

EDGES OF BODIES
Camouflage, Correspondence and the
Choreography of Alterity

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Abstract

This practice-based research project reconfigures a novel conception of the phenomenon of camouflage to both exercise and theorize new relational models of subjectivity through choreographic practice and writing. Camouflage is here understood as a spatio-temporal act—a process through which bodies are negotiated in correspondence with their surrounding environments, processes that are intrinsic to choreography as well. Camouflage, at heart, rehearses the problem of distinction: between self and environment, subject and object, and being and appearing. It operates at the threshold of a corporeal localization, osculating at the contours of where bodies meet their surroundings, and ultimately surfaces as an interweaving of an interior-exterior, real-virtual, and visible-invisible intersection.

Building on this alteric reading of camouflage, this project probes the various ways how the chameleonic term may not only queer the visual sphere by sparking another kind of “here-ness” that is inherently changeable, but also highlight the porosity of boundaries and thus become a technology to embody the material thresholds of multiple possibilities of realities. Both camouflage and choreography are morphological processes that rehearse new formations of figure-ground relationships. Choreography organizes bodies in times and spaces around thresholds of visibilities and offers methods for bringing bodies together in novel ways: both human and non-human, as well as bodies of knowledge. These are the very negotiations that are pertinent to camouflage too, and as such the overall objective of this thesis is for them to interlace.

Accordingly, this project expands camouflage as somatic knowledge, not in terms of concealment and deception, but rather as a mimetic, interspecific and sensuous potentiality through which a different *being-of-the-world*, and ultimately new worlds, can be embodied and opened up. It reaches towards multi-natural becomings and phenomenologies of permeability, softening the edges of the subject as a distinct entity acting against the world, and, by shedding light on a new way of being, demonstrates that embodiment is always already an extension of oneself, an accession to an exterior world. Furthermore, this thesis introduces the term correspondence as a relational device animating intra-subjective exchanges between bodies, entities and forces: to correspond is to participate in and be in movement with a much wider animate sociality.

The practice component of the thesis develops a series of choreographic works under the title of *Correspondance*. The wordplay alludes to the notion of correspondence as a dynamic, living and ongoing relationship between things, i.e., the ability to correspond to a world that is always moving. The *Correspondance* series develops camouflage as a performance strategy to generate a series of choreographic inquiries that engage camouflage choreographically. Alongside the practice, the written component of the thesis constellates the terms camouflage, correspondence and choreography in order to articulate highly multidisciplinary fields of inquiry by weaving together a trans-disciplinary web of fields that bring together minoritarian and marginalized bodies of knowledge including Amazonian indigenous cosmologies, queer and feminist theory, new materialisms and post-humanism, ecology, philosophy, zoology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, critical theory and dance and performance studies.

Together, both practice and writing crisscross and interfere with one another to generate new artistic, somatic and discursive forms of knowledge. Both practice and writing demonstrate that it is in movement, that choreography establishes a relational correspondence with the environment, a mobile architecture that allows for an embodied ecology, or inversely, an ecological embodiment, namely to camouflage.

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Preface

“It’s weird, you know, the way so many people accept the notion that stone is inanimate, that rock doesn’t move. I mean, really, this cliff here moves me every time that I see it.”

—David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*

What if one were to consider such a movement across interspecific boundaries and spatio-temporal scales a dance? And how may one write of such animate correspondences where differing surfaces move and are moved by one another without merely representing them? This thesis is an exercise in weaving through these kinds of frictions. And in doing so, it sets out a number of tensions both in the making of choreographies and the writing of text. Its goal is to compose across the edges of artistic and theoretical practice, as well as other embodied, tacit, experiential and intangible forms of knowledge that every so often rub against each other, without working to resolve them. Instead, this thesis aims to open choreographic practice in a reciprocal dialogue with theoretical inquiry to co-compose with diverse concepts and bodies of knowledge that are at times at variance in their operation, already on the move into different modes of activity. To make, dance, choreograph, think and write across these varying modes of practice—oscillating between convergences and divergences, consonances and dissonances—afford the generative environments within which this thesis unfolds.

First off, the relation between the practice and written components of this thesis are coextensive. In other words, both practice and writing extend into and out of one another through varying modes of interpositions and interventions. While providing a conceptual scaffolding, as well as methodological framework (through the use of scores, for instance) to the practice elements, the written element becomes a site where other entities and forces that co-perform the art works can articulate themselves through the text—particularly those that are simply not available to visual documentation alone. To that end, the role of the written thesis is not to describe or speak *about* the practice components. Rather, the written component establishes a field, a morphological structure, a grammar through which entities and forces that co-perform the practice component can “speak” otherwise—beyond the registers of photo and video documentation.

The overall undertaking of this thesis is to reconfigure and interlace the three already existing terms camouflage, correspondence and choreography by reading them differently. Each of these terminologies are preoccupied with edges and thresholds, as well as their crossings, in different ways, and it is the aim of the written component to both write into and out of this difference. Camouflage, as a corporeal and spatial practice, is located at the contours of where the “real” and the “virtual” begin to crossover—suspended between the body and environ, the visible and invisible. As a reality-altering technology, camouflage is virtual in its actualization of another corporeality. Camouflaging organisms co-respond with their surroundings, and vice versa. Thus, correspondence is another relational device that is virtual in itself: it conceives of intra-subjective relations that emerge out of ontologies of animate as well as dynamic sensibilities and materialities. Interspecific acts of responsiveness, response-ability and relationality are at the core of correspondence. Choreography, on the other hand, is an ideal mode of practice to mobilize camouflage and correspondence. As a spatio-temporal practice, choreography can set in motion intra-bodily acts of permeability—establishing in time and space different forms of *being-with* an immersive, living world in which both human and non-human, animate and “inanimate” beings and entities reciprocally participate in its dance of animacy.

In its crossing over of varying modes of practices, mediums, disciplines and knowledge systems, this thesis runs a series of interferences. Firstly, the written component shifts between experiential first-person perspectives and accounts of existing academic knowledges. While this alternating mode of writing is deliberate, it does not intend to hierarchize one over the other. Instead, navigating through these various forms of narration is to highlight the manifold forms of language at play in the phenomena it aims to encompass. To that end, the written thesis is not a scholarly exercise but rather a compositional one—co-composing with a wider variety of trans-disciplinary and trans-subjective types of knowledge that co-produce the thesis. Secondly, the thesis as a whole comprises both somatic and discursive registers of knowledge production—not as separate entities, but as distinct forms of language that co-constitute the thesis, both in its practice and written elements. Thus, language is another prominent feature throughout this thesis, which it equally aims to reconfigure. Thirdly, much of the written thesis challenges questions of visibility and scopic representation, while the practice component utilizes recognizable means of visual documentation. Again, these seemingly contradictory frictions are the

organizing tensions that this thesis operates within. The goal is not to resolve them, but rather to extend a series of invitations rather than conclusions towards thinking the possibilities and limitations of the ocular in relation to the somatic.

Finally, yet importantly, this thesis interweaves both Western academic knowledges and artistic practices in addition to Amazonian indigenous cosmologies and knowledge systems. I have been a student of specific indigenous practices for more than a decade, almost as long as I have been a student in my particular field of study in Western artistic and academic contexts. My first-person accounts of being in the Amazon in this written thesis are only one fraction out of my many encounters living and working with various indigenous communities. The experiences narrated particularly in the opening and closing chapters, although I refer to those throughout all the chapters, are based on a specific center in the Amazon rainforest run by a Shipibo maestro and his extended family, which functions like a school where non-indigenous people come to learn about Shipibo ceremonial practice, language and songs. I have spent many years thinking about and problematizing the potential asymmetrical relations in such forms of knowledge exchange, particularly given the extractive histories (and contemporaneity) of Western invasions of indigenous lands and their varying, specific cultures. I continue to grapple with how such “well-intentioned” visits to learn from indigenous communities may itself not fall into the traps of cultural appropriation and knowledge-based extractivism. While many indigenous people might rightly condemn the sharing of their ancient wisdom with non-indigenous people, many others whom I have been in contact with are proud of the fact that so many come to learn from them. These frictions and tensions are of highly complex matter and remain a contested topic.

This thesis, however, is not an anthropological project. Its aim is not to create a survey of Amazonian indigenous cultures nor an ethnographic critique, which would be unavoidable if the former would be the case but is out of scope in this project. Following Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s proposition to move away from the indigenous Amazonian world as an object of study, instead looking *to* the world from indigenous points of views, which always already includes both human and more-than-human beings and entities, I position myself slightly differently. I would never assume the ability to inhabit the point of view of the many indigenous practitioners that I have established relationships with. And this is because

their knowledge systems and worldviews are inseparable from their resistance towards the Western hegemonic forces that continuously invade their territories. Indigenous communities across the Amazon basin continue to struggle with the impact of deforestation, ongoing invasions and destructions of their ancestral lands as well as cultural and social discrimination, which can be traced back to centuries of colonization, racism and extractive capitalism. As a non-indigenous ally, I strive to engage in acts of reciprocity through several self-initiated and already existing support initiatives. Rather, the aim of this thesis is to explore the possibilities for a different way of being-of-the-world through the notions of camouflage, correspondence and choreography, and in doing so, it is as much indebted to the specific indigenous cosmologies as well as the predominantly Western artistic and scholarly practices that simultaneously inform and transform my practice.

I recognize that indigenous systems of knowledge and conceptions of the world are not essentially static. They are, as much as other systems of knowledge, direct results of diverse social formations and dynamic historical processes. I recognize that I do not in any way represent indigenous points of views when I am writing about my experiences and ongoing contact with Amazonian indigenous knowledge systems. While my practice is situated within a Western art and academic context, it is implicitly affected and shaped by the embodied ecological insights that I have gained through attending numerous vegetal ceremonies and related animist practices over more than a decade. To that end, the art works that make up the practice component of this thesis are never *about* indigenous cosmologies explicitly. Rather, they draw on these varied conceptions of corporeality, temporality and spatiality, which radically differ from traditional Western notions of bodies, time and space. Amazonian indigenous understandings of the relations between self and world are lesser acknowledged and often in ontological and epistemological parity with recognized Western knowledge systems. However, this thesis aims for a trans-disciplinary approach that co-composes across my experiences with indigenous practices together with specific Western scholarly knowledges to trace potential overlaps and similarities, but also differences and distinctions, in a co-constitutive manner to explore other models of body/space, subject/object and real/virtual relationalities through the lenses of camouflage, correspondence and choreography. As a result, this written thesis blends theoretical inquiry with a sense of personal correspondence and as such, aims to locate itself around all its enlivening tensions and frictions.

Part I: Opening

Altered States

It's a sweltering pitch-black night in the heart of the Amazon rainforest. I find myself under a thick blanket of darkness permeating through my porous *tambo*—a small isolated wooden hut with a palm thatched roof. To get here, I took a long journey to Iquitos, the largest city of the Peruvian Amazon reachable only by river and air, then a three-hour drive north towards the confluence of the Ucayali and Marañón rivers, followed by a one-hour hike deep into the forest. Nestled within a small Shipibo village— part of an indigenous group mainly living along the Ucayali River in the eastern part of the Peruvian Amazon—my rustic *tambo* on stilts organically blends with its natural surroundings comprising an all-encompassing, ineffable biodiversity. Although the sheer beauty of the vegetation and diurnal animals visible at daytime is truly breathtaking, it is the weird and somewhat terrifying night-time that is about to capture my imagination. At night, the Amazon takes on a whole other temperament. And it is this peculiar state of darkness, of attuning to the dark, that my entire experience of dwelling here for the coming two months will take hold.

By night, the magical hold of the Amazon becomes intensified through an unsettling yet enchanting eruption of unimaginable sounds. A myriad of calls of nocturnal animals echo and reverberate from all directions near and far, most of which are unrecognizable to the non-native ear. Unidentified objects fall from trees onto the palm thatched roof and an array of mysterious animals and insects whoosh underneath the stilts. Not to mention the atmospheric sounds of wind and rain that permeate through every fiber of the *tambo* and every cell of the body. Since not much light penetrates through to the forest floor, the rainforest remains extremely dark at night. Likewise, the absence of electricity, and thus artificial lighting, enhance the eerie feeling of being surrounded by total darkness, amplifying the sonic ambience even further. However, the soundscape is more than the sum of its parts. Beyond all the

fragmented, overlapping sonic calls and utterances, at times sounding like a mad cacophony, one can hear the entire jungle as one vast entity: fully alive and pulsating all through the night.

But it doesn't stop there. The walls, floor and ceiling of my *tambo* provide rather provisional boundaries to the outside world. Holes, gaps, cracks and crevices are everywhere, allowing all kinds of small and larger animals to creep inside. As I have no other choice than to surrender to a new way of co-inhabiting my temporary dwelling with jungle rats, bats, porcupines, big spiders and all sorts of insects, I am forced to radically reconsider notions of boundaries—between human and non-human, inside and outside, and my body and other bodies. It is not that there is an outside out there and an inside in here. There are no clear markers of where my private space ends and where the jungle begins. In fact, there are no beginnings and endings here, only co-extensive fields of a mutual, multi-species corpo-reality. Not only is my *tambo* a site for such boundary-probing instances, moreover, my personal belongings are infested with ever-growing fungi and mold, and if that wasn't enough, my own body becomes a host for a range of jungle bacteria and parasites. Again, these particulars are more than the sum of its parts. The jungle with all its microorganisms is an enveloping and animate macro-organism: it is eating and being eaten; it leaks out like the immersive darkness it holds—calling boundaries and categories of inside and outside into question altogether. At night, all that I am left with is my own body that—slowly after time—smells and feels like its surroundings, i.e., begins to amalgamate with the forest.

The darkness carries over to the *maloca*, where the other residents and I meet every other night with the *curandero* Don Enrique—a Shipibo healer working with the plant medicine called *Ayahuasca*. The *maloca* is a traditional, large communal space built in a circular fashion, equally made of organic materials featuring a palm thatched roof reaching up very high into the sky. Among other social functions, the *maloca* is mostly understood as a ceremonial house (Serje, 2003). It is an architectural model that corresponds with the specific indigenous cosmologies that vary throughout the Amazon basin, however, in most cases it functions as “a secure and protected place where the mythical universe can be transported to the present” (Serje, 2003: 564).

Here at the *maloca*, we gather every other night in the context of a shamanic ritual in order to drink *Ayahuasca*: a psychoactive concoction consisting of a combination of the

Amazonian vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* together with the leaves of the *Psychotria viridis* plant—sometimes mixed together with other plant materials (Labate et al., 2014). Ayahuasca has been used under different names by many indigenous Amazonian groups in the context of shamanic healing, medicine and magic. During these ceremonies, the *curanderos* and *curanderas* ingest the brew to “perform complex sets of transformative interactions between human and nonhuman agents” (Labate et al., 2014: 6) through ritualized performance comprising music, movement, rhythm and visions. Indigenous cosmologies ascribe souls and spirits to animate and even inanimate beings on earth: humans, spirits, animals, plants, rivers, trees, minerals and rocks, to name a few, all contain living souls in different bodies that each have their own unique subjectivities and thus desires and points of views (Labate et al., 2014). In fact, *Ayahuasca* is itself considered “a subject in its own right, with its own intentions” (Calavia Saéz, 2014: xxv) and the *curandero* or *curandera* is “simply” an intermediary facilitating forms of communication between these different lifeforms.

Every other night, we assemble under dim candlelight in a circle around the outer rim of the *maloca*. After the *curandero* Don Enrique serves the *ayahuasca*, the light goes out and we sit in complete darkness for the remainder of the ritual late into the night. Sitting quietly for a long while with my eyes closed, tuning inwards, I can suddenly feel a change of atmosphere in the room. The arrival of the *Ayahuasca* spirit is marked by the *curandero* who begins to sing his *icaros*: strange sounding magical songs sung in vegetal ceremonies that serve to induce visions and enhance awareness of the plant spirit realm. The term *icaros* “seems to be a loan word from the Quechua verb *ikaray*, which means ‘to blow smoke’ in order to heal” (Luna, 1986: 100). Through the *icaros*, the *curandero* evokes specific plant spirits through which he diagnoses and treats individual and collective maladies as well as animates the *pasajeros* (people attending the ceremony) to experience myriad shapes and shades of joy, love, sadness and fear—depending on the *pasajeros*’ unique sets of central themes and issues in their lives. The *icaros* that are sung all night long are the vehicles by which *pasajeros* are transported into plant spirit realms, and vice versa, opening portals to travel between intersecting planes of bodies—zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, phytomorphic, ancestral, among many other beings—in order to receive profound forms of insights and healing (Luna, 1986).

During our many ceremonies, both the *curandero* as well as the *pasajeros* transgress

bodily boundaries between these inter-corporeal states of consciousness. It is the *curandero*, however, who masters the art of mimesis and transformation in this context. It is through the mimicking of and/or transformation into these other beings that the *curandero* can call forth the healing powers of the plants through his *icaros*. According to Bernd Brabec de Mori, an ethnomusicologist who has lived with Shipibo communities for many years and whose work specializes in Western Amazonian indigenous ritual and music practices, makes a distinction between mimesis and transformation in the framework of these healing arts.

In regard to mimesis, he observes, the *curandero* “is aware of his humanness and the localisation of his consciousness does not change” (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 90). In the instance of transformation, however, the *curandero* “still experiences himself as a human person but localised within the sphere ... of the class of beings he transformed into, ... [perceiving] himself surrounded by human persons, who, to [others] ... would appear as animals, plants, or [other] beings” (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 90). During these states of transformations into non-human persons the *curandero* “perceives the world ... from the non-humans’ point of view” (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 90). These inter-subjective, inter-species and multi-perspectival processes have been studied in depth by the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro through his notion of Multinaturalist Perspectivism, a concept that points to Amazonian Indigenous peoples’ point of views. He observes that in Amazonian cosmologies humans and non-humans participate not only in a shared humanity but also share common points of views, which in turn conceive varying and differing “natures”, which de Castro describes as “multinaturalism”—a concept that thinks the coexistence of multiple “natures” including non-human perceptions together with human ones as one common sociality that all share kindred and mutual perspectives and affinities (De Castro, 1998).

This multi-species, multi-natural dance of agency becomes even more complex as the *curandero* could be transforming into a specific plant ally which in turn might be mimicking another being (Brabec de Mori, 2012). These trickeries could potentially provide for dangerous situations, e.g., in moments when the *curandero* is fighting demons or expelling unwanted spirits on behalf of the *pasajeros*. Thus, the *curandero* applies voice masking when singing his *icaros* in order to conceal his own position during acts of mimesis and transformation. According to Brabec de Mori, “voice

masking is used to transmit the ... experience of what it sounds like being transformed into a non-human entity” (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 87), which is his “strategy of concealment, so that he may not be identified, named, and overthrown by the enemy” (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 91). These bodily acts of multi-perspectival soundings through the singing of the *icaros* become techniques “for achieving mimesis, transformation, and the construction of worlds” (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 96).

Knowing at the margins

Such complex entanglements of human and non-human, as well as “animate” and “inanimate” agents and entities, and their co-constitutive crossings through ritual performance, are exemplary of the ways in which Amazonian indigenous cosmologies reshape questions of subjectivity and agency. Ayahuasca ceremonies in particular offer radical ways of experiencing alterity. It appears to be a compelling medium that allows humans to embody the multiple thresholds of realities—gleaning other perceptions of other worlds and to establish relations with all kinds of categories of Others (Calavia Saéz, 2014). The aforementioned scenarios, as long-winded and perhaps excursive they may seem, in fact establish a conceptual and affective scaffolding to this thesis, both in its practice and written components. These lived accounts of darkness and altered states—spatio-temporally, materially, corporeally, and psychically—open up questions of boundaries and thresholds as they touch on central themes including mimicry, permeability, relationality, ecology and language, amongst others. These phenomena will be explored through the lens of three major terminologies that my thesis reconfigures: camouflage, correspondence and choreography.

