

# TWAH(=These Worlds Are Here) Ana Teo Ala-Ruona

July 4-August 2, 2019

*Workshop Participants:*

Angi Brzycki

Jessica Fee

Prima Jalichandra-Sakuntabhai

R. Kauff

Arin Krausz

Julia Mande

Renée Reizman

Bridgid Ryan

Daviel Shy

Soffia Stiassni

Kristof Trakal

Annabel Turrado

Udita Upadhyaya

Thank you NAVEL, Women's Center for Creative Work, Human Resources, Ochi Projects, Hikawa Studio, Zizia and Scallion Chloe.

Supported by Frame Contemporary Art Finland, the Finnish Cultural Foundation, and Poets & Writers.

<http://www.gas.gallery>  
@gas.gallery



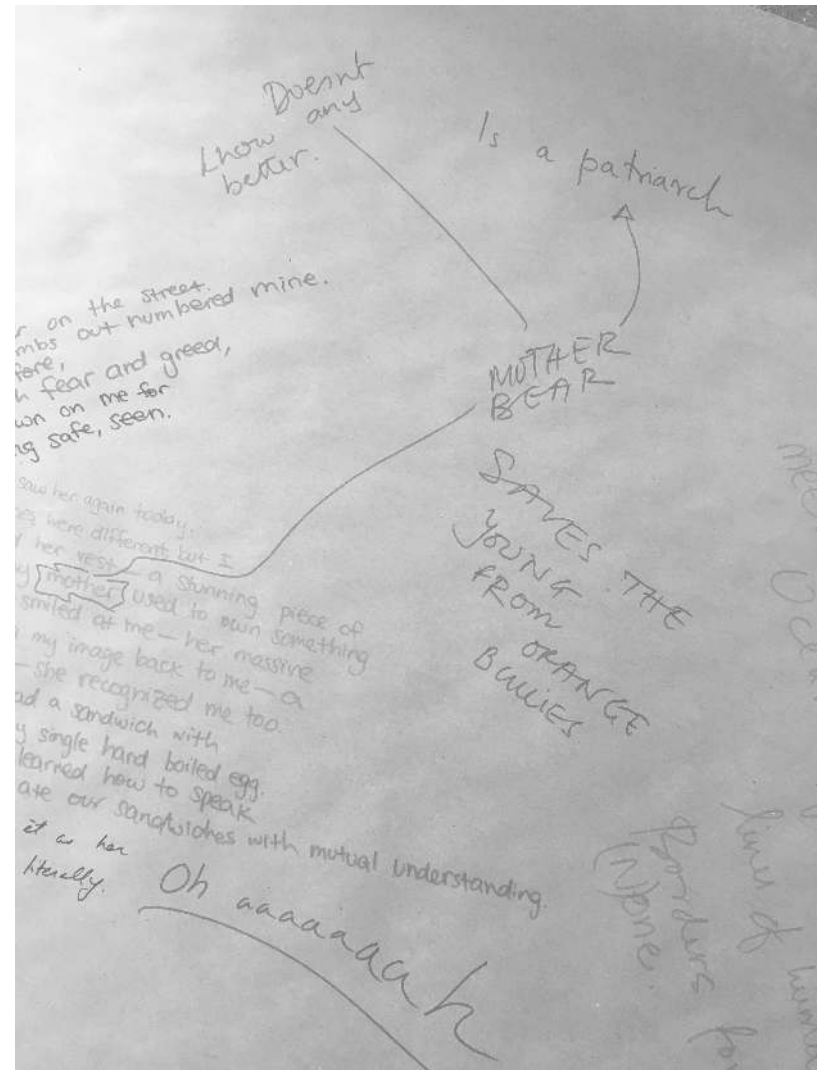


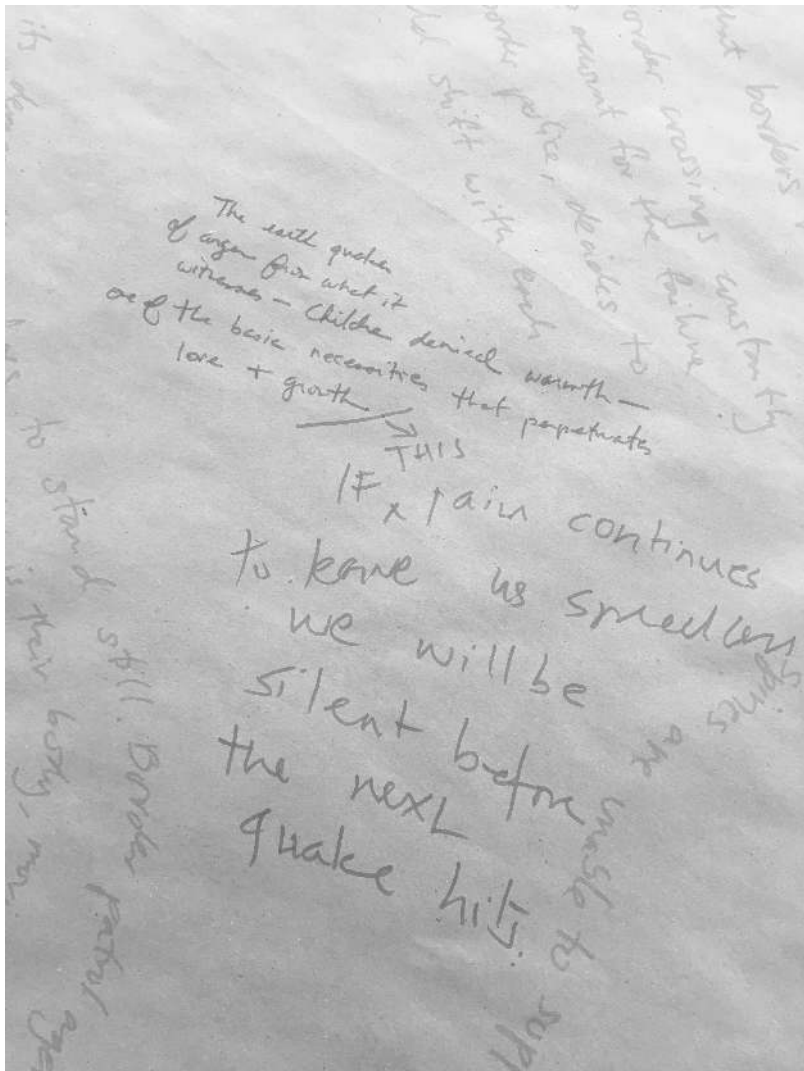
moving in time (to any direction whatsoever). Often fictioning is considered to be a practice of imagining worlds and futures to come, but that are still somehow unreachable or far away. For me, writing is somatic, embodied and intimate. It is undoubtedly a practice of engaging with futures, but not necessarily one that remains distant from it. If the moment of writing is approached as a material event that molds, moves and (re)forms the writing body as the writing happens, then those words (or other beings) that are written can materialize the future in the here and now, in the body of the writer. Every ending of a written word is the future of its start. The futures unfold as the writing happens. Words and worlds are created in the meeting point and tension between pasts, presents and futures.

