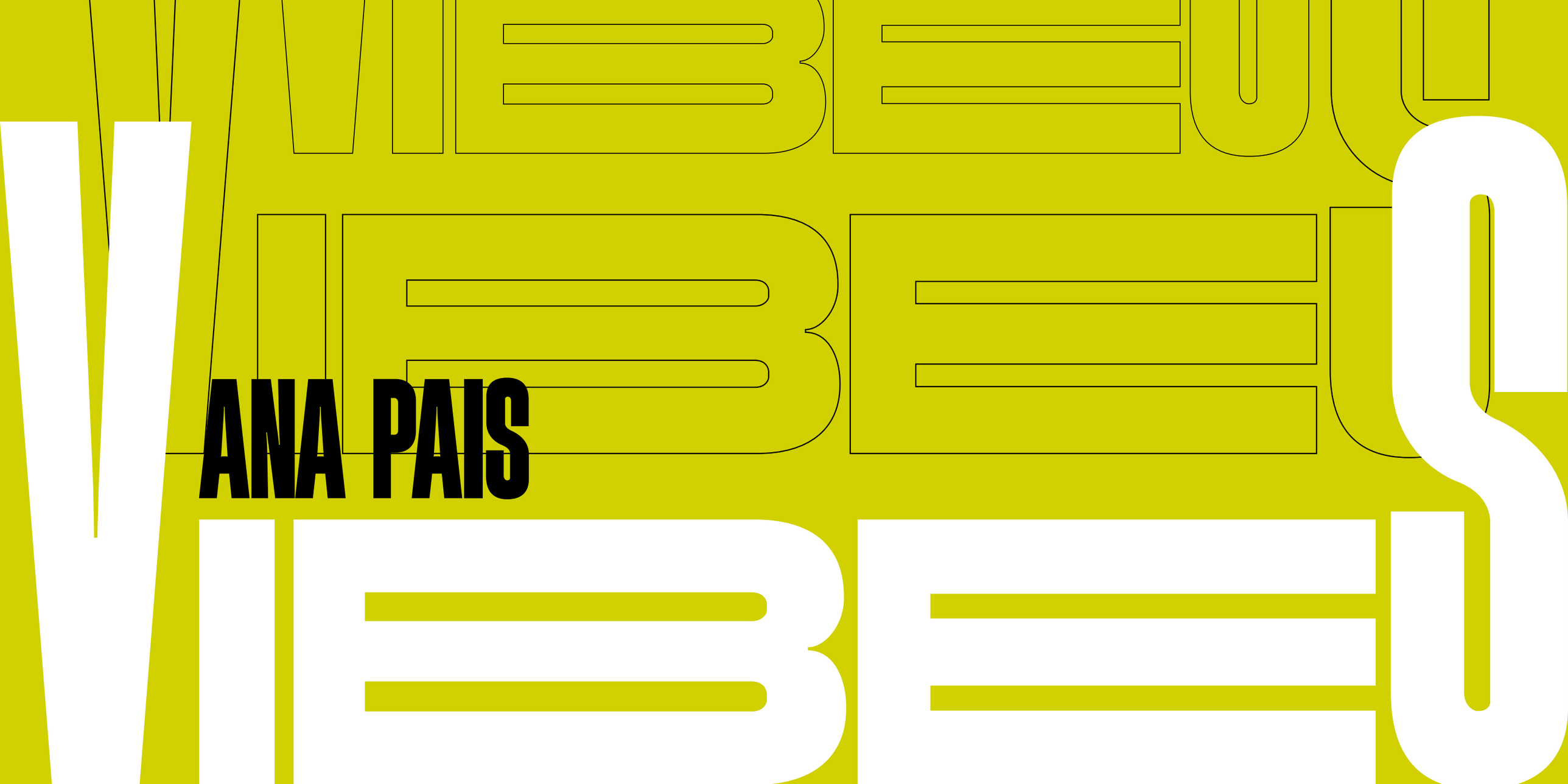
ANA PAIS

VIBES

A distinctive atmospheric quality can be defined as a vibe: something that vibrates in a certain frequency, that propagates through spaces and materials, bodies and minds. Like a magnet, one can give a good or bad vibe that creates an ambience around the person inspiring attraction or repulsion. Like an antenna, one can pick up a specific vibe that a person or a space emanates, being aware of feeling it or not. Thus, vibes are always relational: a signal that is emitted and received, radiated and felt through a wave of intensities.

In the context of the American presidential campaign in 2024, in which the word vibe resurfaced significantly to describe the perceived emotional shifts of the electorate regarding their candidates, philosopher Jason Read called attention to social media as the stage for the presentation of the self through their vibes. He gives the example

of how we pick up information from those we have access mostly online. Obviously, we do not establish the same kind of dialogue as if we were to meet in presence; we do not learn facts. Instead, we get a perceived image of how the person presents herself through the way she relates to her 'tastes, interests and activities': 'the way of relating to what they relate to could be called their vibe'. Hence, a digital space also radiates atmospheric intensities that can give away the vibe of a person, which can be felt by someone else behind the screen.

One could say, perhaps, that vibes are less about being present in a space, being in the presence of others, and more about a relationality established through affective signals. Like sonic waves, these signals travel through the air, through different objects and materials, carrying meaning but not producing meaning per se. In addition, such kind of relationality is hardly possible to cross check, so one never really knows the difference between what is the actual atmospheric intensity and what one perceives as the actual atmospheric intensity. This conundrum both describes our contemporary political moment of indistinction between truth and perceived truth as much as the secular actor's craft of creating effects of truth and reality.

While the replacement of Joe Biden by Kamala Harris generated a vibe shift in the US presidential campaign, it surely wasn't enough to overcome and transform the dominant affects of frustration, anger and prejudice that led to the election of Donald Trump. In other words, the relation of the American electorate regarding their candidates only knew a moody shift that didn't translate into actual change of voting intentions. Floating and fleeting, vibes are moving, shifting sparkles that cannot be fully grasped, but sensed in the continuum of life's experience, whether real or perceived

as real. In the long run, they cannot compete with strongly rooted beliefs and mindsets that ground their relation to the world.

In contrast, the Western theatrical tradition revolves around the production of effects to influence the spectator. Anchored in different techniques and varying historical approaches to representation, the work of the actor aims at engaging audiences through the emotional effects their representation produces. If representation requires technical mastery of voice and gestures, the moment of performance feeds on the vibes it emanates — one of the reasons why a performance cannot be repeated. The theatrical vibe is real or perceived as real, but it's theatre. Likewise, the impalpable reading of the audience is never verified, hence, it is a movement of vibes fraught with misunderstandings. For instance, actors often misjudge their audiences for their silence (reading disinterestedness rather than focus) and can be surprised at the end. Sometimes during the performance, the cast shares their opinion about how the show is going and they might have different perceptions of the audience's engagement. In other words, both actors and spectators give away their vibes and pick up vibes from each other, even if actors are faking theirs and the audience is mostly unaware of the signals they are emitting as a whole. //

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ATTENTION
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