Taking a trans-disciplinary approach, this practice-based PhD project brings together minoritarian and marginalized bodies of knowledge such as indigenous Amazonian cosmologies and queer and feminist theory, as well as other fields including anthropology, zoology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, somatics, and performance studies through several key thinkers that either work in-between or at the margins of disciplines and/or focus on marginal, liminal phenomena themselves. This is to configure camouflage, correspondence and choreography as boundary-probing instances as ways to rethink edges between bodies: be it human, non-human, material,

relational, and elemental bodies, such as darkness and light, as well as bodies of knowledge, and the possibilities for crossovers between those bodily registers. In interplay, practice and writing develop camouflage, correspondence and choreography as performance strategies as well as concepts to both practice and theorize a chameleonic being-of-the-world, one that I will attempt to formulate throughout the next chapters, in order to articulate highly multidisciplinary fields of embodied and theoretical knowledge that reside along disciplinary thresholds, and that cross between corpo-realities.

My affinity to these forms of marginal or marginalized forms of knowing might be animated by my own lived, embodied experience as a queer, immigrant subject embedded in my continuous encounters of forging alliances, as well as my experience of living and working with various indigenous communities across the Amazon basin for the past eleven years. However, this PhD project is neither an anthropological nor a historical undertaking. My thesis does not intend to be thinking about bodies of knowledge such as indigenous cosmologies or queer theory, as well as some of the key thinkers such as literary critic and writer Roger Caillois, feminist theorist and quantum physicist Karen Barad or anthropologist Tim Ingold, for instance, like a more traditional, academic scholar might do. Rather, I attempt to be thinking in correspondence with them in order to establish my own trans-disciplinary field of practice-based research. In that sense, I am not writing about my references per se, which would require much wider scholarly and historical footings, but instead, I am interested in writing in dialogue with them—shifting from a thinking about to a thinking with. In other words, I am not engaging my references through analysis, but through emergence: reading and thinking with them towards my specific field of practice, as opposed to theorizing my practice through them.

These shifts in relational re-orientations will be further elaborated on in the coming camouflage, correspondence and choreography chapters. To that end, this thesis is not *about* indigenous cosmologies, nor are my works explicitly about them. Rather, this entire research—both in practice and writing—is implicitly altered, moved and shaped by my year-long embodied experiences with indigenous practices. I must clarify, though, that these alliances and forms of learning are not merely intellectually driven, but moreover through affective and relational models of encounter. And it is precisely through these tacit, haptic, sensory and situated types of knowledge induced

by my lived, embodied experiences, as described earlier, and the access and permissions to these new ways of knowing that I have been granted by my various indigenous allies, that I am able to draw from these phenomenological forms of knowledge *towards* my practice and writing. Thinking and working together *with* indigenous cosmologies, however, require some crucial acknowledgements and clarifications of the historical, socio-political ramifications and sets of problems at play in the complex relations between indigenous and non-indigenous people—particularly against the backdrop of the globalization and popularization of ayahuasca and their resulting forms of interactions between these two groups.

First off, in contrast to the misconceptions held by many non-indigenous people seeking ayahuasca as a departure from the “social” to the “natural”, i.e. as a form of spiritual elevation from mundane human consciousness to a false sense of collective unison, ayahuasca for indigenous people, in fact, “is mostly about sociality: a negotiation among human and nonhuman companions and neighbors; an activity that establishes networks ... between kin and affines; masters and apprentices; brothers-in-law, animal spirits and the dead ... [but also] very real microconflicts among neighbors, kin, and rivals over knowledge, power, and economic resources” (Calavia Saéz, 2014: xx). These inter-relational dimensions of ayahuasca insist on a radical reconsideration of the domain of the social since ayahuasca, viewed through this lens, is mostly “a means of communication: among subjects, among worlds” (Calavia Saéz, 2014: xxii). Sociality, however, is also always already riddled with questions of power: “hostile relationships are still relationships” (Calavia Saéz, 2014: xxiii). Beyond the undoubtedly magical and beautiful connections that are established between diverse subjects through ayahuasca, the social and communicative mechanisms of ayahuasca not only summon allies but also enemies. To that end, “ayahuasca was also related to warfare, providing both the motivations and occasions for it” and at times ayahuasca with “its capacity for staging virtual wars ... can be as much a cause for starting a war as a substitute for it” (Calavia Saéz, 2014: xxiii). Thus, it is important to recognize that indigenous practices such as ayahuasca are highly complex models of sociality—they stage social interactions amongst the multitudes of social beings (including humans, animals, spirits, trees, rivers, etc.) that are co-extensive within the social, even political, sphere. Ayahuasca is therefore not some kind of spiritual retreat away from the social and into “nature”, as many New Age seekers tend to believe.

Furthermore, it is important to state that perpetuations of toxic exoticizations that reduce the use of ayahuasca by the Amazonian indigenous people to relations with animal and plant spirits and other Others must be firmly resisted. As critical as these multi-species relationalities are, “Amazonian peoples interact with many other powerful agents ... in the contemporary context” (Calavia Saéz, 2014: xxv) as well, having to manage and endure the colonial and neo-colonial, capitalist and neo-liberal, populist and racist hegemonic powers that continue to threaten indigenous sovereignty across the Amazon basin. These toxic constructions of indigenous identity as seen outside the complex, globalized contemporary world, expelled back into some kind of pre-historic, pre-social “natural” sphere—constructs I continue to observe among non-indigenous people that I keep encountering in the context of ayahuasca—are nothing but a reaffirmation of the violent currents and continuities of the liberal and colonial script. We must combat fetishizations of nativism and indigeneity that construct “Amazonia as a world without history, indistinguishable from its natural environment; where knowledge about plants and ecosystems does not proceed so much from conscious investigation, but rather from a kinship that was never broken” (Calavia Saéz, 2014: xx). However ancient these practices may be, “ayahuasca has had a tumultuous history” and “aspects of indigenous traditions, which, like all traditions, are subject to constant change” (Calavia Saéz, 2014: xix). As allies, we must acknowledge these complex histories past, present, and future.

During his keynote speech at the World Ayahuasca Conference in Spain, which I attended back in 2019 and which convened many representatives of various indigenous communities across the Amazon as well as non-indigenous scholars and leaders engaged with Amazonia and indigenous justice, the anthropologist Jeremy Narby introduced the concept of “white vampires”. In his article *Confessions of a White Vampire*, written shortly before his speech at the conference, Narby describes how he—during his extended stays with the Ashaninca people—came to realize that their view of him as a “pishtako” (white vampire), “was in fact an appropriate metaphor for the historical behavior of Westerners in the Amazon, who have long acted as a sort of vampire, extracting natural and human resources. ... [who] have come to extract rubber, oil, wood and minerals, often at the cost of human life”. He reflected on his own position as an anthropologist extracting “data” for his academic work against the backdrop of the centuries of predatory aggressions and violence and extractive exploitations and “atrocities committed against indigenous Amazonian people”

justified by colonialism and the development of global capitalism (Narby, 2019).

Narby proceeded with the observation of “a new type of extractor ... a new generation of white people ... in search of shamanic experiences and healing”. He argues that “what is different this time around is that the white people say they want to learn from Amazonians”, i.e., they are not coming to extract natural resources, but knowledge. This new constellation ultimately leads to a perpetuation of the “vampire-like relationships with Amazonians” if the violent histories, complex power dynamics and systemic inequalities are not tackled. “Undoing this imbalance”, Narby concludes, “and making our relationship with Amazonian people more reciprocal, is the work of a lifetime” (Narby, 2019).

Through my plentiful encounters with members of this new demographic described by Narby, I have repeatedly come across the mistaken beliefs that learning from Amazonians amounts to a reversal of the power dynamics between the missionaries and the indigenous people. This paradox of power is exemplified in the words of the historian Oscar Calavia Saéz when he claims that “Ayahuasca is now the motor of a missionary enterprise that indigenous Amazonians have directed toward the same societies that bombarded them with their own missionaries for centuries. The dialog has finally gained some symmetry.” (Calavia Saéz, 2014: xxiii). Although Calavia Saéz’ questionable comment raises an important aspect about many non-indigenous people now converting to indigenous belief systems, it falls extremely short, if not ignorant, since there can never be any symmetry, nor can the fact of Western individuals seeking ceremonies by choice and free will in order to be initiated into a new belief-system hardly be called missionary work. I am also not persuaded by Narby’s optimism that the imbalances of the colonial and violent pasts and their enduring ripple effects could ever be “undone”. However, there is a lot to be done.

In my forging alliances with specific indigenous groups, I strive to practice reciprocity and solidarity. Given that indigenous epistemologies and ontologies are situated within cultures and geographies that remain threatened; and the fact that indigenous practices such as ayahuasca become increasingly commodified in these postcolonial contexts, it is important that we as allies continue to practice ways of radical forms of reciprocity and solidarity. It is not enough to learn from indigenous knowledge systems for our own purposes, be it for intellectual, spiritual or other personal reasons,

but to actively “give back” to these communities through participating in indigenous efforts and struggles for justice, equality and sovereignty. To that end, I have extensively engaged with as well as initiated a number of such initiatives—both on-site and from a distance—many of which I continue to pursue, and many more to follow. Outlining those voluntary projects, however, would go beyond the scope of this thesis, as my engagement with specific indigenous communities through these activist registers differ from the ways they feature through my practice and research—which feature my learnings from indigenous practices and knowledge systems in rather implicit ways.

On a related note, let us return briefly to the Amazon. Both the immersive darkness at nights in the *tambo* and the visionary ceremonies at the *maloca* brought forth another kind of visuality. While the former blacks out the outside world, instigating a kind of seeing with the body—sonically, somatically and through introspection—as well as features other perspectives that can see you which you cannot see; the latter attunes vision to the margins of perception allowing for a hallucinatory kind of seeing, one that defocalizes the rational gaze and carries you through the threshold of an (in)visible world. Both instances not only speak of the provisional nature of (physical) boundaries, but also another kind of seeing and being seen. Together, these nights gave birth to experiences that have revealed, through phenomenological instances of knowing at the margins of perception and recognition, a new kind of relational subjectivity: one that I will be exploring through the conceptual frameworks of camouflage, correspondence, and the choreographic. Night after night, bathed in the thickening darkness that took hold not only of the spaces but also of our bodies within them, we repeatedly spaced outside of ourselves. Guided by the sounds of the jungle and the *curandero's* singing of the *icaros*, we attuned our senses in order to widen our otherwise self-contained, single-perspective viewpoints, and softened the edges of our bodies and subjectivities. Nightly, we converged with one another and other Others through inter-corporeal, inter-subjective and multi-natural morphologies of co-presence. During these nights, we've come together to space out.

Mimetic exchange

The possibilities of entanglements and crossings of subjectivities at play during these

nightly congregations were afforded through mimetic exchanges. The domain of the mimetic in Western ontological contexts is extensively broad and manifold, interwoven in a polysemic manner with a wide range of references dating as far back to Ancient Greece (Auerbach, 2013; Gebauer and Wulf, 1996; IJsseling, 1997; Potolsky 2006). A complete overview of this complex concept called mimesis, ambiguously caught between appearance and reality, is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, irrespective of the reading of mimesis as imitation or make-believe, the mimetic dimensions of alterity through dance and choreography (and of rituals and ceremonies as outlined previously), will surface intermittently throughout this thesis, both in the practice and written elements.

The mimetic in its corporeal and relational sphere of activity, e.g., in the case of mimicry, is a rhizomatic mode of porosity through which living organisms are able to space outside and allow external others to space inside of themselves. Mimesis, as a process of alterity, probes questions of inside and outside, self and other, and similarity and difference. These mimetic processes can be found everywhere: “a child plays at being a grocer or a teacher, but also at being a windmill or a train” (Benjamin, 1979: 1); a dance between two people highlight their mutual “implicit desire to communicate, through the body, with an other” (Manning, 2007: 3); and, an orchid mimics a wasp through “mimesis, mimicry, lure” whereby the wasp, “by transporting its pollen ... “becom[es] a piece in the orchid’s reproductive apparatus”, causing a complex mimetic play of “a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 10).

The anthropologist Michael Taussig, in his book *Mimesis and Alterity*, builds on Theodor Adorno’s and moreover Walter Benjamin’s model of mimesis as a biologically determined phenomenon (Taussig, 1993)—in contrast to mimesis as a form of aesthetic representation (Auerbach, 2013). Benjamin renders mimesis a non-cognitive, somewhat instinctual form (predating language) of adaptive behavior enabling organisms to resemble their surroundings through playful adaptations. Although preceding language, Benjamin considers imitation, and in extension the mimetic faculty, central to both the origin of and capability for language (Benjamin, 2007). In his two essays *On the Mimetic Faculty* and *Doctrine of the Similar*, Benjamin argues that human beings have a unique and distinguished ability to imitate, possessing “the very highest capability to produce similarities”. In fact, he affirms

“there may not be a single one of the higher human functions which is not decisively co-determined by the mimetic faculty” (Benjamin, 1979: 1). Benjamin believes that these capabilities and functions originate from imitative play, saying that “children's games are everywhere interlaced with mimetic modes of behavior ... not limited at all to what one human being imitates from another”. He asks: “what does a human being actually gain by this training in mimetic attitudes?” (Benjamin, 1979: 1).

For Benjamin, play is a kind of school for mimesis, i.e., a playground in which mimetic capabilities are trained and further developed. One might argue that training the mimetic faculty is play's *raison d'être*—and in extension this could be transferred over also to mimetic practices such as art and dance, as well as shamanic ceremonies, among many others. What these social phenomena have in common is that they all rehearse, probe, and negotiate correspondences with things in the world via designated playgrounds, demarcated through time and space, either physically, virtually, or conceptually, e.g. the stage, the gallery, the game-board, the playing field, the *maloca*, and so on. And as Benjamin rightfully suggests is that these mimetic acts are not restricted to humans imitating other humans. As we saw earlier, the *curandero* practices mimesis to embody the point of view of, and at times even transform into, other beings—other humans, plants, spirits, animals, etc. Benjamin's curiosity around mimesis resonates in Michael Taussig's study of this very peculiar ability, when he responds to the work of Franz Kafka:

“So what is this tickling at the heels to which Kafka's all too human ape would refer us all too apish humans to? I call it the mimetic faculty, the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power” (Taussig, 1993: xiii).

According to Taussig, there is a magical dimension to the ability of creating similarities, pointing out that “in an older language, this is sympathetic magic” (Taussig, 1993: xiii). Similarly, Benjamin observes that “the sphere of life that formerly seemed to be governed by the law of similarity was comprehensive; it ruled both microcosm and macrocosm” (Benjamin, 2007: 333). What Benjamin is getting at here is what he comes to call “natural correspondences”, whose function in prehistoric

times was to precisely stimulate and awaken the mimetic faculty—a faculty that we ‘modern humans’ have inherited from these ancient times prior to language. He goes on to say that “we must suppose that the gift for producing similarities (for example, in dances, whose oldest function this is), and therefore also the gift of recognizing them, have changed in the course of history” (Benjamin, 2007: 334). Benjamin seems slightly troubled by these changes towards a more fragile mimetic faculty, when he denotes that “the perceptual world of modern man contains only minimal residues of the magical correspondences and analogies that were familiar to ancient peoples” (Benjamin, 2007: 334). However, he emphasizes that rather than focusing on a potential decay of the mimetic faculty we should focus on its transformation in the present. And he believes that some clues could be derived from astrology.

Benjamin implies that “we must assume in principle that in the remote past the processes considered imitable included those in the sky. In dance, on other cultic occasions, such imitation could be produced, such similarity dealt with” (Benjamin, 2007: 334). These accounts of ancient mimetic exchanges with the world in which phenomena, be it human, non-human, social or multi-natural, which accord with the inter-subjective correspondences still in force exemplified through those nights in the jungle, in fact echo Amazonian indigenous cosmologies in the current. In the context of indigenous cosmovision, boundaries between humans and non-humans are rather porous and indefinite and as a result, social relations can be analogous to all kinds of lifeforms, which in turn can all be imitated, mimicked and corresponded with—be it other humans, plants, animals, spirits, bodies of water, the forest, the sky. Here, the human self is considered co-extensive with its environs and ecosystems, not as a separate, contoured entity, but rather embedded within them in the entangled, inter-agential, multi-natural web of inter-dependent life-forces.

According to Benjamin, these ‘magical correspondences’ have receded in modern humans and their mimetic faculty’s abilities to read similarities from the stars and to render them imitable. Instead, he argues, the very transformation of the inherited mimetic faculty, once attuned to a cosmic being, has now developed other ways of creating correspondences through what he calls “non-sensuous similarity”, namely, language. He elucidates that “allusion to the astrological sphere may supply a first reference point for an understanding of the concept of non-sensuous similarity” (Benjamin, 2007: 334). For Benjamin, language as ‘non-sensuous similarity’ possesses

the force for establishing correspondences and has now become the site of mimetic activity that was once in the realm of magic and superstition. In place of establishing correspondences directly with objects, it now connects things through their essences. In this way, language, for Benjamin, is the highest form of the mimetic faculty (Benjamin, 2007).

A short interjection might be conducive here to reconsider language in a more-than-human world. Language, as a ‘non-sensuous similarity’, is not any less powerful than the ‘magical correspondences’ prevailing prior language. The scenarios in the Amazon that I described earlier, both in the sense of the audible forest coming alive at night through its manifold, sonic utterances as well as the magical songs sung by the *curandero*, all attest to the existence and persistence of a multi-natural language shared by all beings on this earth. Indigenous oral cultures evidence that language emerges in correspondence with the animate natural world—rendering language more complex than a mere human activity. The expressive efficacy of words to help us make sense of our and other worlds is a testament to the powers of language, whether spoken or sung. And I would argue that language is as magical today as it was to our oral, storytelling ancestors. In his stunning book *The Spell of the Sensuous*, the ecologist and philosopher David Abram traces reciprocities between our senses and the sensuous earth by drawing our attention to the participatory nature of perception and language immersed within our living, animate world, a world that equally perceives us and speaks back to us. “To our indigenous ancestors, and to the many aboriginal peoples who still hold fast to their oral traditions”, as David Abrams so eloquently writes, “language is less a human possession than it is a property of the animate earth itself, an expressive, telluric power in which we [humans along with non-humans] all participate ... each creature enacts this expressive magic in its own manner” (Abram, 2010: 170-71). In his book *Becoming Animal*, David Abram remarks:

“Human language, for us moderns, has swung in on itself, turning its back on the beings around us. Language is a human property, suitable only for communicating with other persons. We talk to people; we do not talk to the ground underfoot. We’ve largely forgotten the incantatory and invocational use of speech as a way of bringing ourselves into deeper rapport with the beings around us, or of calling the living land into resonance with us. It is a power we still brush up against whenever we use our words to bless and to curse, or to charm someone we’re drawn to. But we wield such eloquence only to sway other people, and so we miss the

greater magnetism, the gravitational power that lies within such speech. The beaver gliding across the pond, the fungus gripping a thick trunk, a boulder shattered by its tumble down a cliff or the rain splashing upon those granite fragments -- we talk about such beings, about the weather and the weathered stones, but we do not talk to them.” (Abram, 2010 :174).

In a return to Benjamin, he argues that language did not develop arbitrarily as a system of signs. Instead, according to Benjamin, the origin of language is onomatopoeic (Benjamin, 1979). An onomatopoeia is a word which phonetically imitates or resembles the sound of that which it describes, e.g., animal noises such as “quack” “oink”, “meow”, and “woof” (Robinson, 2011). In Benjamin’s analysis, the root of language remains in essence onomatopoeic and this is precisely what he means by ‘non-sensuous similarity’, in that language, as a non-sensuous activity, is nevertheless based on a given similarity between the word and its corresponding object in the world. Therefore, language, even in its transformation over the course of history, retains some of its “magical” force in creating correspondences with the world. Thus, language, in thinking together with Walter Benjamin and David Abram, is more than a mere social construction exclusive to humans. Rethinking language as a shared multi-natural phenomenon helps to deconstruct the notion of “nature” as the antithesis of the “social”, if we were to expand sociality in the context of a multi-natural world. While in many contexts the idea of social construction has been truly liberating, and while its demand for empowerment, from games of constructions to which power is so essential, cannot be underestimated, there is a danger in purely constructionist views of the world to cast “nature” in too broad and undifferentiated brushstrokes.