The term world-making is a concept that has been used by several writers, but the ones that have been most influential for me are micha cárdenas, Ursula K. Le Guin, Donna Haraway and Sara Ahmed. I use the term world-making as a directional tool for thinking what the writing can do as a political, speculative, embodied and somatic practice.

The word “world” in Finnish is “maailma”. In Finno-Ugric languages, such as Finnish, its meaning is roughly “the earth and the air”. World can be thus understood as (1) the actual physical and material site/position of oneself or (2) a whole—anything that belongs to some “one whole”. This is the conceptualization of the word “world” that I am using in my work: the world of writing consists of the surroundings of the writer, the writer’s body, physical and emotional state, the history of the writer, the unconsciousness and all sorts of things that appear. I’m curious about the material and imaginary spheres and their intertwinement in the world of writing. How do they leak into and affect one another?

In the end, I guess it’s pretty impossible for me to describe clearly the worlds that are created in my work, both in my personal writing and in the writings that are generated in the workshops by participants. The worlds that come into existence through these practices are always unknown beforehand. However, there are some characteristics that unify the text material: my work aims to make space for desirable, pleasurable, wanted or even voluptuous worlds to unfold. Some of the practices suggest that the writer look for words that in one way or another feel good for them to





write; some practices aim towards writing “inside” a world that the writer would want to exist in; some practices then again are all about creating a character that the writer wishes to play for a moment through the writing. These proposals create a pretty diverse cluster of texts that deal with needs, wants, desires, longings and dreams of people taking part in the workshops. It’s important to remember that when one is dealing with desires and pleasure, there needs to be space for dealing with pain, trauma and the complexities of the realities in which we live.

So, what kind of futures am I then trying to move towards...? Various, I hope. In my work I want to imagine something that might not exist yet (in larger scale), imagine “against the flow” of cis-heteropatriarchy together with others and create a heavy sea of multitude of imagination and hope—not in a wholehearted naive celebration of futurity, as Heather Davis puts it (Davis 2015, p. 243), but from a queer and critical point of view that rejects the generalizing language of “the one future for all” and “the one and only apocalypse to come”.

**How do you approach language and writing in your practice? How does this relate to your efforts to build community?**

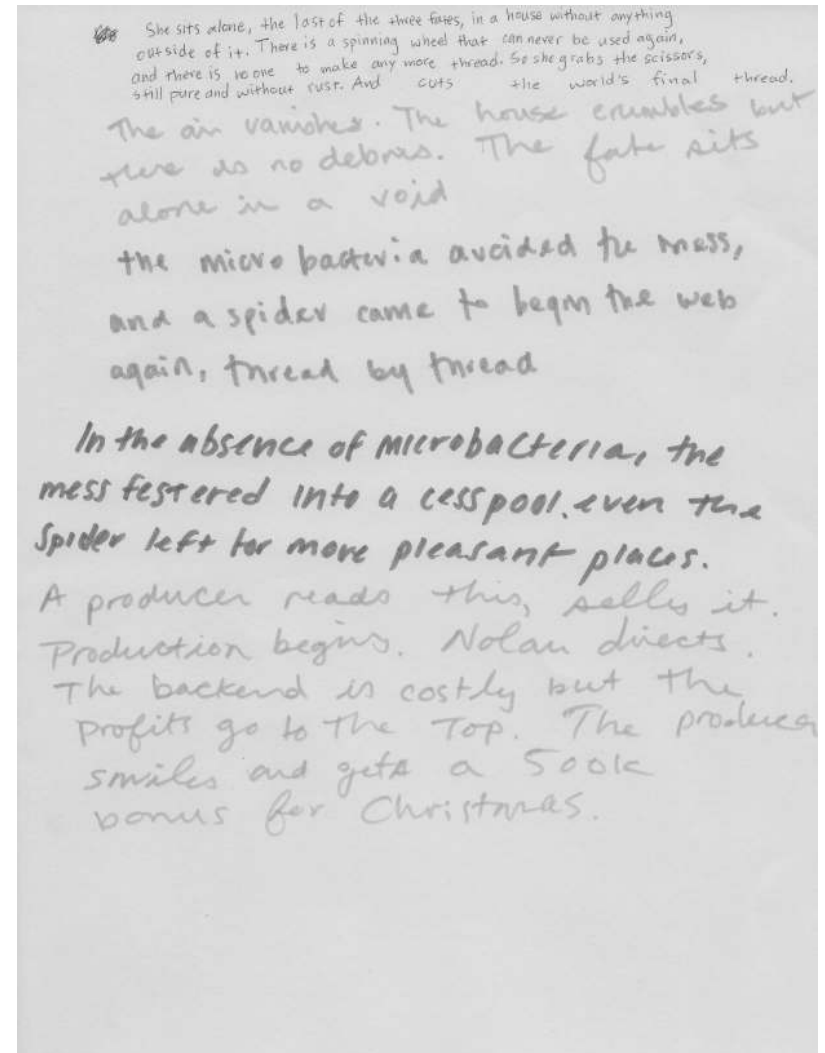
In January 2017 I had a dream in which I began to learn a new language. (I actually had this dream soon after seeing the movie Arrival.) The language was not written and it had no words, at least not in the sense as I have learned to know words, nor did it have letters as I have learned to know letters; the language was only oral, but it did have sounds. The sounds were something between peeping, chirping and tweeting. In the dream I didn’t get very deep with understanding or being able to speak it, but what I discovered was that the language was a language of the forthcoming feminist futures. Back then I thought the dream was pretty cool, and I guess it served as some sort of an intuitive approval of the writing practice that I had started to sketch. So, with this dream in mind and inspired by the feminist writings of authors such as Audre Lorde, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, Donna Haraway, Eva Hayward, Ursula K. Le Guin, Hélène Cixous, and Heather Davis, I continued developing my writing practices for feminist and queer futures.

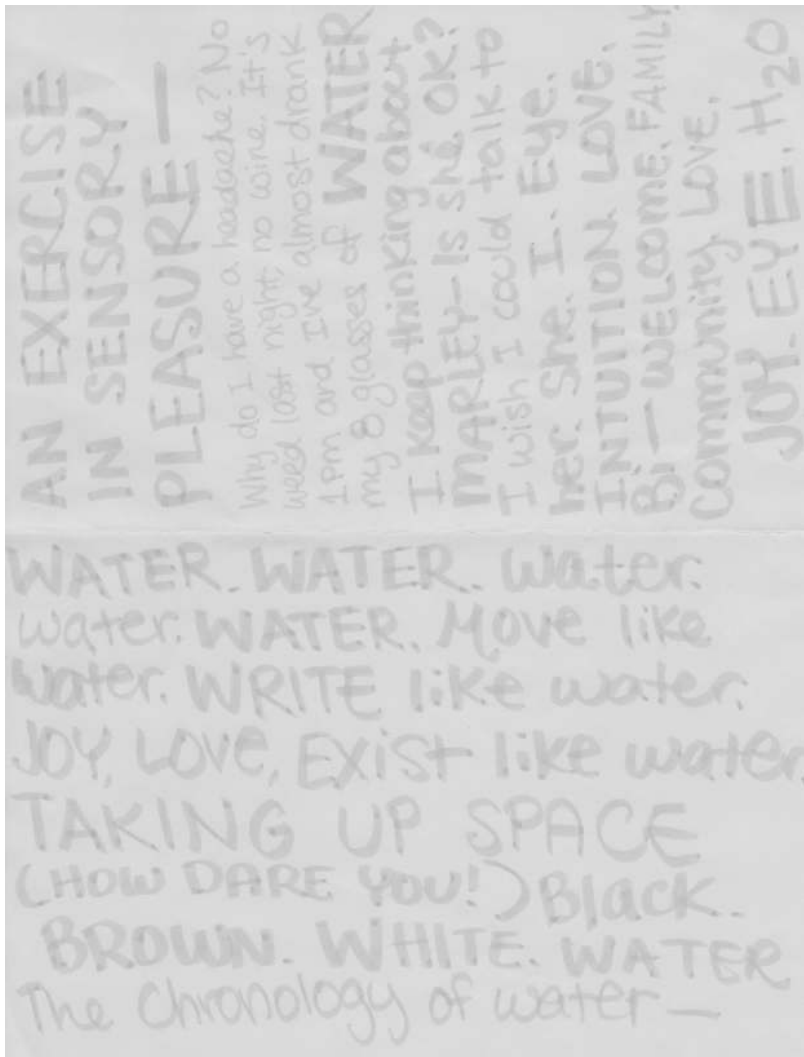
Language and writing are of course only two of the many means with which feminist, queer and trans worlds can be made more

visible, audible and tangible. Words and ways of speaking have actual and physical effects on lives. It matters what kind of identities are taken into account through words. It matters what kind of words are used to describe queerness. It matters who says and writes those words, and creates new language about and around queerness. I really like Haraway's way of putting this: "It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories." (Haraway 2016, p. 35.)

In my work, I approach language as an adaptable political tool, that can be claimed for queer and trans feminist world-making. As I am asking how could I, in collaboration with others, create writings, wordings and worldings that support thinking for and moving towards futures that radically oppose cis-heteropatriarchy, I need to ask what kind of words are required for this. Sometimes it's necessary to try to find and give birth to words and languages that do not exist yet. Then again sometimes it's necessary to use the language and words that we already have: some languages need to be given more space to be heard than they have at the moment (an example of this in Finland would be all the Saami languages) and some languages or ways of speaking need to be reclaimed and used in new ways in feminist contexts and for feminist purposes (one example of this would be scientific discourses around ecology and biology dealing with gender and sexuality).

In the writing practices that I do, language is both an area where the writing can start and a familiar toy with which the writer can play freely. In the workshops that I facilitate, everyone is always welcome to write in whatever language they feel most compelling at each given moment. Often people like to write in their mother tongue, but also sometimes people want to try to "break free" from their conventions of writing through writing with a language they know, but aren't so close with. Also, I encourage people to try out sketching words and wordings that do not "make sense" to them at all. Artist Camille Auer writes in the abstract of her master's thesis that: "Unconventional ways of writing bring about new ways of reading and thinking" (Auer 2016, p. 3). I consider this as a queer "bodybuilding" practice—thinking starts to move in a more nonlinear and indirect (non-straight) manner. I like this possibility of travelling between various languages and ways of





writing. It can sometimes be liberating, sometimes frustrating and sometimes just super playful and funny.

Language as a political and rhetorical tool has a huge impact on ways of thinking and living. The stories we hear have an effect on how we go on about our lives. Especially in my years of studying I was introduced to a variety of theoretical discourses around ecological crises, such as posthumanism, post-fossil-fuel theories, object oriented ontology and new materialism. All these discourses are in some way concerned with topics like the Sixth mass extinction, Climate Change and the “Anthropocene.” Thus, they are all theories that look both into the pasts (how have humans considered their actions on the Earth) and into the futures (how should “we” go on). From this present position, these theories propose different ways of perceiving, living together and viewing and experiencing the interconnectedness and relatedness of the world. They take critical stands on anthropocentric and humanistic readings of the world, and try to figure out ways to exist on this damaged Earth as humans with and amongst various more-than-humans. They suggest changes in thinking; changes on which humans could try to start building different ethics towards futures. Getting familiar with these discourses made me think what is my own in relation to various speculations on futures. What is my relation to the language used in these discourses, and how would I want to take part in them?

My writing practice is driven by questions around the language(s) that we encounter in ecological and sociopolitical crises and fossil-capitalism. I’m wondering how we create meaningful relations to the language used to discuss the Climate Catastrophe, the Sixth mass extinction, the toxicities of our environments or the Anthropocene, Capitalocene or whatever you may call “these times.” There are many examples of the generalizing, exclusive, Eurocentric, white and cis-heterocentered language used in both media and scientific discourses. Our daily lives are filled with disastrous and apocalyptic depictions of “the end of the world,” and the scientific knowledge and information about ecological crises is often written from a western science point of view, which excludes multiple alternative ways of knowing and dealing with the changes at hand.