To that end, Michael Taussig wonders “as to whether the wonder of the magic in mimesis could reinvigorate the once-unsettling observation that most of what seems important in life is made up and is neither more (nor less) than, as a certain turn of phrase would have it, a “social construction.”” (Taussig, 1993: xv). He continues to say that through “a recharging and retooling the mimetic faculty [...] we are forthwith invited if not forced into the inner sanctum of mimetic mysteries where, in imitating, we will find distance from the imitated and hence gain some release from the suffocating hold of “constructionism” no less than the dreadfully passive view of nature it upholds.” (Taussig, 1993: xv).

Taussig, whose anthropological work challenges the authorial colonial violence of ethnographic study and its claims to objectivity, does not fail to acknowledge that the history of mimesis, in the context of anthropology and its study of the Other, is also deeply tied to the colonial discourse. In the essay *Of Mimicry and Man* by postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha “mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (Bhabha, 1984: 126). Bhabha employs the concept of mimicry to describe the ambivalent power dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized. The colonized are enforced to mimic the colonizers by adapting to and internalizing their culture, values, language and manners. However, these processes are never exact copies of these traits, but rather repetitions with difference, as Bhabha asserts: “the marginalizing vision of [...] the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quiet”, reaffirms that “the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.” (Bhabha, 1984: 126). Thus, the fact that the colonized can never actually be like the colonizer, highlights the paradox of assimilation. And this is where mimicry, according to Bhabha, can inadvertently gain its subversiveness: by functioning more like an exaggeration, rather than a true copy, mimicry may become a menace to the colonial hegemony. This is because mimicry could also be understood as mockery, whereby the colonized may parody the colonizer, even without consciously realizing it, and thereby undermine its authority by revealing a glitch in the colonial dominance and control over the behavior of the colonized. Bhabha writes:

“Mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance that differs/defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically. Its threat, I would add, comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory “identity effects” in the play of a power that is elusive because it hides no essence, no “itself”. (Bhabha, 1984: 131).

The ambivalent nature of mimesis can simultaneously be its potential to subvert the oppressive order of the “natural” imposed by hegemonic authorities. Likewise, ayahuasca also appears to be “the perfect embodiment of ambiguity” (Calavia Saéz, 2014: xxii), allowing humans to defocalize the rational gaze and attune to the margins of perception in order to perceive other worlds and other Others that are left out of the dominant visual sphere—thereby reinforcing the possibilities “that another reality

can be found just behind the apparent world” (Calavia Saéz, 2014: xxii). Taussig also recognizes that “mimesis as the art of becoming something else, of becoming Other” (Taussig, 1993: 36) brings about a radical alterity that can induce a more tactile experience of and sensuous relationship with the world. However, what I find is missing in both Benjamin’s and Taussig’s evocative accounts of mimesis is the role that the somatic plays in all this. Especially since it is the practice of dance, Benjamin observes, that demonstrates one of the earliest mimetic behaviors (Benjamin, 1979). To me, the mimetic faculty, beyond language, enables the beings engaged in mimetic exchanges with one another, whether human or non-human, to practice a somatic alterity, i.e., to welcome altered states of corporeality. To that end, the mimetic domain is always already corporeal and performative.

The mimetic faculty as such is mimesis-in-action, not one of being, but one of becoming. It allows us to become otherwise and move into difference. The mimetic together with our senses open up the sensuous pathways through which we enact our subjectivity, our agency—to meet the other within oneself and oneself in the other. In an interview about her book *Through Vegetal Being*, feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray proclaims that “in order to meet with the other as such, we have ... to leave our usual quotidian reality so as to open ourselves to the strange, the still unknown, the unusual and unfamiliar” (Wheeler, 2004: 95). In order to cultivate the diversity of worlds, Irigaray adds, we must practice ourselves in these back-and-forth motions in and out difference, not only through language but through our perceptual faculties, perhaps our mimetic faculties. She remarks:

“It is difficult to realize that we inhabit different worlds while apparently we share a common quotidian reality. But considering only this dimension, we already are forgetting the level of a being-in-relation(s) with respect for difference(s) – that is to say a being-in-relation with the other as such. In order to leave a culture in which being with the other(s) only means to take part in the same world, we have to overcome an undifferentiated relation with respect to the other(s)” (Wheeler, 2004: 94).

In *Through Vegetal Being*, Irigaray brings our attention to the act of breathing: “the biggest share of elemental exteriority” (Irigaray, 2016: 132). She sees in breathing a very simple, yet practical tool to remind us of a multi-natural, inter-subjective being-in-the-world. Thus, breathing may help us find awareness not only of our own bodies,

but also of other bodies—non-human bodies included—and thereby inspire intercorporeal forms of embodied, affective ethics of difference. For breath exists both within us and outside of us, it is both private and shared. Breath, much like the thickening darkness back in the Amazon, is pervasive and permeating—they both penetrate through our bodies, calling into question distinctions between interiority and exteriority. Breath is that which gives life, which each of us receives and shares with one another in our ongoing exchange of air with the living world around us. Irigaray calls for “the need to let the breath pass through us better, with more awareness and attention. Similar to plants, we must become the conduits for air, channeling it through ourselves, rather than relating to it as a resource” (Irigaray, 2016: 132).

Correlatively to Irigaray’s breathing as a shared elemental exteriority, artist Susan Hiller locates dreaming as a sort of shared interiority. In her 2011 lecture *The Provisional Texture of Reality* at the Fondazione Antonio Ratti in Italy, Hiller journeys into “the mysterious nocturnal realms of dreams”. She calls attention to how humans and countless other lifeforms on earth participate in dreaming, which—much like acts of breathing—demonstrate that we are all embedded in a collective “nature”, an exteriority that we all share. Dreaming, according to Hiller, “is an altered state of consciousness which we enter nightly” and while “our dreaming selves seem to be organized differently from our waking selves ... it is as much a part of us as our waking consciousness”. Dreams are elusive and provisional akin to hallucinatory states: “in dreams we think differently, we think in pictures, symbols, fragments”. However, the origins of dream imageries are always social. For Hiller, dreams are passages to “the world of rhizome connections—the hidden pathways that connect us unconsciously to the world of animals and perhaps to the entire natural world”. Why then, Hiller asks, is our species destroying nature if we humans are embedded within it? “Could it be possible that we need to pay more attention to our “natural” selves, our dream selves? Could it be that we need to formulate another model of ourselves, another model of the human being to see who we are from a quite a different point of view than the individual ego?” (Hiller, 2011).

And this takes us back again to the *maloca* in the Amazon, where this journey into mimesis began: steeped in complete darkness every other night, the *ayahuasca* prompted us, the *pasajeros*, to quite literally space out together, to step outside and

find ourselves again along an axis of an inter-subjective, inter-corporeal and multi-natural world of oscillating similarities and differences. Together we embarked on personal as well as collective dream-like states that allowed us to navigate other, more provisional textures of realities and forms of perception. As David Abram notes, “for magicians—whether modern entertainers or indigenous, tribal sorcerers—have in common the fact that they work with the malleable texture of perception” (Abram, 1996: 5). Such a choreography of a perceptual, visual and, moreover, somatic alterity afforded magical correspondences where the edges of bodies were no longer firm, but permeably softened. I would argue that these vegetal ceremonies allowed us to somatically exercise our mimetic faculties in order to be able to establish meaningful correspondences with the world much like dance and performance practices allow us to do. They provide us with the space-time where reconfigurations of subjectivity and agency may be probed, where we can wit(h)ness possibilities for difference.

And what insights can one glean from these magical encounters for choreographic practice? How can a similar “recharging” or “retooling” of the mimetic faculty through dance and choreography unravel new bodily knowledge? Michael Taussig proposes that “the fundamental move of the mimetic faculty taking us bodily into alterity is very much the task of the storyteller” (Taussig, 1993: 40). Isn’t that the task of the dancer, the choreographer too? And wouldn’t that be through a movement vocabulary, a bodily language, beginning right through the body? In the coming chapters, I will summon up these interior-exterior, inside-outside, visible-invisible, real-virtual, self-other interfaces—as they appear both as performance strategies in the practice elements and as conceptual motifs in this written account—to explore a somatic understanding of the mimetic realm. A kind of somatic mimetics, or mimetic somatics, that—through the notions of camouflage, correspondence and the choreographic—develop choreographies at the edges of bodies and the spaces in which they come together.

Part II: Camouflage

Queering Visibility

"Mimicry reveals something so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage ... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare."

—Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*

Camouflage is a puzzling phenomenon. In zoology, processes like animal mimicry, types of coloration such as iridescence, and other morphological adaptations disrupt probabilities that a camouflaging organism will be detected and recognized (Kjernsmo, et al. 2020; Merilaita, et al. 2004; Thayer, 1909). Thus, camouflage is a technique employed by an organism to either render itself "difficult to detect or recognise by virtue of its similarity to its environment" or by "resembling other objects in order to be hidden" (Stevens, et al. 2011: 1). Camouflage is used "for both defensive and aggressive purposes" (Stevens, et al. 2011: 1) and can be found across the animal realm by prey and predators alike. Examples include a variety of moths that use "markings to match the colour and pattern of the background", marine isopods that "break up the appearance or shape of the body", chameleons and cephalopods that "can change colour to match the background" (Stevens, et al. 2011: 1), certain crabs that decorate their bodies "with items from the general environment" (Stevens, et al. 2011: 3) as well as other astonishing mechanisms such as transparent, bioluminescent and iridescent bodily metamorphosis (Stevens, et al. 2011: 3). In addition to these transformations, "animals must also possess appropriate behaviours to go with their camouflage markings, including resting at the most appropriate orientations to maximise their concealment" (Stevens, et al. 2011: 3).

The etymology of the word traces back to the late 19th century from the French word

camoufler ('to disguise'), in turn from the Italian *camuffare* ('disguise', 'deceive'), which is of unknown origin, most likely in association to the French word *camouflet*, ('to whiff of smoke in the face'; 'blow smoke in someone's face') (Etymonline, 2023). I would like to draw attention here to the intriguing, etymological resemblance to the magical songs called *icaros* introduced earlier, which derives from the Quechua verb *ikaray* meaning 'to blow smoke in order to heal'. Blowing smoke on people's faces, bodies and objects as well as on the *ayahuasca* brew itself is a common practice in vegetal ceremonies: rather than to deceive, here, the function of blowing smoke is to allure the spirits that might be disguised within people and things to come to the surface.

The practice of animal camouflage is as old as the existence of animals themselves. The first employments of camouflage by humans were used by "hunters to disguise themselves from their prey and could take the form of foliage or mud smeared over their bodies" (Newark, 2013: para. 1). There are other accounts of Native American groups, on the other hand, that "creep up on grazing buffalo while wearing wolf skins" with the hope that "their skin covering imbues them with the spirit of the predator animal so that they can scatter and separate the buffalo just as a pack of wolves might" (Newark, 2013). In fact, specific Amazonian indigenous groups to date, paint their bodies or adorn them with "feathers, colours, designs, masks and other animal prostheses" to present the body "to the sight of the other" as ritual acts to express human and non-human forms of kinship (De Castro, 1998: 480).

First scholarly accounts of camouflage date back to Ancient Greece. Seen as a pioneering study of zoology, Aristotle's text *Historia Animalium* (History of Animals) takes notice of the color-changing capabilities of cephalopods such as the octopus (Gerhardt, 1966). In the context of the discipline of zoology, camouflage has been studied for more than 200 years by Charles Darwin's evolutionist grandfather Erasmus Darwin, as well as Charles Darwin himself through his work *On the Origin of Species* (Darwin, et al. 2008). During the end of the 19th century, American artist Abbott Thayer explored different types of animal camouflage in his paintings such as "obliterative shading and disruptive coloration" (Stevens, et al. 2011: 3). Another key figure in the history of camouflage was the British zoologist Hugh Cott who pioneered "the use of photography to study animal coloration" (Stevens, et al. 2011; Hubbs, 1942). Camouflage in the context of the military emerged during the First World War and both Thayer's and Cott's studies of art and natural history were instrumental for

the “US and British governments to adopt camouflage uniforms and dazzle camouflage” (Stevens, et al. 2011: 3)—the latter of which used complex geometric shapes painted on naval ships in order to disrupt and confuse detection (Stevens, et al. 2011).

Across all these varying registers, camouflage is mostly understood as a visual phenomenon. Equally, I would argue that it is also a corporeal and spatial occurrence concerned with calling into question notions of boundaries: between self and other, body and environment, inside and outside, and across a range of otherwise fixed binaries, dichotomies and taxonomies. In its visual sphere of action, however, camouflage could be seen as a technique to disrupt recognition and identification and thereby become a form of resistance “against actors that insist on rendering subjects as readable, legible and categorizable” (Lingel, 2021: 1110). Accordingly, as well as subsequently, I will advance a rethinking of camouflage, one the one hand, as a queer tactic that may enable an escape from hegemonic and normative regimes of visibility (Klaassen, 2020; Lingel, 2021; Szcésniak, 2014), and, on the other hand, as a possibility through which a different being-of-the-world akin to indigenous and post-human subjectivities can be envisioned. This is to interrogate a politics of escape (Blas, 2016), both from “the controlling gaze of heteronormative and other normative and normalizing instances” (Klaassen, 2020: 4), as well as from “asymmetrical structures of recognition” (Markell, 2003: 3), which too often lead to misrecognition; in addition to possibilities of withdrawal from the demands for clearly-contoured, individualized subjects imposed by neoliberal capitalism in its ruthless “expansion of individualism” (Vujanović & Cvejic, 2022: 11).

Acts of escaping, concealing, tricking, distorting and confusing appearance and discernibility—either through optical confusion or defensive invisibility— can be live-saving. Thus, camouflage is often seen as a form of self-protection employed in moments when most vulnerable (Szcésniak, 2014). Likewise, minoritized groups such as undocumented migrants, people of color, queer and trans people as well as indigenous communities continue to endure and experience the paradoxes of visibility (Lingel, 2021). To be rendered visible to a surveillant gaze that is racist, colonial as well as trans- and homo-phobic can have dangerous consequences (Lingel, 2021).

In queer and indigenous communities alike, “the gaze has long been politicized” (Lingel, 2021: 1108) and the politics of visibility “remain a highly contested topic” (Klaassen, 2020: 4). Both groups are very familiar with having to manage, negotiate and subvert dominant structures of visibility—key characteristics of the workings of camouflage (Lingel, 2021). While visual representation is vital, it is yet often dubious akin to a double-edged sword, particularly for racially, sexually and culturally marked subjects who are dispossessed of their share of privileges and forced to occupy the invisible background. According to feminist scholar Peggy Phelan, visibility can be a trap: it can effect dispossession, discrimination and domination. Camouflage’s tactical properties of invisibility or illegibility can resist and elude the demand for recognition, detection, and identification (Klaassen, 2020). By challenging the false binary of the power of visibility versus the powerlessness of invisibility, camouflage grants a critical power to the invisible to find protection from the controlling gaze of the hegemonic authorities. In her book *Unmarked*, Phelan interrogates the complex sets of problems of visibility, by arguing:

“I am not suggesting that continued invisibility is the “proper” political agenda for the disenfranchised, but rather that the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility is falsifying. There is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal. Visibility is a trap [...]; it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession.” (Phelan, 1996: 6)

Equivalently, by no means does my reconfiguration of camouflage propose persistent, passive and imposed forms of invisibility, nor does it suggest conformity. Quite the contrary, a queer reading of the chameleonic term is aimed at change and difference and not at the reproduction of sameness. According to José Esteban Muñoz, queerness is “about the rejection of the here and now” (Muñoz, 2009: 1). It is a “refusal of a certain natural order” (Muñoz, 2009: 132), such as “normal love” and rather an “insistence on potentiality and possibility for another world ... and relationality” (Muñoz, 2009: 136). Thus, building on this radical-critical reading of camouflage, this project rehearses the multiple ways that camouflage can call into question the “natural” (Muñoz, 2009) and enable another kind of “here-ness” where bodies become Other and “reproduce nature with a difference” (Muñoz, 2009: 139).

Feminist scholar Elin Diamond embarks on a mimesis differently read which attempts to reclaim it from fixed, solid, yet partial absolutes understood as “a *truthful* relation between world and word, model and copy, nature and image, in which potential difference is subsumed by sameness.” (Diamond, 1989: 58). Mimesis read through a feminist lens, according to Diamond, “would take the relation to the real as productive, not referential, geared to change, not to reproducing the same. It would explore the tendency to tyrannical modeling (subjective/ideological projections masquerading as universal truths), even in its own operations.” (Diamond, 1997: v). Diamond suggests that we view mimesis not as representation or passive imitation, but rather as an intermediary ‘active-doing’. Mimesis, therefore, considered through a queer and feminist lens, allows us to think differently about subjectivity, which is always already interwoven with questions around agency. Mimesis, then, not in terms of a passive *what is*, but as an *active-doing*, as *what ought to be*, could be understood as a queer potentiality to effect change—since change itself is dependent on *agents of change*.

Both Diamond and Muñoz offer us new ways to think about mimesis and camouflage, in which relations to the world are “productive” and not “referential”, i.e., aimed at change and not at the reproduction of sameness (Diamond, 1997). So too does a queer reconfiguring of camouflage “spark new ways of perceiving and acting on a reality that is itself potentially changeable” (Muñoz, 2009: 134). In his very short analysis of the phenomenon of camouflage, hidden in the middle of his book *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz recognizes in camouflage a potential queer aesthetic that “disrupts the tyranny of nature as a coercive mechanism” (Muñoz, 2009: 134) and enables the envisioning of “a new world” (Muñoz, 2009: 134). Likewise, camouflaging organisms baffle the other, not through mimetic *trompe l’oeil*, but through a constant shifting not only optically but also bodily. What new formations of “here-ness” can be practiced when what is recognized or recognizable is constantly shifting amidst all the dazzling and baffling?

Camouflage, then, can not only queer visual spheres but also highlight the porosity of boundaries and thus becomes a technology to embody the material thresholds of multiple possibilities of realities. Camouflage demonstrates that embodiment is always already an extension of oneself, an accession to an exterior world. In his essay *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia*, published in 1935 in the Surrealist journal *Minotaure*, the idiosyncratic French writer Roger Caillois suggests that in moments of

mimicry, when the organism exceeds its own self-boundary into its surrounding environment, the organism has a will to resemble, while the environment has a will to incorporate (Caillois, 1984). Following this train of thought, camouflage, hence, may affirm that a body is not *in* space, but rather *of* space. Camouflage rejects fossilizations of identities and insists on a living, agential and animate world that acts back.

In Amazonian indigenous cosmivision, the agency of humans is always already entangled with those of non-human actors. These realities manifest in traditional, vegetal ceremonies, which I have outlined earlier, and which I have attended extensively. Through the ingestion and communication with plants, I learned to attune to altered states by defocalizing my gaze and reconditioning my capacity for vision to practice a new kind of perception: one that displaces the human subject as the centrifugal force structuring visibility and agency. These practices confront the limits of the “rational” gaze of capitalist, hegemonic forces that continue to violently invade indigenous ancestral territories. According to anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena, in order to truly understand indigenous environmental relations and political struggles, one must think politics differently and be able to establish alliances and relations which (neo)colonial, neoliberal and populist regimes have expelled from their fields of vision (Cadena, 2015). A cosmivision that is chameleonic because it surpasses current boundaries of the political—not only due to race, gender, sex, or ethnicity, “but because it conjures nonhumans as actors into the political arena” (Micarelli & Verran, 2018: 124).