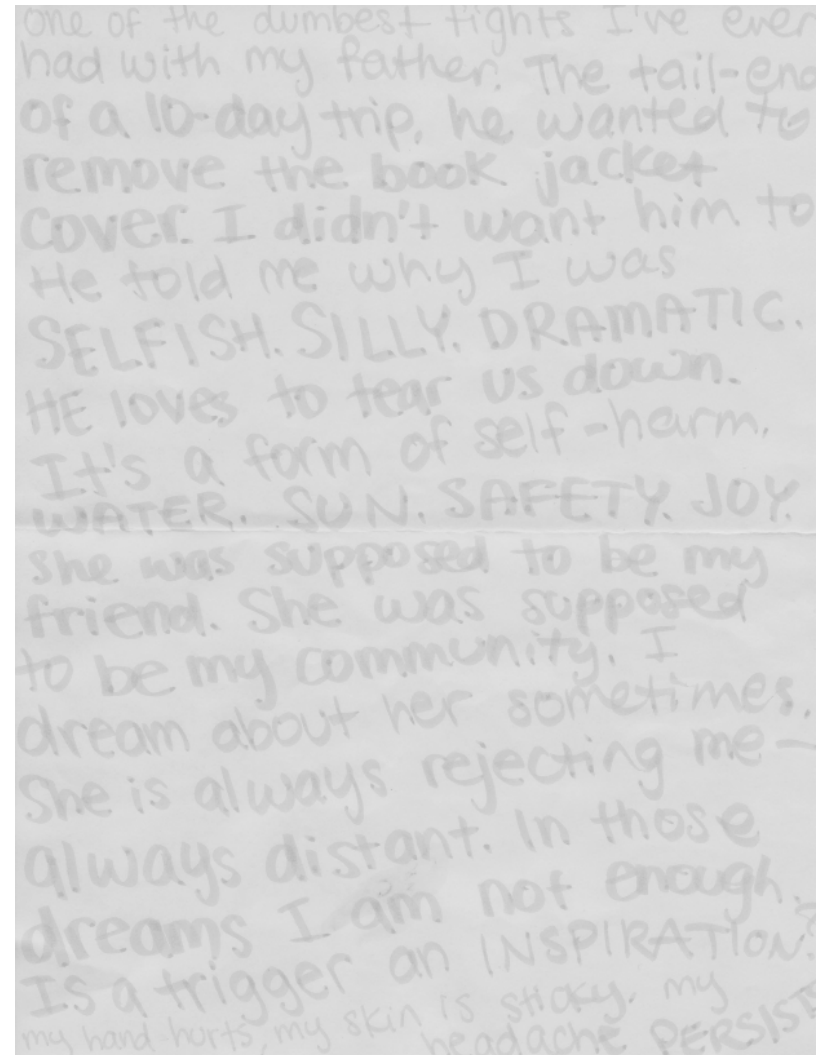
Also, environmental toxicities and plasticities and their influences on human and more-than-human worlds, bodies, reproduction and

behaviors are often discussed in a problematic manner especially in relation to gender and sexuality politics. Pollution and its effects on human and more-than-human worlds are themes loved by the media, which often, as Malin Ah-King and Eva Hayward point out, treats these themes in cis-sexist, gender-essentialist and heteronormative ways and thereby demonizes the effects that pollution sets for gender, sex and sexuality, bypassing at the same time all the other health risks that environmental chemicals cause in animal bodies (Ah-King & Hayward 2014, p. 3 - 4).

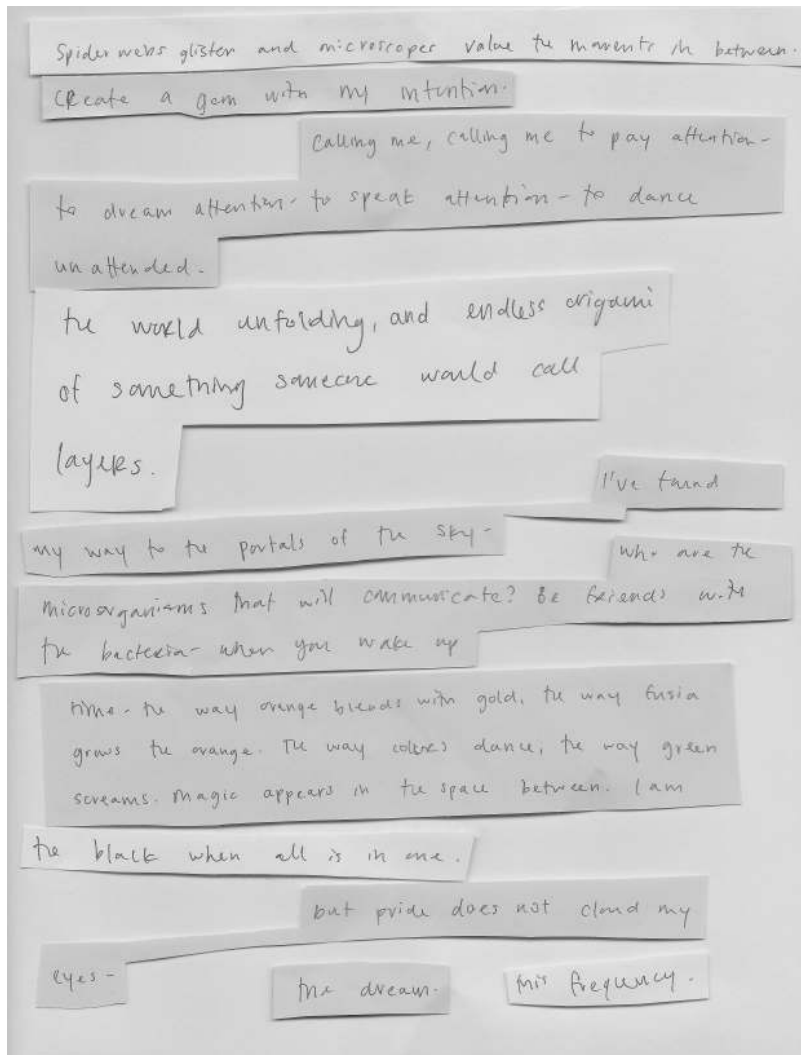
Our reality and understanding of histories are in the end very much created and maintained by the narratives that we tell, hear and read. For me, these SF writing practices are tools to imagine futures and give space for self-definition and self-care in forms of hope for those futures. With this practice I ask whose language and words are taken into account when we are talking about futures. How do we create personal relations to various future visions? What kinds of stories can we tell about the future? And who gets to tell those stories? How do we create our own ways of speaking and writing about futures? What kind of and whose futures are excluded in the generalizing language that deals with the future prospects? How can we start creating multiple, touching, personal but yet shared and heterogenous languages and words for futures, on which we can also start building collective actions?

You also asked how my approach to language and writing relates to my efforts to build community. As my work is made mainly for and with trans, non-binary and queer people, so too are my aims around creating new ways in using and creating language related to people included in aforementioned identity categories. It matters who gets to use the space and time allocated for telling about queer and trans experiences. It matters who gets to redefine the language describing gender and sexuality. micha cárdenas reminds us that: “The ways that transgender people are described in popular culture have real, material effects on our safety and our ability to survive” (cárdenas 2017) Transpeople are the owners of their experiences, stories and bodies. Just as queer people are theirs. And telling these stories, and stories influenced by or stemmed from these stories, is a crucial action that—I believe—can create new queer and trans feminist language.

***Can you speak to the pedagogical methods used in your***







## **workshops? How do you craft these events, and what do you hope will come out of them?**

One of the central elements in my pedagogical approach in making these workshops is that they are (almost always) separatist: for trans, non-binary and queer folks and sometimes for cis-hetero-women too. In my experience separatist spaces are much needed in order for people to build trust, feel seen and central (not always marginalized) and also to build queer communities.

In the beginning of all my workshops I speak through some basic safer space principles. I don't know how it is here in LA, whether people are very familiar with safer space policies, but at least in Finland there is still a major need for making more work around safer spaces. Practicing intersectionality in the ways of speaking to one another and taking into account different experiences, needs, backgrounds, sexualities, genders or genderlessnesses and abilities feels still like quite a recent feminist project in Finland. It's important to remember that still these so called "safer spaces" do not exclude the possibility of having conflict, being called out, experiencing challenging emotions and situations or dealing with pain. Holding safer space is a collective and active action towards a space that is safer than many other spaces that people who are marginalized (for example, due to their gender and/or sexuality) need to pass through in their everyday lives. For me personally holding safer and separatist spaces is a political, personal, artistic and activist project. I think it's necessary that marginalized people have opportunities to gather together for discussing, sharing experiences and learning from each other while at the same time possibly having something in common or some "similar" experience to identify with.

I compose the workshops quite carefully beforehand, yet still leave a lot of space for unplanned, surprising and spontaneous things and events to occur. There needs to be room for the workshop participants to have an effect on the formation of the workshop too. Also, when people are dealing with topics such as desires, sexuality, body and societal structures, there is always the possibility of traumatic and unpleasant experiences to unfold. These must have space within the structure of the workshop.

I usually base the structure of the workshops on a few main writing

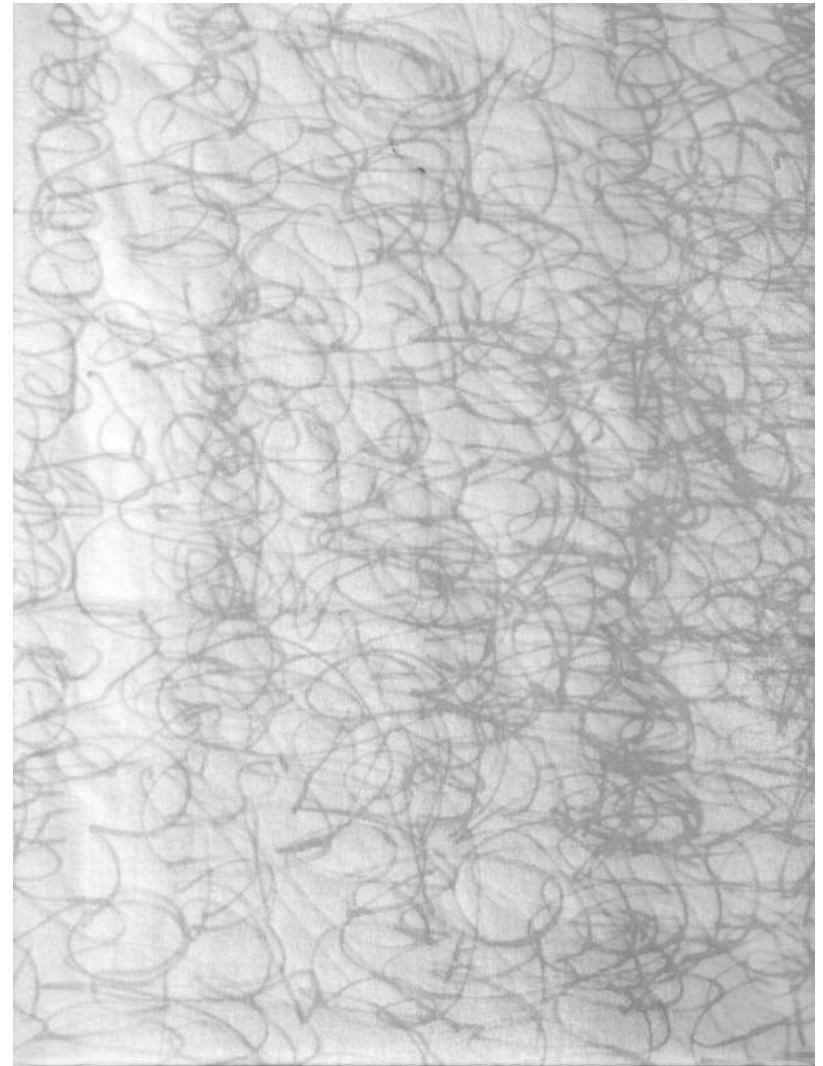
exercises, which I have been developing and practicing since 2016. I like to use the same exercises over and over again, as they always bring about something new with new people. The exercises inexorably develop and mutate with time and with every workshop, as people give their feedback on them.

It's pretty impossible to point out any specific outcome that I'm aiming for in the workshops, as each workshop I've ever held has brought about very different things. Personally I enjoy always meeting all the people who join the workshops, hear their thoughts on writing and learn from and with them. It's such a privilege to hear people's texts and experiences on the practices. It gives me a lot of joy. Each comment about any given writing exercise deepens my understanding of that exercise and thus brings the work forward. So, I'm always deeply grateful for all the workshop participants. Even though I'm the one facilitating, it's really all the people together that make the workshop and its atmosphere possible. When I and the participants really give our energy, thoughts and input for the workshop, the outcomes and experiences can be pretty deep, and this can open up an intriguing landscape of stories, desires, enjoyment, pleasure, laughter, weirdness and all sorts of unexpected encounters.

***Across your practice - whether it is performance, teaching, writing, visual art, etc. - I feel that you're after an entirely queer ground for perception, that is both embodied and enacted. This doesn't begin and end with typical conversations about "representation" but rather presents another paradigm. This is exciting and important, but since you're building something new, I could see it presenting some challenges. Could you discuss how you create work on your own terms?***

I like this question a lot, even though it's a tough one. Also thank you for these kind words. They mean a lot.

Representation is such a big and complex topic when it comes to marginalized or underrepresented artists' work. I really appreciate how artists Spence Messih and Archie Barry have written about the complexity of trans, non-binary and gender diverse artists' representation in the arts in their super important publication called *CLEAR EXPECTATIONS: Guidelines for institutions, galleries and curators working with trans, non-binary and gender diverse*



mettle with my walls  
and you will find yourself  
quite red-faced.