Spacing out

We have assembled in a circle. The occasion of this gathering is a vegetal ceremony taking place in complete darkness at the maloca—moving the assembly through an (in)visible presence that blurs the boundaries of the bodies in space. Throughout the night, *icaros* are sung out of the field of relations: not only amongst the present humans, but also to those multi-natural beings and entities that are woven into the social fabric of this intra-corporeal encounter through song. The magical songs both conjure and organize themselves around the interspecific forces they summon, in turn establishing fleeting yet forceful correspondences through which bodies and entities move through and across one another. This multi-natural choreography, which

emerges out and through the darkness, invokes Roger Caillois' essay on mimicry, wherein he reflects on dark space and the lack of distinction it generates between organisms and their milieus. He writes:

"Darkness is not the mere absence of light; there is something positive about it. While light space is eliminated by the materiality of objects, darkness is "filled", it touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him: hence "the ego is permeable for darkness while it is not so for light"; the feeling of mystery that one experiences at night would not come from anything else" (Caillois, 1984: 30).

During the ceremony, not only did we touch each other, were touched by one another, but also were touched by the stealthy darkness, itself a co-respondent, a living material body permeating through the bodily assembly. In correspondence with the *icaros* and the body of darkness, the *pasajeros*, together with a range of multi-natural forces and entities, channeled gestures of resemblance, correspondence, similarity and difference. The intra-bodily encounter unfolded in a series of constellatory flashes—sudden coming-to-appearances and disappearances—testing out processes of multi-natural becomings and alterity. The immersive hold of darkness, which softened the edges of the bodies in and (out of) space, evoked a dialectics of (in)visibility, whereby the subjects became fused for a fleeting moment, like in a flash.

This brings us back to Walter Benjamin and his remark in his *Doctrine of the Similar*: "The perception of similarity is in every case bound to an instantaneous flash. It slips past, can possibly be regained, but cannot be held fast, unlike other perceptions. It offers itself as fleetingly and transitorily as a constellation of stars" (Benjamin, 1979: 66). In the context of dance, according to Benjamin, the mimetic faculty can be observed in action (Benjamin, 1979). It was thanks to the collective mimetic faculty, our sensuous capability, that the other *pasajeros* and I could space outside of ourselves, establish correspondences with one another and other *Others* and become permeable to the dark. It is within the realm of the mimetic, activated through practices such as choreography and dance, or ceremony, that we are given the capacity to both recognize and produce similarity, and thus consequently, difference. For there cannot be any difference without similarity, or inversely, there cannot be any similarity without difference. Benjamin concludes his essay on the mimetic faculty with the following comment:

“The gift which we possess of seeing similarity is nothing but a weak rudiment of the formerly powerful compulsion to become similar and also to behave mimetically. And the forgotten faculty of becoming similar extended far beyond the narrow confines of the perceived world in which we are still capable of seeing similarities. What the stars effected millennia ago in the moment of being born into human existence wove itself into human existence on the basis of similarity” (Benjamin, 1979: 69).

Michael Taussig is startled by Benjamin’s statement that “the gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else” (Taussig, 1993: 33). Taussig ponders that “seeing resemblances seems so cerebral, a cognitive affair with the worldly” and, thus, wonders “how on earth, then, could it be the rudiment of “nothing other” than a “compulsion”, let alone a compulsion to actually be the Other?” (Taussig, 1993: 33). According to Benjamin, the fundamental ability of humans is that of imitation. Their mimetic capacities are at the center of any humanly activities. Why would such a function then, one that gifts us with the ability to establish correspondences with the world, be “nothing other” than a “rudiment” and “compulsion” from former times? Taussig continues with another question: “What does such a compulsion to become Other imply for the sense of Self? Is it conceivable that a person could break boundaries like this, slipping into Otherness, trying it on for size? What sort of world would this be?” (Taussig, 1993: 33). “At its most extreme”, Taussig wittingly interjects in reference to Caillois, such a world would be one of “legendary psychasthenia”.

Psychasthenia is a term Caillois uses in his peculiar 1935 essay to depict mimicry as a pathology, i.e., a form of psychosis, which lead organisms to a state of complete self-obliteration (Caillois, 1984). At the root of all mimicry, according to Caillois, lies a temptation to space on the part of the mimicking organism. In its temptation to (become) space, the mimic, as Caillois observes, becomes implicated in, what Taussig describes as a “drama in which the self is but a self-diminishing point amid others, losing its boundedness ... where the mimicking self, tempted by space, spaces out” (Taussig, 1993: 34). For Caillois, these acts of mimetic disappearance and loss of ego are equivalent to the types of disassociations that are associated with psychotic episodes, hence his diagnosis of mimicry as “psychasthenia”. He depicts these figures as acutely troubled by their own dis-location and in-distinction, not knowing where they are in space, quite literally spacing out into nothingness, in the following way:

"I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I'm at the spot where I find myself." To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put." (Caillois, 1984: 30).

Despite Caillois' evocative, yet terrifying description rendering mimicry as a pathological condition, a death-drive on behalf of the mimicking organism, my perspective on this mysterious phenomenon differs starkly from his: mimicry, and in extension camouflage, is a reality-altering mechanism that can both provide protection from the predatory gaze and become a transformative technique for practicing permeability, for *spacing out*. During such acts of alterity, possibilities for other worlds can be opened, perhaps due to the "permeability of the ego" afforded by darkness, to reiterate Callois' words. It is through the immersive hold of darkness, the animate dark space, into which mimicry opens: a space where the contours of things dissolve, a virtual space where other worlds come to the surface—the night also being of key status in indigenous cosmologies. In his equally scintillating text *Iridescence, Intimacies*, artist and writer Tavi Meraud supports this other perspective on camouflage, when writing:

"Camouflage is not merely perception being tricked, but in that instant of recognition—recognizing something as something else—it is rather that another reality has been momentarily illuminated. The locus of reality is no longer in the perceiving subject, nor is the reality of the perceived object itself altered. The blending of reality and the apparent is precisely the mechanism of camouflage." (Meraud, 2015: 9).

Camouflage, thus, is a window into another world. Perhaps it is not necessarily an opening into a *different* world, but rather an instance in which a *different being-of-the-world* is opened up. Thus, as opposed to Caillois' view of mimesis as an undifferentiated sinking into nature that is nothing other than a mere compulsion with the purpose to self-annihilate, I argue that camouflage in fact is a reality-altering, virtual potentiality enabling the organism to probe a being-of-the-world otherwise. Here we can see that camouflage is not only a visual phenomenon, but also a corporeal act of spacing out into the surrounding environment, as the writer Ion Idriess reveals:

“Use the country; become part of the earth upon which you walk or lie or hide; make yourself invisible with leaves, or earth stains, or with lightly teased strips of bark, with the broad leaves of the jungle or the grass of the forest, with the rushes of the stream or the spinifex of the desert, with the wheat of the field or the seaweed of the seashore ... with the charcoal of night or the ochres of the coloured lands, with the bracken of the creek or with tea tree bark to make you gray as the granite rocks. Use your wits and eyes to make you one with the very earth upon which you walk or hide. Nature places the very materials to hand, no matter where you may be.” (Shell, 2012: 163)

Such acts of surrendering the self into the animate environment, of spacing out and becoming permeable, are characteristic of the “ego death” that *pasajeros* often experience when drinking *ayahuasca*. During the vegetal ceremonies, one is left with no other choice than to completely surrender to the *ayahuasca* and to release any and all preconceived or given notions of the self as one enters the inter-corporeal, multi-natural world of living beings and things—past, present, and future. Camouflage, too, requires certain forms of surrender, as “not only do we grow into and become part of our environment, but our environment becomes part of us” (Leach, 2006: 7). In his book *Camouflage*, which explores relations between camouflage and architecture through a wide range of themes including sacrifice and ecstasy, the architect and theorist Neal Leach points out that “this process of engaging with the other, and of calling into question the boundaries of the self, brings us close to the condition of “ecstasy” (Leach, 2006: 14). In fact, as terrifying these boundary-probing and shape-shifting vegetal ceremonies might sound, most (including myself) liken this experience of a loss of self in the context of ceremony to a feeling of ecstasy with deep and lasting transformations.

“The process of excorporative identification”, according to performance scholar Laura Levin, “need not always be viewed as deadly to human subjectivity, as something wedded to ‘lack’ and thus to be avoided at all costs” (Levin, 2014: 16). Such experiences, even if only for a moment, can “redress the severance of the human from other objects and bodies in the physical world” (Levin, 2014: 16). In her book *Performing Ground*, Levin responds to Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic work by claiming that the “act of mirroring the environment, and deriving one’s sense of self from it, defies our perception of the human subject as a distinct entity acting upon the world ... the ‘I’ is sustained through an illusion of its separateness from the

surrounding world” (Levin, 2014: 16). Lacan, in fact, took inspiration from Caillois’ work on mimicry, which became a source for his *Mirror Stage* theory, a process by which a child acquires a sense of itself as an independent being to develop its bodily ego and physical boundaries. (Lacan, 2006: 96).

Lacan uses the term “*imago*” to describe the function of the mirror stage. Interestingly, the etymological meaning of the term is twofold: on the one hand, it means ‘final or adult stage of an insect’; and, from the Latin *imago* ‘an image, a likeness’ deriving from the stem of *imitari* ‘to copy, imitate’ (Etymonline, 2023). Lacan describes the term *imago* as “an unconscious idealized mental image of someone, especially a parent, which influences a person's behavior” (Lacan, 2006: 96). He writes:

“I am led, therefore, to regard the function of the mirror-stage as a particular case of the function of the imago, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality - or, as they say, between the Innenwelt [inner life] and the Umwelt [surrounding world; environment]” (Lacan, 2006: 97).

So where and how does this meeting of the *Innenwelt* (inner life) and the *Umwelt* (surrounding world) take place? Estonian-German biologist Jakob von Uexküll, in his early work on cybernetics and animal behavior, theorized that different organisms have different *Umwelten* (plural for *Umwelt*), even if they share the same environments (Cobley, 2010). Uexküll distinguishes between *Umwelt* and *Umgebung* (physical surrounding), the latter being the actual surrounding which multiple species can inhabit simultaneously, each with their own unique, species-specific perspective of their *Umwelt*. The *Umwelt* is, thus, the phenomenal world, which extends as the organism’s model of the world through which it exists as well as acts as a subject (Cobley, 2010). The *Umwelt* is shaped through the organism’s own interaction with it, which Uexküll defines as a “functional circle” (Cobley, 2010: 348). And objects from the organism’s specific *Umwelt* appear to the organism as “functionally toned” or “functionally tinted” (*funktionale Tönung*), much like, for instance, “in the context of a human world [where] a chair has a sitting tone” (Adams & Thompson, 2016: 47). When two or more *Umwelten* interact with one another, it creates, according to Uexküll, a semiosphere (Cobley, 2010: 348).

Even though ecological psychologist James J. Gibson does not mention Uexküll in his

book *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, there seem to be many parallels between Uexküll's "functional tone" (*funktionale Tönung*) and Gibson's concept of "affordances", which he develops through his study of perceptions of "the world at the level of ecology" (Gibson, 2014: xiv). "The affordances of the environment", according to Gibson, "are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes" (Gibson, 2014: xiv). Gibson's theory of visual perception is based on his conviction that it is not only a visual affair. "We are told that vision depends on the eye", he disputes, however, "I shall suggest that natural vision depends on the eyes in the head on a body supported by the ground" (Gibson, 2014: xiv). In both Uexküll's and Gibson's accounts, organisms and environments are co-constitutive and complementary. That is, meaning does not emerge from a subjective action, rather it is drawn from what the surrounding environment affords as sets of opportunities to be acted upon. In other words, both "functional tone" and "affordances" arise as action-in-perception that describe "the environment as the surfaces that separate substances from the medium in which the animals live" (Gibson, 2014: 119). Gibson elaborates further:

"If a terrestrial surface is nearly horizontal (instead of slanted), nearly flat (instead of convex or concave), and sufficiently extended (relative to the size of the animal) and if its substance is rigid (relative to the weight of the animal), then the surface affords support. It is a surface of support, and we call it a substratum, ground, or floor. It is stand-on-able, permitting an upright posture for quadrupeds and bipeds. It is therefore walk-on-able and run-over-able. It is not sink-into-able like a surface of water or a swamp, that is, not for heavy terrestrial animals." (Gibson, 2014: 119)

According to Gibson, "the richest and most elaborate affordances of the environment", however, "are provided by other animals and, for us, other people" (Gibson, 2014: 126). These ideas seem to resonate with the phenomenon of camouflage as camouflage is primarily a spatial act. It is an instance in which the self physically transforms through its embodiment of, as well as contact with, its exterior world (Umwelt) and, thus, offers an invitation of a rethinking of orientation in relationship to space. Therefore, camouflage, as mentioned previously, insists on a living, agential and animate world that acts back. Hence, camouflage is, to re-iterate, not only an opening into a different world, but furthermore a potentiality through which a different being-of-the world is opened up, where the self no longer ends at the

boundary of the skin—a world in which we don't stop being our individual selves at the edges of our own bodies. To that end, we might understand this process as a kind of camouflage consciousness that enables a practice of permeability of self to surrounding environment, while at the same time allowing for other, virtual realities to emerge. To that end, David Abram too offers us a chameleonic perspective on perception and embodiment:

“Considered phenomenologically—that is, as we actually experience and live it—the body is a creative, shape-shifting entity. Certainly, it has its finite character and style, its unique textures and temperaments that distinguish it from other bodies; yet these mortal limits in no way close me off from the things around me or render my relations to them wholly predictable and determinate. On the contrary, my finite bodily presence alone is what enables me to freely engage the things around me, to choose to affiliate with certain persons or places, to insinuate myself in other lives. Far from restricting my access to things and to the world, the body is my very means of entering into relation with all things.” (Abram, 1996: 38).

Across Boundaries

“Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?” (Haraway, 1990: 220), feminist science and technology theorist Donna Haraway inquires in her 1985 *Cyborg Manifesto*, which interrogates questions of intersectionality and fluidity between organisms and machines. Feminist new materialist theorist Karen Barad picks up Haraway's question in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*—a boundary-probing work combining quantum physics, philosophy, and feminist science studies to explore matter and materiality of the world as a whole instead of composed of separate social and natural realms. Barad urges how an insistence on the existence of a bodily boundary, one which ends at the skin, ultimately leads to the failure of recognizing the body's situatedness in the world. In quoting Haraway, Barad interjects that a "situation is never self-evident, never simply 'concrete,' [but] al-ways critical, ... "the kind of standpoint with stakes in showing how 'gender,' 'race,' or any structured inequality in each interlocking specific instance gets built into the world—i.e., not 'gender' or 'race' as attributes or as properties, but 'racialized gender' as a practice that builds worlds and objects in some ways rather than others, that gets built into objects and practices and exists in no other

way. Bodies in the making, not bodies made" (Barad, 2007: 159). "Bodies in the making", Barad argues in response to Haraway, "are never separate from their apparatuses of bodily production" (Barad, 2007: 159).

Correspondingly, camouflage—as a mechanism through which mimetic organisms transgress bodily boundaries by becoming permeable and in-distinct to their surroundings—provokes a challenge to notions of identity as fixed and self-determining, since, during the mimetic act of *spacing out*, processes of self-realization and self-preservation are indistinguishable from "habitat-construction" (Levin, 2014: 41). If following on from Caillois's notion of mimesis as the living creature's temptation to space, i.e., its temptation to become space by "which the self is but a self-diminishing point amid others, losing its boundedness" (Taussig, 1993: 34), what is it for a mimetic being to respond to the call of space? Who exactly is calling to whom? Laura Levin comments on this reciprocal correspondence of agency between an organism and an environment by referring to Caillois:

"What does it mean for mimetic beings to respond to the call of space? After all, it is 'space' that is calling, a solicitation to action that clearly exceeds the agency of the mimic and originates from the world itself. The response here does not take place at the level of language but rather that of morphology: to respond is to produce (or reproduce) a visual and physical form." (Levin, 2014: 38)

The question of call and response presupposes a reversal of the determining factor of mimicry. By reiterating Caillois, we can detect a double horizon in this play of agency: the organism's 'will to resemble' its surrounding environment could inversely be understood as a counterpart to space and its 'will to devour' (Caillois, 1984). For Caillois, after all, the organism's 'will to resemble' is far from "being taken for a defense reaction", since camouflage as survival, i.e. as an escape from the predator's hungry gaze, "would only apply to carnivores that hunt by sight and not by smell as is often the case" (Caillois, 1984: 23). Caillois' close study of insect mimicry, however, shows that self-preservation is not always its *raison d'être*. There are plenty of examples of "inedible" species employing camouflage or 'useless' forms of mimicry where, after all, "one finds many remains of mimetic insects in the stomachs of predators" (Caillois, 1984: 25). In other words, Caillois claims that "it should come as no surprise that such insects sometimes have other and more effective ways to protect

themselves" (Caillois, 1984: 25). In some cases, as Caillois explains, mimicry can be rather harmful than protective, for example, when "geometer-moth caterpillars simulate shoots of shrubbery so well that gardeners cut them with their pruning shears" (Caillois, 1984: 25).

One could ask, who actually adapts to whom? Let us look at the scenario where mimetic beings blend into their surroundings by responding to the call of space—a living, animate space that has its own will, i.e., the will to incorporate. How, then, does the mimetic act of *spacing out* not only exceed the organism's self-boundary, but also its agency? An agency, which in turn, if we are to follow Caillois' logic, reciprocally co-responds with, and perhaps even originates from, its immediate environment, and thus, from the world itself—a world that acts back. Where are we to put the beginnings and endings of these inter-agential causalities as they play out between organisms and environments? These acts of becoming co-extensive with one's setting or "mirroring the environment and deriving one's sense of self from it"—acts that are native to insects, animals and humans alike—can defy "our perception of the human subject as a distinct entity acting upon the world" (Levin, 2014: 16). Or else, as Hannah Arendt put it: "Living beings, men and animals, are not just in the world, they are *of the world* and this precisely because they are subjects and objects—perceiving and being perceived at the same time." (Arendt, 1981: 20). Not to mention Maurice Merleau-Ponty's claim that "to be a body, is to be tied to a certain world ... our body is not primarily *in space*: it is of it" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 171).

In a return to Haraway and Barad, this kind of intertwining of self and world, in which bodies are not only *in* the world, but *of* the world, where the self does not end at its individual bodily boundary due to its situatedness in the world, implies that embodiment, according to Haraway's feminist reading, "is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning. Embodiment is significant prosthesis" (Haraway, 1988: 588). The idea of embodiment as prosthesis (away from its purely technological Cyborgian reference) situates the body, and thus the human, as already outside of itself. Embodiment is always already an extension of oneself, an accession to an exterior world. Through a feminist, or even queer reading, this *outside* could also be seen as the body situated outside a supposedly "natural" or "given" reality, one of a queer futurity that disrupts the

present order and opens new possibilities of configuring ourselves, bodies and desires otherwise. Thus, camouflage, understood as a queer technology, can enable the body to become Other and “to reproduce nature with a difference” (Muñoz, 2009)—re-orienting subjectivity towards these kinds of “nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference” (Haraway, 1988: 588).

“Bodies in the making, not bodies made”, as Haraway proclaims (Haraway, 1994: 67). Both Haraway and Barad prompt us to think that bodies in the making “are never separate from their apparatuses of bodily production” (Haraway, 1994: 67). Barad, through her conceptualization of “agential realism”, proposes a way of looking at the world, in which relations pre-exist as well as constitute their relata. Subjects (‘agencies of observation’) and objects (‘objects of observation’) do not exist independently from one another as singular, individual entities, but are rather existent from within their ‘intra-action’. Intra-action is a neologism coined by Barad that puts emphasis on the mutual constitutions of entangled agencies. Contrary to the notion of interaction, which presupposes the existence of separate individual agencies preceding their interactions, the term intra-action instead recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but moreover emerge through their intra-action (Barad, 2007). Barad’s philosophy offers “challenges to the individualistic conception of bodies and the presumed givenness of bodily boundaries” (Barad, 2007: 154), and moreover, “suggest that there may be important intertwined ontological and ethical points to be made that go beyond the question of the nature of individual subjective human experience” (Barad, 2007: 158). In proposing a post-humanist understanding of the concept of the human, Barad writes:

“I will argue that the nature of the production of bodily boundaries is not merely experiential, or merely epistemological, but ontological—what is at issue and at stake is a matter of the nature of reality, not merely a matter of human experience or human understandings of the world. Beyond the issue of how the body is positioned and situated in the world is the matter of how bodies are constituted along with the world, or rather, as “part” of the world (i.e., “being-of-the-world,” not “being-in-the-world”).” (Barad, 2007: 160)

A *being-of-the-world*, then, rather than a *being-in-the-world*, an ontological shifting of subjectivity and agency, is not only a question of phenomenology, but also of materiality, i.e., of material-reality—never separated from their ‘apparatuses of bodily

production', a *being-of-the-world* attests to the matter of material entanglement of bodies, histories and worlds. Furthermore, a *being of-the-world* is neither an apolitical nor an ahistorical affair. As much as a *being-of-the-world* is tied to a 'body in the making', one cannot ignore the fact that the making of the body in the world is precisely a *making*, and not a given. And the making of the world is always already critical, as Haraway had pointed out earlier, meaning, any status through which a *being-of-the-world* is constituted through either class, race, gender, human, non-human or any other factors is always already an "instance [that] gets built into the world" (Haraway, 1994: 67). Therefore, the world, of which the body is made and of which it is *of*, is always itself in the making, it is constituted by practices that, as it were, build the world.

Haraway reminds us that "neither gender nor race is something with an origin, for example in the family, that then travels out into the rest of the social world, or from nature into culture, from family into society, from slavery or conquest into the present. Rather, gender and race are built into practice, which is the social, and have no other reality, no origin, no status as properties" (Haraway, 1994: 67). When Haraway speaks of the social, she doesn't reduce these "apparatuses of bodily production" as simple social constructions. Instead, she thinks of them, by seeking a more "knotted analytical practice", as tangled with what she calls "nonhomogeneous, nonexclusive, often mutually constitutive, but also nonisomorphic and sometimes mutually repellent webs of discourse" in order to achieve an "effective critical practice", which inquires "into all the oddly configured categories clumsily called things like science, gender, race, class, nation, or discipline" (Haraway, 1994: 67). Social constructionism, in contrast, rests on beliefs that reality is socially constructed with an emphasis on language as the crucial means through which humans interpret experience. Like Benjamin, Haraway too provides a much more nuanced understanding of the togetherness of "nature" and social phenomena, in which the social, including language, does not construct nature as the antithesis of anything that is social. For Haraway, the boundaries between these phenomena are not so firm after all.

A "body cannot stop", according to materialist-feminist theorist Rosemary Hennessey, "with the assertion that the body is always discursively constructed. It also needs to explain how the discursive construction of the body is related to nondiscursive practices in ways that vary widely from one social formation to

another" (Hennessey, 1993: 46). In refuting to "restrict power's productivity to the limited domain of the 'social'", Barad wonders "not only how human bodily contours are constituted through psychic processes but how even the very atoms that make up the biological body come to matter and, more generally, how matter makes itself felt? It is difficult", Barad continues, "to imagine how psychic and sociohistorical forces alone could account for the production of matter" (Barad, 2003: 810). She goes on to elaborate:

"The inscription model of constructivism is of this kind: culture is figured as an external force acting on passive nature. There is an ambiguity in this model as to whether nature exists in any prediscursive form prior to its marking by culture. If there is such an antecedent entity then its very existence marks the inherent limit of constructivism. In this case, the rhetoric should be softened to more accurately reflect the fact that the force of culture "shapes" or "inscribes" nature but does not materially produce it." (Barad, 2003: 825)

In her seminal essay *Posthumanist Performativity*, Barad begins with the provocative statement: "Language has been granted too much power" (Barad, 2003: 801). Through her theory of agential realism, Barad turns to matter to reveal how matter matters by putting forward a "performative understanding of discursive practices", which, according to her model of intra-action "challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things" (Barad, 2007: 133). This power given to words, which supposedly "mirror preexisting phenomena is the metaphysical substrate that supports social constructivist, as well as traditional realist, beliefs" (Barad, 2003: 802).

"Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. Hence, in ironic contrast to the misconception that would equate performativity with a form of linguistic monism that takes language to be the stuff of reality, performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve." (Barad, 2003: 802).

Barad's mistrust in representationalist and constructivist worldviews is rooted in Niels Bohr's quantum mechanics where "things do not have inherently determinate

boundaries or properties,” and in which the “inherent distinction between subject and object, and knower and known is challenged” (Barad, 2003: 813). This means that both humans and non-humans “come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity—its performativity ... bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena” (Barad, 2003: 823). According to Barad, “reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but things-in-phenomena [that is] the world is an ongoing open process of mattering through which ‘mattering’ itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities” (Barad, 2003: 817).

Hence, Barad does not consider matter a stable substance, it is “not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency” (Barad, 2007: 151). At the same time, Barad doesn’t claim “that human practices have no role to play; we just have to be clear about the nature of that role.” (Barad, 2007: 171). These roles are never predetermined but rather relationally emergent out of entanglements with simultaneously discursive and material phenomena and practices (Barad, 2007). This has radical implications for conceptions of subjectivity, or to adapt Haraway’s approach, subjectivities-in-the-making, based on the ways in which Barad’s model configures subjectivity and agency as constituted solely through their entanglement with other subjects and agents. Furthermore, bodies are not only entangled with each other but also in and with themselves, i.e., they are “constituted along with the world, or rather as ‘part’ of the world” (Barad, 2007: 160). Barad, towards the end of her essay *Posthumanist Performativity* concludes by saying that “‘we’ are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places in the world; rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity” (Barad, 2003: 828), before quoting feminist sociologist Vicky Kirby’s posthumanist perspective:

“I’m trying to complicate the locatability of human identity as a here and now, an enclosed and finished product, a causal force upon Nature. Or even . . . as something within Nature. I don’t want the human to be in Nature, as if Nature is a container. Identity is inherently unstable, differentiated, dispersed, and yet strangely coherent. If I say ‘this is Nature itself,’ an expression that usually denotes a prescriptive essentialism and that’s why we avoid it, I’ve actually animated this ‘itself’ and even suggested that ‘thinking’ isn’t the other of nature. Nature performs itself differently.” (Barad, 2003: 828-29)

Barad's conception of 'how matter comes to matter' (Barad, 2003) and the ways it questions the idea of the rational individual with its internal representation of the world, provides new revelatory insights for thinking through non-discursive practices—such as the vegetal ceremonies in the Amazon: they make possible new processes of engaging with the other, new ways of relating as well as acting with and through one another. In understanding Barad's agential realism as grounded in bodily practices and actions, such as ceremony and dance, for instance, one can begin to think practices as practicing what feminist theorist Kathrin Thiele describes as "worlding-with-others, which starts from immanent relatedness and thus is able to undo the humanism of the transcendental self/other (inasmuch as nature/culture) relation" (Thiele, 2014: 20). During the vegetal ceremonies, conventional ideas of subject/object distinctions as separately fixed entities were, in different ways, disrupted. While in the former the individual self did not end at the boundary of one's skin due to hallucinatory induced altered states of consciousness, during the latter, conventional subject/object analogous to spectator/performer, body/environment distinctions were obscured through choreographically induced altered states of corporeality.

Part III: Correspondence

Sensing Surfaces

“Humans are tuned for relationship. The eyes, the skin, the tongue, ears, and nostrils—all are gates where our body receives the nourishment of otherness.”

—David Abram, *The spell of the sensuous*

Humans, animals, plants, and a myriad of other lifeforms alike, engage in various forms of sensuous correspondence with their environments through their embeddedness within an interconnected world of relationships and entanglements. Much like Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s concept of multinaturalist perspectivism, which identifies the coexistence of multiple human and non-human perceptions as one common sociality within Amazonian indigenous cosmologies, Karen Barad, too, offers us a different view to think agency as mutually constitutive, co-emerging world-making practices through her concept of intra-action. Both conceptions allow for new ways of relating with the world as a reciprocal *worlding-with-others*—an open process within which a multiplicity of agents and a dynamism of forces are in constant exchange with one another. However, in each of these accounts we can recognize the multi-natural and material-discursive differentiations causing different human or non-human agents to participate differently within particular fields of relations. Diverse organisms have particular modes of intervening into the diversity of their unique worlds with varying degrees of agency as well as ways to respond to the fluxes and flows of those worlds. As Barad notes, “it is through specific agential intraactions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency” (Barad, 2007: 140). However, I would argue, it is through the manifold bodily surfaces that organisms including us humans are able to access their specific worlds.

In his essay *Iridescence, Intimacies*, artist and writer Tavi Meraud shows us that surfaces are intriguingly complex phenomena that are not as superficial as they might seem.

Most often understood as the outermost edge of a being or thing, the surface is more than a boundary, “a locality ... a kind of densification of information and material ... an accumulation in a particular, specific locality” (Meraud, 2015). The surface, understood in this way, is an intimate place of proximity and dynamic localization where bodies—both animate or inanimate—begin to begin and end, converge, coalesce, diverge and deviate. Furthermore, surfaces are sites of touch, allowing things to come in contact with one another. “How do we go from surfaces to affordances?” (Gibson, 2014: 119), Gibson asks in his book *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. The very same surface to one can have very different meanings to another. As I sit here typing up these words, I see a fly landing on the outside surface of my window. While the window surface affords a landing strip to the fly, to me it affords a view to the outside. Thus, surfaces are essentially affordances perceived differently by organisms depending on what they afford them. Like Viveiros de Castro’s perspectivism, surfaces bring to the surface the existence of multi-natural points of views. According to Gibson, “the composition and layout of surfaces constitute what they afford [and] different layouts afford different behaviors for different animals, and different mechanical encounters” (Gibson, 2014: 119-20).

Surfaces as intimate sites of affordance, therefore, bring about processes of correspondence through which living beings and materials unfold from within their manifold entanglements with their specific worlds. As Gibson demonstrated, organisms not only respond to, but are dependent on the physical and material constitutions of their surroundings as places to exist and act upon. Likewise, the very surface compositions of these environments need to be responsive and response-able for such reciprocal forms of active correspondence to take place. This shows us again that surfaces as environments themselves are living, agential ecosystems in their own right: they act back. They are agents sensing and being sensed at the same time. Agency, as Barad observes, “is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world” (Barad, 2007: 141). Together, organisms and their environments realize each other through multi-natural forms of intra-actions, or correspondence. This dance of agency, through which living beings co-respond to one another, is exemplary of our immersion in our worlds, which we access through our senses. Another way to think about correspondence is to think it relationally as movement. In her book *Politics of Touch*, philosopher Erin Manning positions “the senses *relationally* as expressions of moving bodies” (Manning, 2007: xiii).

Considering the senses as relational vehicles for bodily movement, according to Manning, “presupposes a vastly altered concept of time and space [whereby] the body does not move into space and time, it creates space and time” (Manning, 2007: xiii). For Manning, in order to talk about bodies we must first consider how bodies *move*, and I might add how they are *moved*, and she identifies the senses (by focusing on the sense of touch without excluding all other possible senses) as a specific instance through which to re-think bodies-in-movement, by stating that “the senses prosthetically alter the dimensions of the body, inciting the body to move in excess of its-self toward the world. Sensing toward the world implicates the body in a worlding that re-organizes conceptions of space and time” (Manning, 2007: xiii). What Manning is alluding to here in her exploration of the “sensing body in movement ... is not its shape or form but the relational matrices it makes possible” and she acknowledges that this sensing body “is a body that has always emerged through and alongside other bodies, be they political bodies, gendered bodies, raced bodies” (Manning, 2007: xiii).

Bodies, of course, are always already situated along varying axes of differences which ultimately make up for highly diverse sets of ‘relational matrices.’ Haraway and Barad showed us earlier that bodies are always already embedded within a world that is in the making, part of ‘apparatuses of bodily productions’ that generate bodily practices and embodiments, which in turn are shaped, supported as well as constrained and oppressed by specific social, political and historical instances of power. When bodies of difference meet, they do so along the axis of those embodied differences, emergent from specific social and cultural contexts, certain histories, ways of relating to others, particular emotional responses, diverse patterns of behaviors, and different (bodily) languages. However, to reiterate, it is through the bodily surfaces as animated by our senses that bodies are able ‘to move in excess of its-self toward the world’. As Meraud remarks, “the most urgent surface is the surface of the skin (for it is the closest to us), and thus of touching” (Meraud, 2015). As relational bodies-in-movement we must cross over the thresholds of multiple surfaces to meet the other, like in a moment of touch, to be able to correspond with one another. And this is precisely again the space that camouflage holds, and in extension, mimesis, which according to Taussig is “the art of becoming something else, of becoming Other” (Taussig, 1993: 36).

Deleuze and Guattari criticize the concept of mimicry as they consider it a mechanism

relying on binaries. They argue that “mimicry is a very bad concept, since it relies on binary logic to describe phenomena of an entirely different nature. The crocodile does not reproduce the tree trunk, more than the chameleon reproduces the colors of its surroundings” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 11). They go on to differentiate the notion of becoming from mimesis in the following way: “To become is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferentiation where one can no longer be distinguished from *a woman, an animal, or a molecule*—neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and nonpreexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form” (Deleuze, 1997: 1). Although I endorse the rejection of mimesis as simple imitation with no other value than to replicate and copy, mimicry and camouflage read differently, i.e., through a queer feminist lens, as I tried to demonstrate in the previous chapter, can precisely disengage and subvert fixed binaries. A queer reconfiguring of camouflage is geared toward change, rather than reproducing the same. By disrupting “the tyranny of nature as a coercive mechanism” (Muñoz, 2009: 134) through acts of escaping recognition and identification, camouflage can “spark new ways of perceiving and acting on a reality that is itself potentially changeable” (Muñoz, 2009: 134). As mentioned previously, camouflage understood in this way becomes a technology through which one can embody the material thresholds of multiple possibilities of realities.

And there is not a more brilliant example of how camouflage may spark new realities other than by looking at a particularly scintillating type of camouflage, namely that of iridescence. “Iridescence is a striking and taxonomically wide-spread form of animal coloration ... as concealment ... that produce[s] intensely chromatic colors that shift with changing angle of view or illumination” (Kjernsmo et al., 2020: 551). Iridescence, according to Meraud, “begins, as it were, at the surface [and] is a trace or residue of the surface interacting with air and light, the mediums of vision” (Meraud, 2015). Thus, iridescence, through its vivid changing of hues based on viewing angle, not only complicate acts of looking as it can never be fully captured, quite literally dazzling the onlooker, but furthermore “mark[s] the site where a surface begins to emerge, where a surface surfaces [as a] site of intractable multiplicities” (Meraud, 2015). To that end, in Meraud’s view, iridescence “seems to exist only insofar as it is seen” (Meraud, 2015). This shows us that camouflage, far from a mere attempt to attain a form through imitating and copying, as Deleuze and Guattari see it, may in fact function as a reality-

altering, virtual technology through which an entirely different *being-of-the-world* can be probed and stimulated. However, what we can take from Deleuze and Guattari's counterexample of becoming is that it seems to invoke principles of attunement and correspondence in certain ways.

In my view, this particular surface phenomenon that is iridescence is an equally remarkable example of how the notion of correspondence might allow us to think differently about *bodies-in-movement* and *worlding-with-others*. As Meraud observes, "iridescence is only insofar as it is seen" (Meraud, 2015). To frame this slightly differently, let us look at another example of iridescence in nature outside of animal camouflage: the evanescent iridescent shimmering we find glimmering on the surfaces of bodies of water such as the sea, ocean and river. Here, I might add, iridescence is only insofar as it emerges out of a correspondence between the sunlight hitting the surface of the water, then reflecting onto the surface of our retina, in turn surfacing in relation to our viewing angle. Iridescence, as we can see, occupies the space of the threshold that is itself constantly shifting: a crossing over between these oscillating and mirroring elements that co-respond to one another by allowing for something utterly formless and provisional, yet strikingly captivating, to emerge. The ephemeral choreography of multiple surfaces interacting, or intra-acting, or rather co-responding, in interplay, highlights that the notion of correspondence may offer another conceptual framework through which to rethink question of relations and agency.

Moving Worlds

Correspondence is a relational model of discursive and non-discursive forms of language capable of articulating the dynamic and reciprocal exchanges between various bodies—human, non-human, material and other bodies including bodies of knowledge. The key to correspondence is that it renders these multi-natural, material-discursive agents as active participants acting upon one another through all kinds of forms of communication (words, movements, sounds, concepts, textures, atmospheres, energies, etc.) as one entangled and interconnected animate sociality. To co-respond is to participate in the aliveness of the living world and to enter the dynamic, intra-active, multi-natural field of relations. To think with correspondence

is to acknowledge a *world-in-movement*, a world in which not only everything and everyone moves and is moved by one another in different ways, but one that itself emerges from movement. What greater example could there be other than our world, the earth, itself. The earth moves in many ways, both rotating around itself while revolving around the sun, consequently causing day and night that rhythmically move across cycles, correspondingly bringing about lightness and darkness. Correspondence *is* precisely this relationally dynamic type of movement: it is the path along which agents co-respond, affect and animate one another co-constitutively, just like the ways that the darkness in the Amazon corresponded with my acute sense of bodily permeability and immersion into that nocturnal world.

Etymologically speaking, the term correspondence derives from the Medieval Latin ‘correspondentia’ meaning ‘congruence, resemblance’, its present participle ‘correspondere’ meaning to ‘reciprocate’, stemming from ‘com’ (together) and ‘respondere’ (to answer) (Etymonline, 2023). At the heart of correspondence, therefore, seem to lie questions of resonance and responsiveness. Not only between the word and its corresponding element in the world, but rather in its capacity to render actors in the world as response-able, i.e., to imbue them with the ability to both respond and be responded to. In the context of camouflage, I might argue that the specific type of relationality that the mimicking organism employs to camouflage itself into its environment is precisely that of correspondence. Much like the image depicted in a photograph both corresponds to as well as transforms its place of origin into something completely new, as opposed to merely representing it, “morphological mimicry ... after the fashion of chromatic mimicry, an actual photography [could also be understood as] a photography on the level of the object and not on that of the image, a reproduction in three-dimensional space” (Caillois, 1984: 23). Again, as previously outlined based on a mimesis read differently, correspondence, too, does not equate itself to simple imitation or copy made in harmony or conformity. Rather, in the instance of corresponding with the environment, the organism does not so much *reproduce* its surroundings through acts of resemblance, but rather *co-produces* an entirely new reality by becoming a *living* photograph, which in turn takes a life on its own. As Levin remarks in reference to Caillois’ observation:

“The mimic is physically transformed by its embodiment of, and contact with, the external world. As in a chromograph, a copy is made through the physical pressure of one substance on

another. It is as if the mimicking organism takes a photograph of the surrounding space and develops it on the surface of its body." (Levin, 2014: 40)

Correspondence, then, aids camouflage in its rehearsal of multiple possibilities of realities by giving the organism the means to effectively exchange and communicate with the animate environment in ways that allow for such acts of alterity. The term correspondence has also been a concern of the anthropologist Tim Ingold. His wide-ranging body of work that brings together disciplines of anthropology, philosophy and ecology in scholarly, yet poetic ways, develops an animist understanding of the world—"a world of incessant movement and becoming, one that is never complete but continually under construction, woven from the countless lifelines of its manifold human and non-human constituents as they thread their ways through the tangle of relationships in which they are comprehensively enmeshed" (Ingold, 2011: 141). In Ingold's entire oeuvre, which focuses on a wide range of themes including environmental perception, crafts, technology, language, art and architecture, human-animal relations, amongst many others, two phenomena in particular seem to keep recurring: movement and creativity. Creative practice, for Ingold, is the site where the animate world expresses itself, linking the idea of creativity "to a sense of improvisation, as a movement that is continually attentive to the comings and goings of human and non-human others" (Ingold, n.d.). It seems to me that notions of creativity and movement have deeply influenced his conception of correspondence, which he defines in his research statement as follows:

"The idea of correspondence ... is also part of my ongoing attempt to reunite perception with imagination, understood not as a power of mental representation but rather as a way of entering creatively into the very becoming of things – of moving 'upstream' to the moment of their incipient formation." (Ingold, n.d.)