I am not a bother

I am safe

I am not a fast predator

I am not a list

I can relearn

I can remap

artists. They write: "Being 'represented' often comes at a large personal cost where artistic exposure does not equal actual resources or access to influence, nor does it make the lives of trans, non-binary and gender diverse artists easier. Visibility often means having to respond on someone else's terms, speak only about one's gender identity and provide evidence of, and defend, one's own existence." (Messih & Barry 2019)

Working from a trans, queer and intersectional feminist perspective is not easy. As an artist who is marginalized due to queer sexual orientation and non-binary gender, I often can't expect many of the organizations and institutions that I work with to have queer sensitivity or knowledge. (For example, words that are ok to be used about me and my work.) I can only hope for that. I'm aware of the increasing "trending", if you like, of queer topics in the arts, and I know that to some extent this brings along some very needed and welcomed changes, but it also has entailed (at least in Finland) some flattening evolution to the understanding of queerness, as the term is widely used also by people who might not need to live through any queer externality in their lives. The experiences of queer and trans lives are real, and the margins do exist in the sense that queer and trans people are harassed and killed for being who they are. This reality, this ground of perception needs to be taken into account whenever doing any "queer art." And I think that it's exactly from this ground, from the experiences of queerness, where a new and radical landscape of various, desirable, hopeful, safer, trans and queer feminist futures can start taking shape. I wrote once in an article about allyship, that whenever one wishes to understand the violent power of structures of societies, one should always keep in mind that it's exactly those targeted by that violence, who possess the deepest understanding of these power structures. And that they should be heard when trying to dismantle structures and create new ways of co-existence and living and dying together (as Haraway would put it).

I reach out to queer and trans communities through my work. I also work mostly with people from these communities; these are my own terms of making my work, and the most pragmatic guidelines. For a person like me, who is all the time in their everyday life incorrectly defined from the outside, with wrong words and with language that wipes out my gender, it is necessary to make, look for and find spaces and situations where I can exist

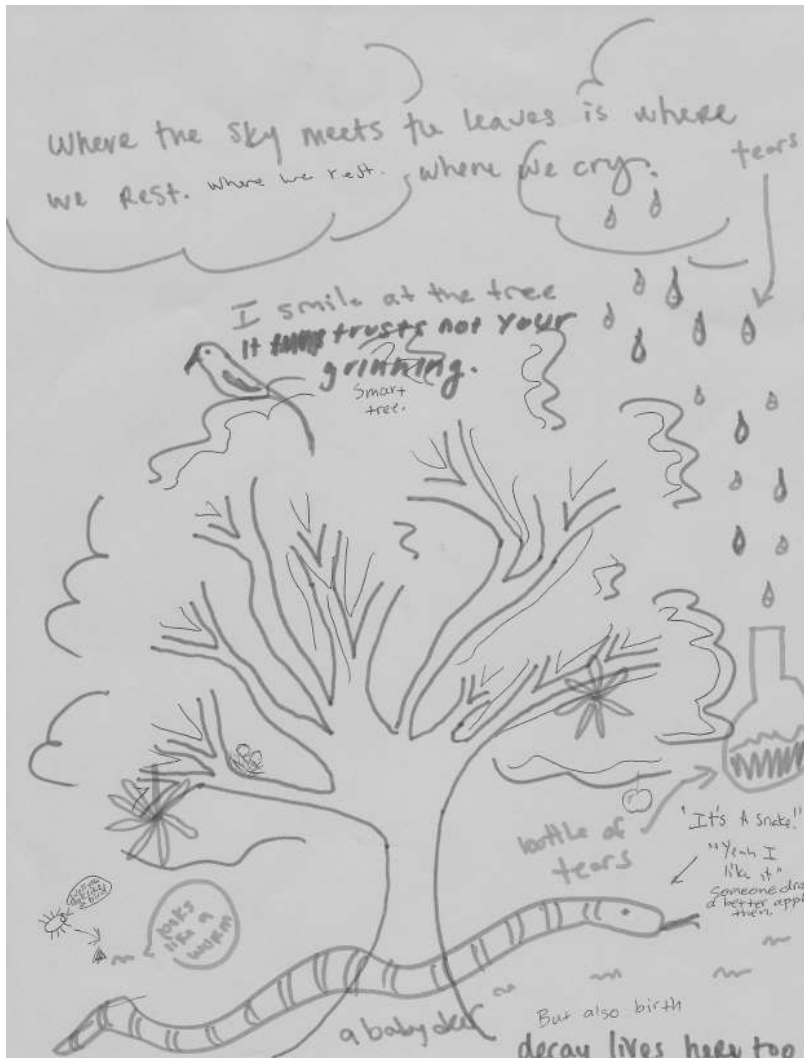
and be seen in my own terms, and where others can exist and be seen in theirs. I'm not making my work for cis- and heteronormative gazes, even though I'm happy if my work reaches out to various people and can give them things to consider. I don't consider my work to be pedagogical in that sense that it would be about educating cis- and heteroaudiences. It might do that, which can be an important impact, but it also might stay weird, quirky and queer. And that's ok.

Also SF, as in both speculative fiction and speculative feminism, are ways to do work in my terms, bypassing various deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs of reality. To alter perception, or to generate a ground for queer perception, if you like, one needs to experiment and critically look into how one's own conceptions of the world have been shaped within history. Which stories shape me and my perception? Which stories have I been believing in only because I knew about nothing else? I want to look for that "something else" in my work. I want to generate, listen to, look at and explore stories from trans and queer feminist perspective, both about pasts, presents and futures. SF writing can bend and flex time, realities, societal structures and bodies. Fictioning and queering up words can blend together realities, "truths" about queer peoples lives, fiction and storytelling.

I'm also curious how writing can serve trans people as a practice of imagining, living with/through, handling and dealing with transitioning. Through writing I have been able to visit bodily realities that my physical body does not (at least yet) reach, but that it desires. Writing can make me shift shape. This kind of SF writing creates experimental areas for perception of the self to radically transform. SF for me is an embodied and somatic practice in the sense that it alters one's thinking and the brain tissue. It moves the body, it creates emotions and feelings, it runs through the whole physical structure, its cellular levels and nervous system and it affects the body thoroughly.

When many people are brought together in a same physical space and time to write together (individually or collectively) and when they read their textual creations to each other, a lot of things start to appear. Written worlds and characters affect each other and imagination circulates and resonates. When this ground for imaginary worlds is cultivated together, something happens in the shared field of perception.

*Children are the most resilient  
creatures.*



References:

AH-KING, Malin & HAYWARD, Eva 2014.  
Toxic sexes—Perverting pollution and queering hormone disruption.

O-Zone: A Journal of Object-Oriented Studies  
Issue 1: Object/Ecology.