For Ingold, "perceiving is about attending to things", which in his view "is a skill that can be honed through practice" (Ingold, n.d.). This is reminiscent of Luce Irigaray, who also insisted that we must develop practices not only through language but through our perceptual faculties in order to both think and practice 'a being-in-relation with the other' through an embodied, affective ethics of difference (Irigaray, 2016). Much of Ingold's work is immensely inspired by Gibson's ecological psychology, which, as we discussed earlier, renders perception not as a sole

accomplishment of the mind as part of a body, but rather as implicated and emanant from within the immersion of organisms to their environments, and the movements and behaviors they afford (Gibson, 2014). Ingold draws from Gibson's ecological perception to conceive a relational model of personhood which conceives "the human being not as a composite entity made up of separable but complementary parts ...but rather as a singular locus of creative growth within a continually unfolding field of relationships" (Ingold, 2000: 4-5).

Ingold's understanding of creativity and movement as intelligible forces that animate the world seem to be informed by the philosopher Henri Bergson, whose notion of the *élan vital* stands for a vital impulse that moves across the bodies which it simultaneously organizes—describing this force as a creative movement through life that in effect creates life (Bergson, 2007; DiFrisco, 2015). Deleuze expanded on Bergson's work in his book *Bergsonism* based on his own preoccupation with questions of movement, in which he paired Bergson's concepts (including the vital impetus) with his own "theory and practice of becomings of all kinds, of coexistent multiplicities" (Deleuze, 1991: 8) and notions of virtuality and differentiations. In Deleuze's understanding, the *élan vital* "is always a case of a virtuality in the process of being actualized ... in the process of differentiating" (Deleuze, 1991: 94), as he further remarks in his book:

"Life is divided into plant and animal; the animal is divided into instinct and intelligence; an instinct in tum divides into several directions that are actualized in different species; intelligence itself has its particular modes or actualizations. It is as if Life were merged into the very movement of differentiation ... Movement is undoubtedly explained by the insertion of duration into matter: Duration is differentiated according to the obstacles it meets in matter, according to the materiality through which it passes, according to the kind of extension that it contracts." (Deleuze, 1991: 94)

According to Bergson, "our intelligence is the prolongation of our senses. Before we speculate, we must live, and life demands that we make use of matter, either with our organs, which are natural tools, or with tools, properly so-called, which are artificial organs" (Bergson, 2007: 42). This force of creativity that kinesthetically shapes and organizes itself, i.e., the very fabric of its intelligible, material world, is precisely the process which Ingold ascribes to the workings of his animist ontology: a world in

which “the generativity of action is that of animate life itself and lies in the vitality of its materials” (Ingold, 2013: 97). In his essay *Bodies on the Run*, Ingold explores these questions of animacy by looking at the body itself, not as imperviously contoured and solid, but the body as a whole living organism: “every living organism ... is itself a site of infestation: a seething colony of lively, jostling materials ... a gathering together of materials in movement” (Ingold, 2013: 93). To that end, Ingold finds that the body “is not a thing that moves; it is rather composed (or better, composted) in movement” and it “is animate precisely to the extent that its surfaces have opened up to the surrounding medium” (Ingold, 2013: 93-94). This opening up of surfaces that leak onto one another is precisely the mechanism of what is at play in camouflage as a reality-altering, virtual technology that makes another *being-of-the-world* possible. Ingold remarks:

“Things can exist and persist only because they leak: that is, because of the interchange of materials across the surfaces by which they differentiate themselves from the surrounding medium. The bodies of organisms and other things leak continually, indeed their lives depend on it. Now this propensity of things to leak, and for material flows to override or seep through their surfaces, bears crucially on the question of material agency.” (Ingold, 2013: 95)

We can see how the works of Gibson, Bergson and Deleuze provide a theoretical scaffolding to Ingold’s animism, which conceives of a world that challenges notions of the individual as a solid, fixed entity. Instead, Ingold renders the individual as a constituent of a “creative unfolding of an entire field of relations within which beings emerge ... each in relation to the others” (Ingold, 2000: 19)—as part of a “world in which things are ever differentiating from one another” (Ingold, 2021: 7). We may equally recall Barad, whose post-humanist world unsettles individualism that “allows matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming, in its ongoing intra-activity” (Barad, 2007: 136). Barad, in an interview about intra-action, defines her neologism in the following way:

“The usual notion of interaction assumes that there are individual independently existing entities or agents that preexist their acting upon one another. By contrast, the notion of “intra-action” queers the familiar sense of causality (where one or more causal agents precede and produce an effect), and more generally unsettles the metaphysics of individualism (the belief that there are individually constituted agents or entities, as well as times and places) ...

“individuals” do not preexist as such but rather materialize in intra-action. That is, intra-action goes to the question of the making of differences, of “individuals,” rather than assuming their independent or prior existence. “Individuals” do not not exist, but are not individually determinate. Rather, “individuals” only exist within phenomena (particular materialized/materializing relations) in their ongoing iteratively intra-active reconfiguring.” (Kleinman, 2012: 77)

Possibly inspired by Barad, Ingold too proposes a shift away from the concept of interaction, toward the notion of correspondence. For Ingold, correspondence is “about the ways along which lives, in their perpetual unfolding or becoming, simultaneously join together and differentiate themselves ... a fundamental reorientation, from the between-ness of beings and things to their in-between-ness” (Ingold, 2021: 9). Correspondence springs from the space of *interstitial differentiations*: where difference emerges from within the conjunctions of things joining *with* other things while simultaneously differentiating themselves. This oscillation between similarity and difference, which is of equal concern to the concept of mimesis, resonates with Ingold’s correspondence as a relational and communicative process of sympathetic affiliations through which agents answer and respond to one another as part of an entangled social life. “To communicate with people”, according to Ingold, “is then to common with them, in the participatory process of living together” (Ingold, 2017: 15).

For Ingold, the shift away from the interaction between subjects, and thus intersubjectivity, places a heightened emphasis on the dynamic middle space, i.e., a space of transitions and crossings between agents. A key quality that arises out of this relational shift from “othering into togetherness, interaction into correspondence” (Ingold, 2017: 20) is one of attunement and attentiveness as movement, i.e., correspondence as a form of “resonance with the movements of the things to which it attends” (Ingold, 2017: 19). Ingold refers to Erin Manning’s book *The Minor Gesture*, in which she rethinks attention not as animated by “subject-oriented agency”, i.e. as something that is singularly “directed by the subject”, but rather as a relational movement or a dance, where attention “emerges in the event, activated by the force of directionality the event calls forth ... where it is the field that attends and attention is less parsed than environmental ... activating the subjective form of the event, not a pre-categorized subject” (Manning, 2016: 154). In the event of walking, for instance,

“the attentive walker tunes his movement to the terrain as it unfolds around him and beneath his feet” (Ingold, 2017: 19), allowing both the figure and the ground to *witness* one another, to respond to one another. In this case, correspondence as a non-discursive language enables a form of attentive communication to emerge which speaks not *about*, but directly *from* the figure-ground relationship itself.

Correspondence operates precisely out of this multi-directional in-between field of relations as multi-natural, material-discursive expressions. According to Luce Irigaray, “we communicate, and even are in communion with one another through air, water, the light and the warmth of the sun [but] we lack words to express this universal sharing between us” (Irigaray, 2015: 106). While all organisms on earth including humans participate in this “universal sharing” of air, water and sunlight, as our lives depend on it, we can be certain that this common exteriority is neither “universal” nor “shared” in equal measure. How can we speak of a shared commonality in the wake of capitalism, colonialism and climate change? What does it mean to be alive within these unjust systems of oppression, asymmetrical power structures, social inequalities and ecological destructions? How do we navigate renewed acts of relatedness through notions such as correspondence in these alienating societal structures that ultimately impede our abilities to find affinities, sympathies and connections? According to Irigaray, “we really have not a lot of words to express a coexistence in life itself” (Irigaray, 2015: 106). But what about the difficulty of devising a common language that expresses the broken existence within these ruins of late capitalism and colonialism? In their book *The Undercommons*, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney draw on black radical traditions to construct a grammar able to speak of such brokenness by conceiving of an architecture they call the “undercommons”—an ungovernable social realm cohabited by marginalized subjects. In his introduction to the book, Jack Halberstam proclaims:

“If you want to know what the undercommons wants, what Moten and Harney want, what black people, indigenous peoples, queers and poor people want, what we (the “we” who cohabit in the space of the undercommons) want, it is this – we cannot be satisfied with the recognition and acknowledgement generated by the very system that denies a) that anything was ever broken and b) that we deserved to be the broken part; so we refuse to ask for recognition and instead we want to take apart, dismantle, tear down the structure that, right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its

walls.” (Harney & Moten, 2013: 6)

The concept of the undercommons is not so much an appeal to resistance or rebellion but a call for a mode of acting out of its inescapable and ineluctable omnipresence, one that is otherwise but never elsewhere, always in the here and now rife with potentialities for radical forms of collectivity and sociality that extend beyond institutions of control. The undercommons is a sphere where those self-governed subjects make meaning with one another by “not finishing oneself, not passing, not completing” (Harney & Moten, 2013: 28), where they reach alternative ways of being with others outside of apparatuses of regulation and corrective governance—“allowing subjectivity to be unlawfully overcome by others, a radical passion and passivity such that one becomes unfit for subjection, because one does not possess the kind of agency that can hold the regulatory forces of subjecthood” (Harney & Moten, 2013: 28). In his introduction, Halberstam asserts that “the undercommons is not a realm where we rebel and we create critique [rather it] is a space and time which is always here [and] our goal ... is not to end the troubles but to end the world that created those particular troubles as the ones that must be opposed” (Harney & Moten, 2013: 9). To that end, we might understand the undercommons as an attempt to remake the world as one that is always already in the here and now by reorienting past regulatory and corrective institutions towards renewed capacities of learning, abilities for love and belonging.

Perhaps to think *with* or act *from* the undercommons is to shift toward the kind of knowing at the margins that I alluded to earlier in the opening chapter. To ally with minoritarian and marginalized bodies of knowledge is to attune to acts of perception and recognition outside of the controlling gaze—not as an attempt to become recognized, but precisely to remain unrecognizable “against actors that insist on rendering subjects as readable, legible and categorizable” (Lingel, 2021: 1110). Camouflage as a fugitive act, where bodily surfaces cross over, both touch and are touched by one another, virtually opening new worlds, might correlate to what Moten and Harney call *hapticality*: “the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you” (Harney & Moten, 2013: 98). In alliance with the notion of the undercommons, Erin Manning describes her concept of the *minor gesture* as that which has the “capacity to actualize, at the edge of the virtual where the actual is not-yet ... leading the event elsewhere than toward the governant

fixity of the major, be it the major in the name of normative political structures, of institutional life, of able-bodiedness, of gender conformity, of racial segregation” (Manning, 2016: 7). Similarly to the undercommons, the *minor gesture* is not so much a lament but a celebration of the “fragility and the persistence of the minor ... perceiving in it more potential than in the self-directed “I” that stands outside experience and speaks the major languages of the brands of individualism and humanism” (Manning, 2016: 7). Manning remarks:

“The minor gesture is always political: in its punctual reorienting of the event, the minor gesture invents new modes of life-living. It moves through the event, creating a pulse, opening the way for new tendencies to emerge, and in the resonances that are awakened, potential for difference looms. This is how I am defining the political: the movement activated, in the event, by a difference in register that awakens new modes of encounter and creates new forms of life-living.” (Manning, 2016: 8)

For Manning, the minor gesture activates a life-living that “brings into resonance field effects otherwise backgrounded in experience ... and moving it toward ... new modes of existence” (Manning, 2016: 7). A renewed life-living activated by the minor gesture, however, is always a political question, one that includes different lifeforms that have been evicted from the political arena, one that thinks “life with and beyond the human, thinking life as more-than- human” (Manning, 2016: 8). Manning allies her minor gesture to the undercommons, which she understands not as a predefined place or recognizable site, not as a given gathering but an ecology of practices, “an emergent collectivity that is sited in the encounter ... an activator of a tendency more than it is an offering of a commonality ... a tentative holding in place of fragile comings-into-relation ... that create the potential to reorient fields of life-living” (Manning, 2016: 8). In the undercommons, according to Moten and Harney, a different kind of feeling becomes common, one that is “not collective, not given to decision, not adhering or reattaching to settlement, nation, state, territory or historical story” (Harney & Moten, 2013: 98). This new feeling, namely that of hapticality, is ‘the touch of the undercommons’, Moten and Harney remark: “Though forced to touch and be touched, to sense and be sensed in that space of no space, though refused sentiment, history and home, we feel (for) each other” (Harney & Moten, 2013: 98). Moten and Harney refer to soul music in order to exemplify their notion of hapticality, a feeling and possibility for love within the undercommons, they write:

“A feel, a sentiment with its own interiority, there on skin, soul no longer inside but there for all to hear, for all to move. Soul music is a medium of this interiority on the skin, its regret the lament for broken hapticality, its self-regulatory powers the invitation to build sentimentality together again, feeling each other again, how we party. This is our hapticality, our love. This is love for the shipped, love as the shipped.” (Harney & Moten, 2013: 99)

During vegetal ceremonies communing with the plant brew *ayahuasca*, which translates to “vine of the soul” from the Quechua language (Estrella-Parra et al., 2019: 252), it is very common for the attending *pasajeros* to enter a stream of life-living allowing for communication with all kinds of life forms and forces, past, present, and future. At times, the music of the *icaros* open intra-active fields of intra-subjective experiences, including those that are unpleasant to revisit, which precede one’s own lived memories. It is not uncommon that *pasajeros* are sometimes faced with past traumas, even those that go back way in time through ancestral lineages. I have repeatedly come across members of groups that were victims of collective trauma, e.g., the Holocaust, the transatlantic slave-trade, and so on, suddenly thrown right into one’s inheritance of inter-generational trauma, left with no other choice than to surrender and “work” through it. At times, it can get pretty wild causing an unregulated wildness that can only take its own course. In fact, I have had my own share of experiences of this kind and—through the guidance of experienced and gifted *curanderos* and *curanderas*—was able to achieve certain levels of healing from specific personal and shared wounds that continue to haunt us in different ways and to different degrees, both on an individual and collective level.

The *ayahuasca*, which in indigenous contexts, is granted its own subjectivity as part of a multi-natural, animate sociality, could be seen as a living architecture that is not dissimilar to the realm of the undercommons: an utterly ungovernable world in which all kinds of marginalized subjectivities common together, both human and more-than-human. During these ceremonies, one taps into this sociality as always already there, as otherwise but never elsewhere. Depending on personal histories and circumstances, subjects that either currently cohabit the space of the undercommons or once have, e.g., through the afterlives of transgenerational trauma, may come to the surface in very palpable, almost haptic, ways, refusing to be forgotten, refusing to be the broken ones, demanding to be felt. Moten and Harney say that in the undercommons “to feel others is unmediated, immediately social, amongst us ... in

the contained, amongst the contained, lying together in the ship, the boxcar, the prison, the hostel ... thrown together touching each other” (Harney & Moten, 2013: 98). This rings true on so many occasions during the ceremonies, where the hapticality of the *icaro* songs gave us the sentiment which those that came to haunt us were denied, where we were forced to touch and be touched by one another, capacitating us to feel through them and for them to feel through us. At every instance, the hapticality of the *icaro* songs moved us through the undercommons in order to learn and to love.

The movements, i.e., of moving and being moved throughout these instances of communing and communicating with these multi-natural, material-discursive life forms and forces, are made possible through acts of correspondence. This is precisely because to engage in correspondence is to hone abilities to co-respond to a world that is both discursive and non-discursive, past and future, here and there, human and non-human—a world that is both broken as much as it is connected. To co-respond is to be able to attend and attune to the relational manifold and act out of its becomings and differentiations, right from its middle, its in-between. To that end, correspondence, too, is always already a question of politics and ethics. To co-respond is also to be response-able. Its hapticality is one of sympathy. According to Ingold, “we need to learn to attend to the world around us, and to respond with sensitivity” (Ingold, 2021: 3), and this is because “the response is tinged with responsibility” (Ingold, 2021: 12), simply because “responsiveness precedes responsibility” (Ingold, 2017: 20), as Ingold states:

“We are required to speak, in short, in a language of responsivity and responsibility. There cannot be one without the other: to be answerable, one has to be able to answer. And to be able to answer, one has to be present.” (Ingold, 2017: 20).

Knowing from within

Ingold conceives of correspondence not as an interaction amongst atomized, contoured agents that experience “one another as packaged, but as moving and moved, in ongoing response” (Ingold, 2013: 94) expressed by kinesthetic flows of becomings and differentiations. Drawing on the practice of dance, Ingold finds that

correspondence “is something to think *from* rather than *about*” (Ingold, 2013: 94), much like the artisan thinks with and from their materials, which are response-able to their crafting gestures, as well as the dancer thinking *from* their bodies as they compose movements. This is not to say that artisans and dancers do not also think *about* their respective materials and mediums, but since we are talking of correspondence here, it is important to remark that correspondence is not located in the space of the *about*, but in the space of the *within*—immanent to the in-between of the relational manifold. To that end, correspondence arises out of intra-active, as opposed to interactive fields of action—proposing a shift from embodiment to animacy, from enactment to emergence. In considering dance through the lens of correspondence, then, is to think of the dancing body “not [as] a thing that moves [but] rather as composed in [as well as *through*] movement (Ingold, 2013: 93).

Moving through correspondence is not to enact closed, packaged movement sequences (although a level of automatism of ingrained and conditioned movement/behavior patterns is unavoidable due to our situatedness in our specific worlds), but to attune to and be animated by the emergent movements of the field of relations at play in given events, e.g., a live performance or a vegetal ceremony. To engage in correspondence is to move into the animate flow of life-living: corresponding with moving worlds that act back, that respond and are responded to at the same time. Bodies in correspondence, therefore, are always moving and being moved, touching and being touched, by the movements of the animate world. In correspondence, bodies think through other bodies, through one another as emergent from within worlds-in-movement themselves, or, as Ingold puts it: “In the dance of animacy, bodily kinaesthesia interweaves contrapuntally with the flux of materials within an encompassing, morphogenetic field of forces” (Ingold, 2013: 101).

Ingold picks up the act of kite-flying as an example to unravel what he means by a ‘dance of animacy’. “The answer”, according to Ingold, “hangs in the air” (Ingold, 2013: 99). He argues that a kite-flyer’s “dance” with the air cannot be a dance of agency—as the air itself is not a “closed”, separate agent. Ingold refers to Irigaray to support his claim who remarks that “air cannot be closed ... more than any other element air is opening itself” (Ingold, 2013: 100). Ingold suggests that “even if we allow that in flying a kite, the flyer dances with the air, it cannot be a dance of agency. It can only be a dance of animacy. And in this dance, flyer and air do not so much

interact as correspond” (Ingold, 2013: 101). He writes:

“The kite, in effect, sets up a correspondence between the animate movements of the flyer and the currents of the aerial medium in which he or she is immersed. It is not that you need air to interact with a kite; rather, you need a kite to correspond with the air.” (Ingold, 2013: 101).

For Ingold, it is the air that activates “the kite, allowing an action potential ... already immanent within it—in its very construction—to be expressed in motion” (Ingold, 2013: 99). He finds another example in the act of making music. To play the cello, for instance, is not to interact with it like separate agents that interact with one another, but rather, in the emergent act of playing the cello, the cellist corresponds with it through the medium of sound (Ingold, 2013). These acts of correspondence, according to Ingold, within which “the potter’s feeling flows in and out in a correspondence with the clay, the herdsman’s in correspondence with the airborne rope, the flyer’s running with the wind, and the cellist’s bowing with musical sound” (Ingold, 2013: 108), demonstrate how “to correspond with the world ... is not to describe it, or to represent it, but to answer to it” (Ingold, 2013: 108). Thus, correspondence is where the animate world expresses itself through movement and creativity, “it is to mix the movements of one’s own sentient awareness with the flows and currents of animate life” (Ingold, 2013: 108). To correspond is to enter the dynamism of creative life forces within which multi-natural, material-discursive bodies intertwine as part of intra-active environments and fields of relations.

Ingold draws his conception of correspondence from the German poet and natural scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe “when he wrote of the relation between sunlight and vision that were the eye not sun-like, it could not see the sun” (Ingold, 2013: 107). It is not so much that “the eye resembles the sun, but that it is so formed as to be able to respond to its light” (Ingold, 2013: 107). These interdependent, inter-relational reciprocities are precisely what is at stake in correspondence, which recall again Gibson’s affordances as ecologies of action-perception. Ingold also refers to Jakob von Uexküll, who had inverted Goethe’s observation by writing that “were the sun not eye-like, it could not shine in any sky” (Ingold, 2013: 107). In response to Uexküll’s understanding of the notion of Umwelt, which we had looked at earlier, Ingold points out that “the sky, and the sun as a celestial light that illuminates the sky, could exist only in the phenomenal world [Umwelt] of creatures with eyes ... in just

the same way the bee corresponds with the pollen-bearing flower, and the spider with the fly” (Ingold, 2013: 107). The living organisms within their Umwelt, then, each take into themselves “something of the characteristics of the other so as to be able to respond to it” (Ingold, 2013: 107). To that end, correspondence is the coming together of emergent states of becomings and differentiations in their matterings, their materializations as animate qualities of the world that both perceive and are perceived within their specific phenomenologies of correspondence. As Ingold writes:

“Persons and things do not exist as bounded entities, set aside from their surroundings, but rather arise, each as a nexus of creative growth and development within an unbounded and continually unfolding field of relations. This is not to say that they are undifferentiated, or they all merge into a kind of blur. It is rather to argue that their differentiation is a function of their placement within the relational manifold – that is, of positionality.” (Ingold, 2021: xv).

As we come to see, correspondence is a way to enter the streams of things. Perhaps such intra-active acts of streaming with, through and across bodies and things require a closer look at surfaces themselves. As we came to see earlier, surfaces are precisely not contrary to what belies behind, underneath or beyond them. Surfaces are much more than what is apparent. Rather, as previously outlined, surfaces are dynamic localizations in and of themselves: not ones to merely “enter into” as if they were separate entities, but precisely to be co-responded with as affordances and multi-natural and material-discursive sites of touch. Surfaces are architectures of intimacy where beings and things touch and are touched by one another, an entanglement of lively materials that both move and are moved by one another. They allow agential beings and things to both access their specific worlds as well as exceed those ontological boundaries. In other words, surfaces surface as material entanglements of multi-natural points of touch, establishing other ways of knowing from within. Or, as Ingold puts it, a “knowing from the inside ... to forge a different way of thinking about how we come to know things ... through corresponding with the things themselves, in the very process of thought” (Ingold, 2021: vii).

Speaking Sympathies

Ingold’s most recent book *Correspondences* features an eclectic collection of letter-like

writings which trace a variety of his correspondences with manifold “people and things, [corresponding] in writing, with everything from oceans and skies, and from landscapes and forests to monuments and artworks” (Ingold, 2021: 3-4). Just like writing letters, Ingold finds that “correspondences are dialogical ... not solitary [and that] it is from these dialogical engagements that knowledge continually arises” (Ingold, 2021: 11). In fact, the notion of correspondence is generally understood as the act of exchanging letters. While the communicative dimension to correspondence is indeed an important aspect, this project is to a greater extent concerned with its implications towards forms of resonance, resemblance and sympathy. To correspond is to being implicated in a multi-natural, material-discursive sociality within which agents intra-actively co-respond to one another. For Ingold, correspondence arises from the basis “that all living, and all knowing, is intrinsically social, whether it be of trees in a wood, beasts in a herd or human beings in the community ... social life is one long correspondence” (Ingold, 2021: 11).

If we are to think sociality through the lens of indigenous and post-human reconfigurings of the world, then we shall consider a much wider spectrum of practices as part of the social sphere, both human and non-human. Ingold’s *modus operandi* in engaging with correspondence to socialize with a vast range of agents and subjects is achieved mainly through the act of writing, at least in the ways they are recorded and documented for public dissemination. Writing as a distinct mode of expressing language provides an interesting case here in relation to acts of speaking. In most historical accounts oral traditions precede written ones, however, it is difficult to accurately determine the diverse sets of genealogies of various forms of capturing language for transmissible communication, including the production of symbols or words on given surfaces, from carvings on rocks to written words on paper. Language in oral traditions, such as among indigenous people, according to Abram, was “enacted primarily in song, prayer, and story ... not simply to dialogue with other humans but also to converse with the more-than-human cosmos, to renew reciprocity with the surrounding powers of earth and sky” (Abram, 1996: 50). As discussed through the work of Benjamin in the opening chapter, the origins of language were onomatopoeic and its function was to establish sensuous correspondences with the natural world. In the framework of these bodily forms of language, from Abram’s point of view, “words do not speak *about* the world; rather they speak *to* the world, and to the expressive presences that, with us, inhabit the world [i]n multiple and

diverse ways ... spoken language seems to give voice to ...the sensorial affinity between humans and the environing earth" (Abram, 1996: 51). Abram writes:

"Not just animals and plants, then, but tumbling waterfalls and dry riverbeds, gusts of wind, compost piles and cumulus clouds, freshly painted houses (as well as houses abandoned and sometimes haunted), rusting automobiles, feathers, granite cliffs and grains of sand, tax forms, dormant volcanoes, bays and bayous made wretched by pollutants, snowdrifts, shed antlers, diamonds, and daikon radishes, all are expressive, sometimes eloquent, and hence participant in the mystery of language. Our own chatter erupts in response to the abundant articulations of the world: human speech is simply our part of a much broader conversation." (Abram, 2010: 172).

The practice of writing, it seems, is a particularly human instantiation of communicating language. Although non-humans employ all kinds of bodily, territorial, chemical, olfactory types of markings, amongst many others, carving symbols on rocks and writing words on paper or typing them on screens are human technologies, nevertheless. Writing, in contrast to speaking, sounding, listening or feeling—expressions we share with other non-humans—is a form of capturing otherwise fleeting and ephemeral acts of communication. Thus, writing is an apparatus of capture, much like image-based, audio-visual and digital recording devices and data coding, which produce inscriptions on surfaces that eventually take on lives of their own. In most cases, writing, as opposed to speaking, is also often carried out alone, with pen to paper or fingertips on keyboard buttons, even if awaiting a response later on. By considering Ingold's notion of correspondence as dialogical, not solitary, one might ask, how a seemingly solitary act such as writing, particularly through a single-voiced author, may achieve such relational forms of dialogue with multi-natural, material-discursive beings and things without merely speaking *about* or *at* them. How can writing as a process of inscribing thoughts on surfaces of paper, for instance, establish forms of correspondence that allow for subjects (both in terms of subject matter as well as human and non-human subjects) to speak through the page themselves?

After all, to correspond is to be in dialogue with myriad forms of expressions and utterances that arise from the multi-natural world, less by speaking on behalf, but together with, through and across them. Perhaps one way to establish forms of writing

that can capture such multi-natural, material-discursive expressions from the vantage point of a more-than-human world is also to write across disciplinary boundaries. It is at least striking that all the authors appearing in this chapter work in such radically extensive, transdisciplinary ways, either by writing at and through the margins of disciplines or by focusing on marginal (or marginalized) phenomena themselves. Voices such as Barad, Gibson, Manning and Moten & Harney develop entirely new fields of inquiry, which, correspondingly, summon and enliven, or even give voice to the complexities of multi-natural worlds. Likewise, I cannot help but notice that the works of Ingold and Abram not only bridge diverse fields of knowledge, but also utilize a poetic style of writing.

Is it due to the evocative use of language at play in poetry that allow for rather invocational forms of correspondence, making beings and things felt quite viscerally and haptically (like soul music or *icaró* songs, for instance)? Poetry is conceivably “the primal and primary form of languages themselves” (Nemerov, 2023). Language at large has its roots in ritual, but poetry’s relation to magical spells is particularly tangible. Poetry is difficult to be defined, but generally “evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound, and rhythm” (Nemerov, 2023). Poetry, in some ways, is a technique to utilize language otherwise. Is it the *otherwise*, the space in which camouflage and correspondence operate as well, that may grant language, including its written form, the ability to summon beings and things to come to the surface and speak through words?

In his discussion of phenomenology through the work of Merleau-Ponty, Abram finds that Merleau-Ponty “writes of the perceived things as entities, of sensible qualities as powers, and of the sensible itself as a field of animate presences, in order to acknowledge and underscore their active, dynamic contribution to perceptual experience” (Abram, 1996: 43). Ingold, too, reports in his book *Correspondences* that he “has tried in these essays to stay close to the grain of things” (Ingold, 2021: 14). Whether poetry or otherwise, we may deduce that language (and writing) as discursive practices are as conducive for establishing multi-natural, material-discursive forms of correspondence—by which agents and subjects may come to the surface and speak *through them* rather than be spoken about—as non-discursive practices such as dance and ceremony. Perhaps we might disengage distinctions

between discursive and non-discursive forms of communication altogether, since all these practices are corporeal and social by nature, we all communicate through our bodies, with other bodies, as well as through them, and others through us. For Abram, “language as a bodily phenomenon accrues to all expressive bodies, not just to the human [that is] our own speaking ... does not set us outside of the animate landscape but ... inscribes us more fully in its chattering, whispering, soundful depths” (Abram, 1996: 55). He asserts:

“At the heart of any language, then, is the poetic productivity of expressive speech. A living language is continually being made and remade, woven out of the silence by those who speak.... And this silence is that of our wordless participations, of our perceptual immersion in the depths of an animate, expressive world.” (Abram, 1996: 57).

For Ingold, correspondence seeks a “sympathetic approach ... it is continuously in touch with feeling, with the lived experience ... in the precision of close attunement: in the tension of the cello string, yielding a determinate pitch on vibration; in the mariner’s attention to the wind” (Ingold, 2021: 12-13). Correspondence is to call “for practiced care and attentiveness in an ongoing relation between conscious awareness and lively materials [like] dancers ... attun[ing] their movements to one another ... to flex in response to other’s movements [or] for any kind of craft, where the skill of the practitioner lies in an ability to attune the movements of the sensing body to tools and materials in a way that calls forth the relations of line, surface, scale and proportion” (Ingold, 2021: 14). Similarly, to correspond is to construct a language otherwise, both linguistically and bodily, to tune words to surfaces themselves that allow for multi-natural, material-discursive subjects and agents to cross over, to touch and be touched, to move and to be moved.

In her recent book *Influx and Efflux*, Jane Bennett turns to American poet Walt Whitman to locate “the human on a continuum of lively bodies and forces—a continuum that elides conventional dichotomies of life and matter, organic and inorganic, subjective and objective, agency and structure” (Bennett, 2020: xi). Inspired by Whitman’s idiosyncratic, free-verse poetry, Bennett attempts to invent a new language in the “tradition of process philosophy for which metamorphosis ... is a topic of great interest” (Bennett, 2020: xi)—employing a style of writing which infuses various syntax morphologies juxtaposing written text with intuitive doodles, poems, songs

and diagrams to explore renewed models of self and human agency. Bennett puts forward the notion of “a process-oriented self—a model of subjectivity consonant with a world of vibrant matter” (Bennett, 2020: xv), one that exists within porous and permeable exchanges between humans and non-humans that mutually influence and are influenced by one another. The pairing of the notions of influx and efflux in her book title refer to the “the in-and-out, the comings and goings, as exteriorities cross (always permeable) borders to become interiorities that soon exude” (Bennett, 2020: x). Bennett thinks of these boundary-crossing encounters as vibrant materialities that exert influence over one another: “a swarm of nonhumans are at work inside and as us; we are powered by a host of inner aliens, including ingested plants, animals, pharmaceuticals, and the microbiomes upon which thinking itself relies” (Bennett, 2020: xi).

What kind of process-oriented self may speak most appropriately to such a multi-natural world of mutually affective influences, as opposed to one made up by bounded individuals that either actively or passively interact or react to one another? Or in Bennett’s words, “How to bespeak an I alive in a world of vibrant matter? How to write up its efforts and endeavors?” (Bennett, 2020: xii). Inspired by Whitman, Bennett thinks of a new form of “I” as a *dividual* instead of an *individual*. It is the human dividual, according to Bennett, rather than the individual, that partakes in the influx and efflux of a moving world—where exterior influences enter inside bodies and vice versa, where they transform and metamorphose into entirely new bodies and things. A dividual is a person who is precisely not “thought to be ‘individual,’ that is, indivisible, bounded units. To exist, dividual persons absorb heterogeneous material influences. They must also give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances—essences, residues, or other active influences—that may then reproduce in others something of the nature of the persons in whom they have originated” (Bennett, 2020: xii-xiii). Bennett explores these more-than-human processes of “intrabody and interbody currents” (Bennett, 2020: xvii) by looking at “Whitman’s discernment of a sympathetic current” (Bennett, 2020: xv), one that moves across human and non-human bodies and matter. Attuning to these “intrabody sympathies”, according to Bennett, and becoming more sympathetic with a much wider spectrum of lively matter, may lead to sympathy across difference at large. Bennett describes Whitman’s use of the term sympathy as follows:

“The word marks for him not only a moral sentiment linking one person to another but also an atmospherics of indeterminate eros; it is also the name he gives to the earth’s utterly impartial acceptance of each and every one of its elements or inhabitants; it appears also as a biological organ (like lungs or heart); and it even emerges an apersonal physical force (akin to sunlight or gravity). With the last image, Whitman seems keen to locate sympathy within the very infrastructure of the cosmos.” (Bennett, 2020: xv)

Sympathy provides yet another departure from the notion of interaction, much like, though differentiated, a shift from interaction to intra-action, and interaction to correspondence. In Bennett’s view, it is not sympathy as an “interiorized moral virtue [but] an older figure of sympathy as a vital force operating upon bodies from without [and] as a more-than-human atmospheric force that greatly interested Whitman” (Bennett, 2020: 27). Much wider than individual sentiment, Bennett develops a new model of sympathy where “the atmosphere is not a field of forces tending to infuse themselves into porous bodies; it is, rather, a void between bodies that only a leap of imagination can cross. Only by way of a detour through one’s own reflective interior is it possible to “enter into” the feelings of another” (Bennett, 2020: 28). These sympathetic currents that flow through the atmosphere and permeate through living beings and things can be better described as material sympathies, according to Bennett, as she writes:

“The notion of impressive threads—like nervous mimicry, spirituo-sexual magnetism, neuromimesis—expresses the lingering sense that there exists a protean tendency toward affiliation that is broader than any imaginative construct. This is “sympathy” as a more-than-human flow of communicative transfers, a flow that is the indispensable precursor to the interiorized sentiment that bears the same name.” (Bennett, 2020: 29).

Sympathy as dynamism of forces is “not only a human mood but also currents of “affection” circulating in the atmosphere to connect different types of beings and things [and, for example] can appear as a current of contagious pain [or] manifest as erotic attractions between bodies” (Bennett, 2020: 29). Thus, sympathy, for Bennett, “is a responsiveness as automatic as heartbeat, respiration, or digestion” (Bennett, 2020: 30.) Correspondence, too, is a form of responsiveness and response-ability which moves across multi-natural, material-discursive worlds that animate and are animated by both human and non-human agents and subjects. But once again, how

can these forces of complex multiplicities be expressed, or rather express themselves, through the practice of writing by a single human author? In reference to Whitman's as well as Caillois' work, Bennett believes that their writings "allow natural entities, forces, and processes to inhabit and deform the grammatical place of the doer. They release them from the confinement of being merely the "context" or "material conditions" that undergird exclusively human powers of action" (Bennett, 2020: xxv). This is precisely what is at stake in the Amazonian *maloca* when the *curandero* sang his *icaros*: the singing tunes of the *icaros* conjure vibrating visual and energetic geometries, structures and architectures that permeate through the visions and bodies of both the *curandero* and the *pasajeros*—acting as visual and felt grammatical entities through which the spirits of the underworld (or the undercommons) emerge. In other words, the singing establishes dynamic, abstract shapes that the Shipibo peoples call *kano* (loosely translated to "pathways"), which are written into space and across bodies, both inside and outside, through which the spirits speak.

Here we can see that writing might be much more than what is apparent, much like surfaces. Writing, speaking and singing alike, are practices through which multi-natural, material-discursive agents and subjects can common and communicate, where they can co-respond with one another as part of an animate world-in-movement. Likewise, Bennett asks "What are the characteristics of a rhetoric suited to this task? What grammar, syntax, tropes, and tricks are most pertinent to a linguistic and ethical inflection of a process that includes ahuman, alinguistic influences?" (Bennett, 2020: xxi). Bennett develops a method she calls "writing-up" to achieve such forms of correspondence with "sympathies and influences—of transfers at the borders of outdoors and inside ... that is a writing up of such encounters" (Bennett, 2020: xx). By "writing up", Bennett implies "the arrangement of words that repeat, imperfectly and creatively, events that exceed those words but also find some expression in them. It is a writing up when it amplifies and elevates ethically whatever protogenerous potentials are already circulating" (Bennett, 2020: xx). Bennett employs "the use of "middle-voiced" verbs as a linguistic practice, as a way to "write up" processual agencies. To bespeak from within an ongoing process, rather than from an external vantage where the subject of a predicate can either direct activity (active voice) or be acted upon (passive voice)—that is what verbs in the middle voice do." (Bennett, 2020: xix). Bennett also finds that writing at the margins, from the in-between, might offer rather congruous ways that establishes forms of writing *with* rather than *about* multi-

natural agents and subjects, when she highlights in her book *Influx and Efflux*:

“Thoreau’s writing, like that of Whitman and the others I rely upon in what follows, tends to float between genres—part political theory, part mythmaking, part poetry, part speculative philosophy, part political and existential diagnosis. Perhaps this hovering enables it to see more clearly the contributions made by actants whose first language is not human, to write ... and to induce the feeling that, at the very moment you are reading the text, you are amidst a bevy of active forces, some human and many not.” (Bennett, 2020: xxi).

If we reject the idea of writing as a solely human, solitary act, and instead, expand writing as a material and bodily practice much like speaking and singing, one that participates in, rather than illustrates, the more-than-human making of a multi-natural world-in-movement, then we can speak of extended forms of writing as practices of correspondence. To correspond is precisely to engage discursive and non-discursive (if such a binary exists) practices in correspondence with dynamic forms of creativity and movement as intelligible forces that animate the world.

Part IV: Choreography

Animate Writing

“Choreography for me is writing with the body.”