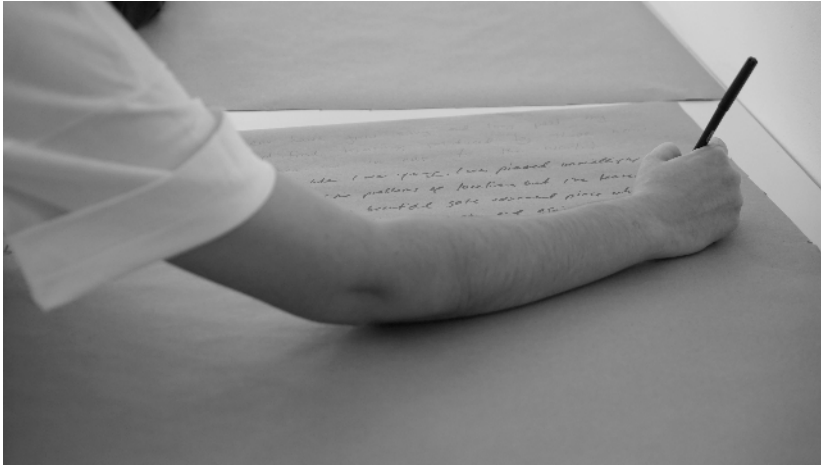
AUER, Camille 2016.  
Remain Impossible.

CÁRDENAS, micha 2017.  
Imagining a Trans World.  
<https://adanewmedia.org/2017/10/issue12-cardenas/>

DAVIS, Heather 2015.  
Toxic Progeny: The Plastisphere and Other Queer Futures.  
PhiloSOPHIA 5.2. (Summer): 232 - 250

HARAWAY, Donna 2016.  
Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene.  
Duke University Press.  
Durham & London.

MESSIH, Spence & BARRY, Archie 2019.  
Clear Expectations: Guidelines for institutions, galleries and curators working with trans, non-binary and gender diverse artists.

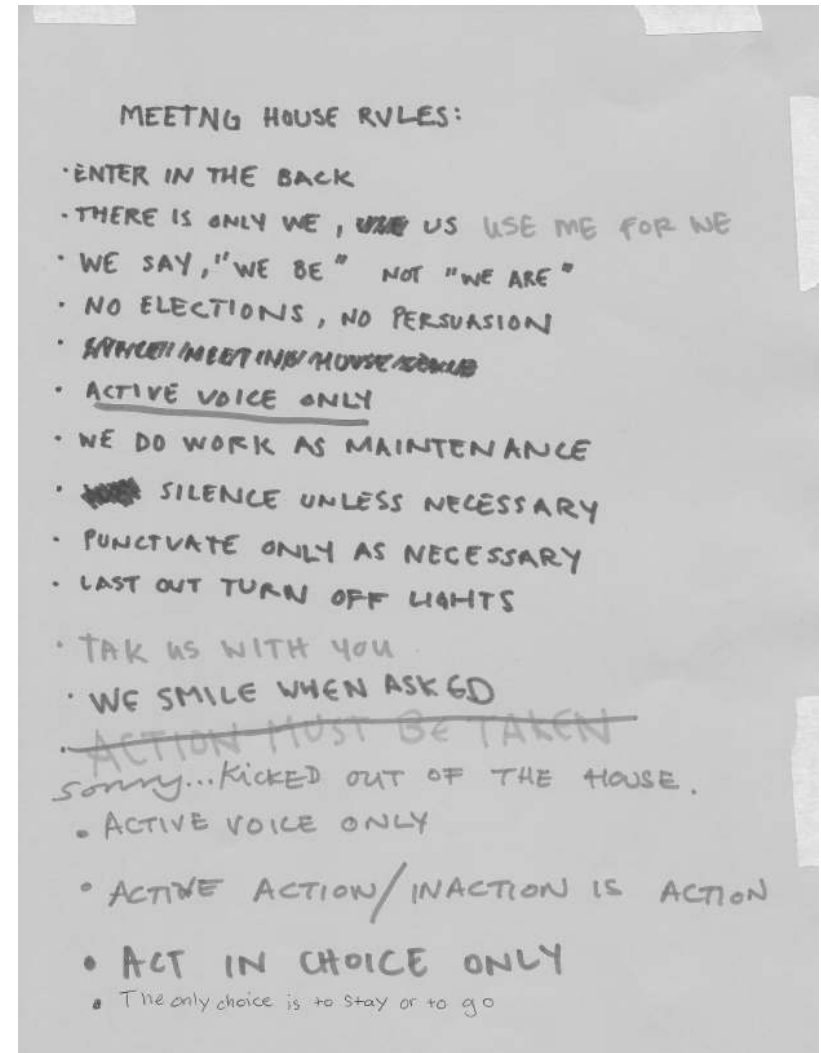


## TWAH(=THESE WORLDS ARE HERE) WRITING WORKSHOP JULY 4-7 AT NAVEL

TWAH (=These Worlds Are Here) was a writing workshop for trans, nonbinary, queer people and women. The workshop allowed participants to LARP (live action role play) queer worlds as they wrote, asking them to experience and embody these imagined worlds at the moment of writing.

### PARTICIPANTS:

Angi Brzycki  
Jessica Fee  
Prima Jalichandra-Sakuntabhai  
R. Kauff  
Arin Krausz  
Julia Mande  
Renée Reizman  
Bridgid Ryan  
Daviel Shy  
Soffia Stiassni  
Kristof Trakal  
Annabel Turrado  
Udita Upadhyaya









She has reduced us.                      she?

Creation feels feminine. Or androgynous. Or maybe it's her way of distancing herself. But for all that creation, we lack even names.

We're letters again. But I'm tired of just being letters and words. I want to bite my lips so hard I taste the muscle.

You say that like there's no pain in words already

You know it's not the same.

No, it's not.

[ Silence ]

Well, I want to be a little bit realer than this. Or at least greener  
I'm more than a wisp of smoke. Can we set the stage?  
We can let her do it for us. Where do you want to be?

Someplace kind.

[ The world starts. It begins with a patch of poppies surrounded  
by a circle of white stones ]

It is when you give such a hard request. ~~the next anyone~~  
not very impressive...

What did you say?

I said ~~that's not fair! We exist and you can't silence us!~~  
I'm taking back words I regret.

That's not fair! We exist and you can't silence us!

We're more than your scribbles and—  
Please. Just let me sit here. Trap  
myself in paper @lysiums.

No! I can't hear them any more! What did ~~she~~ ~~say~~!

I'm sorry. Goodbye.

[ To audience ]

Don't hate me. I'm not in control either,  
Let's just sit at the bottom of this  
page, and imagine an ending.



my gender is made to disappear

I move out from my body

I do not exist

I turn ~~it~~ into molecules

I float in the air, ghost-like  
as your words try to touch me

I dissolve

I am made to disappear

I'm invisible

I live hiding

You can't see me before I speak

I make myself exist through words

For you my flesh grows and becomes  
tangible only through MY words.

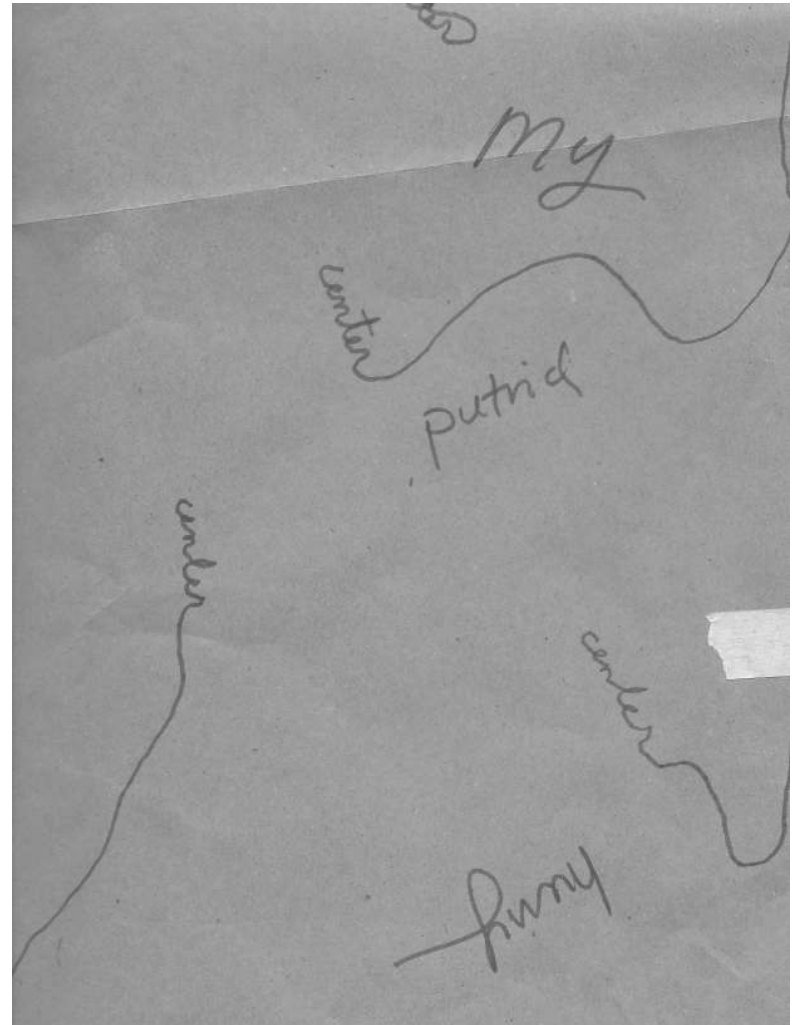
You can't see me without them,  
unless you know how it

feels to live hiding.

My ears process sound around the squeaky knots of discomfort in their drums' way. I picture the doctor's black plastic cone at the end of their light that they will insert into each sore ear later today and get a chill of pleasure. I love the heightened sound, the pressure, the inevitable response that there is, in fact, inflammation or too much wax. My ears have always been issues. Too much swimming or maybe genetics. Mom would tell me to brush my hair in front of them implying that like hers and my grandfather's, they were too big for the public to see. And the, "What?" I have to ask of everyone repeatedly is like a joke, ears so big but so useless. But now, with a lover that squeals with delight at the movements of my exposed ears - a whole language I had been speaking without knowing it.

Listening depends on cilia, tiny hairs like those in the nose. Waves of vibrations like wind through wheat and, voila! Hearing.

These hairs have grown long, so long they flow out of my ear holes and down to my shoulders. They are a surprising golden color, not like the hair on my head but like the flecked hair on my arms. The strands remind me of cornsilk. Of course Mom advised me to trim them, others suggesting I pluck. I couldn't bring myself to touch them since they brought such an improvement in my hearing. Not only do I now hear clearer, better and farther away, but I feel more attuned. Like drooping golden antennae, I can sense shifts within my own body instantaneously. I feel the slightest acceleration in the pulse of a stranger on the other end of a room. I can anticipate the mail truck down the street and begin to soothe the dogs. No, these beautiful strands will not be cut by impulses of vanity or normalcy.



After so much shaking the world feels still again, almost as if we never knew what stillness was before. Nothing cracked, nothing fell, nothing shattered, nothing broke. The earth swayed but structures remain, fixed to space, affixed to place.

Even though buildings stand and ceiling fans hang unperturbed, we have changed. We have entered a new dimension. Time, an inside sort of thing, flows forward.

Awareness is altered. It's broader and deeper, open to chasms that might erupt with the unexpected. Our bodies have learned any cataclysm might crash when we least expect.

Emotional debts are wiped off the all-knowing ledger. We can retire expired expectations. The shadow world of facsimiles, of how we should live is null and void.

Our conception of what we might be blooms inside of us, a new world is born.

My lover asks if she can braid them and the sensation is almost too much. Her hands carefully and expertly separating and bringing together the newest parts of my body. Once they lay in plaits, people begin to tell me things. Voices have changed to me as I can now sense every trauma and triumph embedded in the making of a sound. Music has become too much and headphones are out of the question. Instead, I listen to the concrete sing its woeful journey from rock in the sun, through the mixer, to bearing the burden of structures and so many feet. I put my hands on materials in silent solidarity. I am now the world's ear. Everywhere I go, old forms of communication follow. I can touch objects or sit in environments and feel the stories reverberating in my long braided silks. The stories that have had nowhere to go find rest in being heard. When I sit with someone, I say very little but the listening provides



its own medicine and many people report feeling lighter after having been so heard. Sometimes, I repeat their stories back to them. When I speak, I drape my ear silks in fabrics or feather pillows so I don't have to worry about headaches from the feedback. When I want to hear a new song, I put my head into a metal bowl and the ring produced aligns me like a tuning fork. My body has never felt more receptive, strong, and resonant. I try and strive no more. When I dream, there are no sounds. I relish in the play of light on forms that my waking life's volume has eclipsed. When I eat, I hear the <sup>journies</sup> ~~journeys~~ of the leaves of lettuce, I cry with the cows, I thank the tomato.

By David Shy

Pause. Breath is gas, is fire is fuel, is dry quick  
change is in the body is on  
the floor of your pelvis is  
on the roof of your mouth is on the tip  
of your tongue is neither is  
in the after is in the already is  
get in line, is making space.