—Raimund Hoghe, *Corpus Web*

Choreography, much like camouflage, is a spatial act: a process through which bodies are negotiated in correspondence with their surrounding environments. Both choreography and camouflage are morphological processes that organize bodies in and through spaces around thresholds of visibilities to rehearse new figure-ground relationships. Simultaneously, choreography and camouflage are temporal acts: they establish ephemeral, fleeting and fugitive encounters that bring bodies together in novel ways—both human as well as non-human bodies. Camouflage is always a temporary strategy, never a permanent state—employed by the organism when most in need (Szcésniak, 2014). Comparatively, choreography is an intervention in temporality—organizing movements in time and space as presences vanishing and disappearing into absence—a mechanism which dance scholar and writer André Lepecki describes as “the haunting temporality of which choreography participates” (Lepecki, 2006: 28). Looking back at Caillois’ study of mimicry, we can observe that “the octopus retracts its tentacles, curves its back, adapts its color, and thus comes to resemble a stone”, while the legs of the praying mantis “simulate petals or are curved into corollas and resemble flowers, imitating by a slight instinctive swaying the action of the wind on these latter” (Caillois, 1984: 20). In both these scenarios, we see a choreography of shifting surfaces unfold that animate altered sites of spatial and temporal encounter: through the embodied materialization of, as well as correspondence with, its surrounding environment, the organism temporarily inscribes itself into its terrain while the latter imprints itself onto the former. Camouflage, therefore, has a choreographic concern: it is a spatio-temporal technique inducing altered states of corporeality through “the mutual imprinting of self and

environment ... between figure and ground” (Levin, 2014: 47)—processes that are intrinsic to choreography as well.

Choreography is generally understood as the art of creating dances through the structured design and composition of dance steps and sequences. The term derives from the French word ‘chorégraphie’, which is composed of the Greek words ‘khoreia’ (dance) and ‘graphein’ (to write)—literally translating as “the writing of dance” (Etymonline, 2023). Following on from my previous endeavors to reconfigure the terms camouflage and correspondence as devices to rethink body-space, self-world, inside-outside, real-virtual and human-non-human relations differently, this chapter seeks to investigate a somewhat different reading of choreography as well—not as a mode of prescribing or describing predetermined dance sequences or virtuosic movements, but as an embodied form of writing through movement together with multi-natural, material-discursive agents and phenomena. In other words, rather than the act of writing dance as a discreet set of repeatable and imitable movement scripts, choreography here is understood as a dynamic, intra-active field of emergent forms of bodily language rich with possibilities to common and communicate with, what Bennett calls “ahuman, alinguistic influences” (Bennett, 2020: xxi). It is important to note here that I am not a dance scholar, nor does this chapter attempt to theorize choreography as an artistic discipline in order to contribute to the already well-established field of performance and critical dance studies. Rather, I will draw from these and other fields of knowledge to reconsider choreography as an animate field of bodily writing-together-with vibrant bodies and matter, “a gathering together of materials in movement” (Ingold, 2013: 93)—particularly as it interlaces with notions of camouflage and correspondence. It is precisely this triangular intertwinement and reconfiguration of these three terms and their overlapping co-productions that establish the field out of which my choreographic practice develops.

According to choreographer Jérôme Bel, “choreography is just a frame, a structure, a language where much more than dance is inscribed” (Bel in Bauer 2008, 42). How may we emphasize the “more than” within this ontological exceedance, when considering choreography’s etymological entwinements of writing and dance beyond the individual who is doing the inscribing, i.e., the choreographer, as well as thinking the act of dancing as a more-than-human activity, or even operating in the absence of

recognizable and identifiable bodies? I posed a similar question in the previous chapter about how writing, not as a solitary, human act of inscribing words on surfaces, but as a practice of correspondence, may engage not in writing *about* but in a writing *with* creative and intelligible forces that move across bodies and animate the world. What form of writing might be best equipped in speaking from the entanglement of relations in correspondence with a mutually affective, multi-natural world-in-movement, where agents and phenomena are not only inscribed or described, but rather in-scribe and de-scribe one another through emergent structures and forms?

Bennett's *Influx and Efflux* offered us ways to think of such intra-subjective movements permeating through the ins and outs of lively bodies and forces that mutually exert influence over one another. Her method of *writing-up* manifestly aims at inventing a new grammar through the arrangement of words that invite boundary-crossing encounters with vibrant materialities to inhabit and dwell in their grammatical forms and structures, even if such encounters always already exceed those very syntaxes at the same time. As mentioned earlier, *icaro* songs, too, call up living forces and entities to inhabit their musical grammar as they are written into space through acts of singing, which, in this context, materialize as vibrant morphologies during ceremonies in the visions of those that attend them. These dynamic and animated architectures become multi-natural sites of traversal through which "in-fluences" and "ex-fluences" enter and exit, cross over, pervade and move through. Thus, both practices such as *writing-up* and singing *icaros* create, or rather write, morphological structures into time and space that animate lively bodies and matter to temporarily inhabit and dwell within them. This synesthetic and multilingual crossing over of multi-natural thresholds is precisely what speaks to the "more-than" in language, whether it be spoken, written, sung or danced. It is within these acts of exceeding the boundaries of language beyond the human that we may consider writing in an expanded sense as well—a writing together *with* intelligible and animating life forces, such as in the case of *icaros*, that speak through other kinds of spatial and temporal forms of language.

I have danced to these *icaros* on countless occasions. But every time it felt rather as if the *icaros* danced through me. These dances were never just a two-way interaction between the movement of my body in relation to the tune of the *icaro*. To a greater

extent, they reflected Lepecki's haunting temporalities as they "explicitly manifested in 'choreo/graphing'" (Lepecki, 2004: 124)—that is, out of the interstitial space between the dancing and writing of a multi-natural world across interspecific and multilingual boundaries. Just to recapitulate, *icaros* are magical songs that, while sung in the Shipibo language, use the medium of music, which for Shipibo peoples "is the spirit's language, and singing is the adequate mode of communicating with them" (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 79). As they are sung forcefully during *ayahuasca* ceremonies—often with animated hands and arms moving and drawing gestures into the air—their words and melodies write *kanos* into space, which are "tools or frameworks that are manipulated through song and that allow for the construction of a 'way' or 'path' transcending interspecific borders" (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 91). These *kanos*, i.e., ways or paths, make themselves visible and felt in both the visions and bodies of the *pasajeros* during altered states of perception induced by the *ayahuasca*. They are precisely those vibrant morphologies and dynamic architectures that, to recall Bennett's conception of *writing-up*, "allow natural entities, forces, and processes to inhabit and deform the grammatical place of the doer [and] release them from the ...exclusively human powers of action" (Bennett, 2020: xxv). It is through these pathways which are written sonically, even though they also appear visually, that those structures and forms emerge allowing for interspecific, i.e., interspecies, and multilingual forms of multi-natural expressions.

These forms of communication, or correspondence, are never just descriptive, from one agent to another, but are in-scribing themselves intra-actively in and through the bodies they simultaneously constitute. This is why my dance with the *icaro* was never simply just an interaction or embodiment of the magical song. Rather, both the tunes and my body were implicated and woven into a dance of animacy, which exceeded both the one *doing* the singing or dancing altogether—instead bringing to the surface an entire intra-active field of action within which agents and phenomena choreo/graph themselves. These are the very haunting temporalities intervened by structures and forms that grammatically, sonically or visually choreo/graph intelligible and animating life forces and vibrant materialities into a choreographic field, wherein multi-natural bodies cross interspecific boundaries in a more-than-human dance of animacy. With recourse to Viveiros de Castro, choreography, viewed through the lens of a "somatic perspectivism resulting in a multinaturalism centered on the nature of the (human or non-human) body" (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 97), is

rendered as an animate form of writing that becomes a “tool for achieving mimesis, transformation, and the construction of worlds” (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 96). That is, a world-in-movement wherein forces, entities and influences spatio-temporally cross over, inhabit, dwell and pervade through choreographic structures and forms across multi-natural bodies—animating them to shape-shift and become other, to camouflage themselves in and out of one another, all the while transforming into something new.

Let us consider choreography through this framework—one that shifts understandings of dance from embodiment to animacy, from enactment to emergence, from prescription, description or a single self-directed inscription toward a dynamic, intra-active in-scribing of an animate sociality through the language of movement. In other words, choreography here is understood as an intra-subjective, relational field that establishes a choreographic grammar and, thus, choreographic structures and forms, which allow multi-natural forces and material-discursive phenomena to materialize through them as a more-than-human dance of animacy by virtue of an interspecific movement language. This is where I see the differential entanglements of the registers between choreography, dance and movement both intertwine and variegate. Yet, it is choreography that is of interest here as an encompassing, pervasive field of activity—interweaving dance and movement as forms of animate writing through which multi-natural bodies and matter can common and communicate in other spatio-temporal languages. The task of choreography, viewed through this frame, is precisely not to rescue dance and movement from their ephemeral materiality through writing, i.e., as “vanishing presence[s] from the field of representation” (Lepecki, 2004: 127). Traditionally, these mechanisms were seen as dance’s and movement’s ontological problems, which needed to be countered by fixing them through “descriptive writing” or “movement notation” as defense mechanisms to “cure” them from becoming invisible (Lepecki, 2004). In a critical analysis against such historical understandings of the power dynamics between choreography and dance/movement, Lepecki points out that “movement disappears, it marks the passing of time ... is both sign and symptom that all presence is haunted by disappearance and absence. This stepping into invisibility of both movement and presence generates a new nervousness within the project of writing dances and writing on dances.” (Lepecki, 2004: 128).

The errant and fugitive materialities and physicalities of dance and movement are exactly the qualities that grant choreography as animate writing, instead of prescribing, describing or capturing them, its dynamic force and critical power. Not only does its choreographic construction of mobile forms, structures and morphologies invite spatio-temporal and boundary-crossing encounters with, as well as movements across, vibrant, multi-natural bodies, entities and matter, but also, much like camouflage, allow them to escape hegemonic structures of arresting visibility. In her book *The Choreographic*, writer Jenn Joy argues that “the choreographic is not only a critical discursive force, but always already explicitly social, historical, and political” (Joy, 2014: 24). And this is because choreography, according to Joy, “reveals an underlying debt of dancing to inscription, as structures entangled with complicated networks of power [and] that this writing down of movements is never simply pure description or representation, but it is always a directive conditioned by prevailing notational devices, technologies, and pedagogical imperatives. And yet, these imperatives and demands and apparatuses never quite describe the thing they strive to define” (Joy, 2014: 16).

To that end, if we are to apply principles of camouflage—reconfigured as a tactic to escape hegemonic and normative regimes of visibility—to choreography, such a conjunction may bring forth possibilities to vanish, disappear and elude from regulatory instances of capture and visual regimes of control. Rather, the interlacing of camouflage with choreography would not only reinforce it as animate writing able to mobilize multi-natural bodies, entities and matter to cross-over and pervade through its porous choreographic morphologies, but furthermore allow those boundary-crossing forces to retain their space-shifting and time-haunting physicalities and temporalities through withdrawing from descriptive and inscriptive forms of representation and identification. According to Lepecki, “the dancer is always already an absent presence in the field of the gaze, somewhere between body and ghost, a flash suspended between past and future” (Lepecki, 2006: 125). This fading presence from the field of vision is exactly what agitates directives of ocular-centric control and “its politics of figuration, presence, and visibility [because] to exist at the vanishing point means never to be *figured* within perspectival representation” (Lepecki, 2006: 126). And without representational forms of inscription, for Phelan, “live performance plunges into visibility—in a maniacally charged present—and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it

eludes regulation and control.” (Phelan, 1996: 148).

Here, Phelan’s analysis of the relations between performance and visibility politics, deploys a psychoanalytic framework to conceive the sphere of the unconscious as an unregulated domain which performance enters away from scopic representation. Without casting a binary between in/visibility as that which includes or excludes agents and phenomena in and out of the realm of performance, let us return to choreography—not as the writing *of* dances or a performance event, but as animate writing opening up a field of dancing and moving entities and matter that are neither relegated to a merely visual nor human realm of activity. Rather than thinking of bodies disappearing into the human unconscious, choreography as animate writing viewed through the lens of the undercommons, for instance, establishes choreographic structures and morphologies for ahuman, atemporal and alinguistic bodies, forces and matter to appear through them—albeit in shapes and forms not immediately available to a rational gaze. To reiterate, the architecture of the undercommons as an ungovernable social realm cohabited by marginalized subjects, requires a shift in attunement and perception to the margins outside of controlling gazes that try to render them as legible, recognizable and categorizable. Thus, interlacing choreography with camouflage in correlation with Moten and Harney’s access tool to the undercommons, i.e. *hapticality* as “the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you” (Harney & Moten, 2013: 98), is to think of such an intersection as fugitive acts at the edge of the virtual, where human and non-human bodily surfaces cross over and touch one another, quite virtually opening up new worlds.

Under these conditions, choreography as animate writing is never just a human affair, nor does it require actual, recognizable moving bodies in its scope of activity. Furthermore, understanding choreography in this way is also to disentangle it from its apparent antithetical role to dance and movement’s disappearance, loss and absence. As a gathering together of materials in movement, rather than capturing movements that *disappear*, choreography as animate writing, instead, establishes choreographic structures and forms where multi-natural bodies and matter *appear* through an interspecific dance of animacy, even if they are not easily recognized or appear as something else. As Bojana Cvejić relevantly points out, dance has traditionally been “defended against choreography by virtue of its resistance to vision

and inscription [and] has ever since been conceived as the fleeting trace of an always irretrievable, never fully translatable motion, always in excess of choreography (as its writing)” (Cvejić, 2015: 13). According to Cvejić, the evasion of scopic control and the haunting of presence as mechanisms attributed to dance reinforce movement as its essence “albeit in an unstable sense of the ephemeral, often accompanied by the ineffable [which] are easily mistaken for the romantic inexpressible that arises from the inadequacy of writing and inaccuracy of vision in dance, making [choreography] ontologically inferior to the dance event, or performance” (Cvejić, 2015: 13). Cvejić writes:

“Associating movement with the body’s presence/absence casts choreography in a binary opposition to dance, whose being putatively consists of performance that eludes or exceeds choreography in lack and abundance at the same time. The account of movement’s ephemeral nature consolidates the notion of choreography as the writing that follows and documents the vanishing trace of dancing, even if the writing, as poststructuralism established, always already precedes it. It relegates choreography to a technology of composing movement, which ostensibly excludes the temporal subsistence and transformation of choreographic ideas during and beyond the performance event.” (Cvejić, 2015: 13).

Choreography, understood as animate writing, does not enforce human movement as the essence of dance as something inherently inexpressible, nor does it cast binaries or hierarchies between choreography as the writing of dance and movement. Rather, it establishes a choreographic field of intra-subjective, interspecific and multi-natural encounters through which lively bodies and vibrant matter cross-over, touch and move one another. In this dance of animacy, it is not just recognizable moving bodies that animate the dance, but all sorts of exchanges of forces: human, non-human, material, affective, sonic, grammatical and sensuous kinds of movements that intra-actively emerge as a world-in-movement. The ephemerality within the ecologies of dance and movement within choreography does not so much refer to notions of self-erasure or fading forms, but rather to elusive and fugitive crossings of multi-natural, material-discursive boundaries while organizing new bodily, dynamic constellations in time and space. Thus, choreography as animate writing is an architecting of mobile relations through which agents, subjects, forces and matter can step outside themselves and move in(to) the field of relations—a choreographic field where new multi-natural subjectivities can be born through the dance of animacy. When asked

about what choreography means to him, writer and performance scholar Adrian Heathfield evocatively, and relatedly, responds in the following manner:

“Choreography is both the considered structure and the visible pattern of moving bodies in space and time. Choreography is not limited to that which is rendered visible. Choreography is the authority of phenomena; it seems to contain within itself the totality of movement expression. Choreography is a trace-work of feeling in time. Choreography is that which connects the animate to the inanimate, the air to the ground, the living to the dead. Choreography is the impossible attempt to re-move the paradox of the stillness inside movement. Choreography is a transaction of flesh, an opening of one body to others, a vibration of limits ... a corporeal passage ... In choreography the negative comes into presence: the unseen shimmers, the unheard whispers, the unfelt is caressed and we intuit the unknown.” (Heathfield, n.d.).

Mobile Architectures

Choreography is a boundary-crossing field of practice operating across a multiplicity of human and non-human bodies, entities and matter that move, and are moved by one another. Its choreographic grammar establishes a multi-natural, interspecific movement language through which agents are moved beyond the boundaries of their individuation, never as bounded individuals, but emergent out of “the excess, the more-than of [choreography’s] process [and] always already traversed by forces that exceed it” (Manning 2013: 24-25). These intra-actively expansive and pervasive sets of spatio-temporal orientations that choreography partakes in, afford mechanisms of transindividuation whose processes are extensively relational as they aggregate, re-orient, in-fluence, ex-fluence as well as alter a manifold, multi-natural series of individuations. Such a dance of animacy correlates with Erin Manning’s notion of “life-living”, which she attributes to choreography as “a proposition not for the body itself but for the relational force of movement-moving in an ecology of life-living” (Manning, 2013: 100). For Manning, “life-living as always coupled with *a life* is the diagrammatic force that activates the collective individuation through which transindividuations emerge. For here the body is always already collective, transversed with the force of the preindividual as transindividuation” (Manning 2013: 29). In such a dance of animacy, through which bodies intra-actively extend beyond

their bodily and material boundaries, “the dancing is happening with and across bodies rather than on them. Bodies dance in an ecology of movement expression that in turn dances them” (Manning 2013: 101).

To extend choreography as a field of activity wherein multi-natural relations between bodies and matter co-constitutively unfold one another, reveals that it exercises a multitude of intra-subjective processes of individuations that are not actually realized as such, but rather virtually open new realities within which a “complexity of other ecologies, of other surfaces of experience” (Manning 2013: 46) shimmer through the edges of shifting transindividuations. What is organized choreographically, therefore, according to Manning, “are not bodies as such but relations ... less as that which is generated by the human for the human than a practice that ... attunes to a relational milieu that exceeds the human or wherein the human is more ecological than individual” (Manning 2013: 76). On a different yet similar note, Jenn Joy asserts that “to engage choreographically is to position oneself in relation to another ... [it] invites a rethinking of orientation in relationship to space.” (Joy, 2014: 1). While Joy’s rendering of her notion of the choreographic primarily focuses on dance and choreography as a humanly aesthetic and discursive practice, she equally describes choreography as “an atmospherics of encounter [and] a series of forces” (Joy, 2014: 7). In a related reconfiguration of the individual not as a fixed entity, but one of a “being [that] is always a being outside of it ... always relational” (Joy, 2014: 124), she takes the view that dance and choreography “require encounters with alterity that open us to a limit” (Joy, 2014: 121).

In reference to José Esteban Muñoz, Joy introduces the term “ecstasy” as a frame to think the “choreographic as a working on the self in the presence of and toward something other” (Joy, 2014: 131). For such ecstatic encounters that produce “alteric subjectivities” through the affective opening, as well as exceeding and moving beyond the limits of the self, Joy recognizes a queer dimension “that agitates against linear straight time [emerging instead] as a movement out of time or convergence of multiple temporalities within the ecstatic” (Joy, 2014: 141). As Muñoz proclaimed: “Queerness’s time is the time of ecstasy. Ecstasy is queerness’s way” (Muñoz 2009: 187). Such a vibration of surfaces, limits and temporalities and a “dancing across these thresholds into outer space and other worlds ... a becoming choreographic of shimmering” (Joy, 2014: 157), for Joy, means that “to move into this ecstatic field is not

to focus on our singular sensations; it is a movement toward and with one another” (Joy, 2014: 156). On both Manning’s and Joy’s accounts, we find that choreography simultaneously emanates from as well as arranges its immanent fields of relations while setting in motion intra-subjective processes of transindividuation through which newly emerging subjectivities may surface. For “rethinking the subject in terms of the body”, according to Lepecki, “is precisely the task of choreography” (Lepecki, 2006: 5). To that end, choreography offers ways for rehearsing alterity through the animate dancing of other models of self and world. According to dance scholar Valerie A. Briginshaw, such negotiations are particularly pertinent to dance since it is operating precisely at “the conjunction of bodies and spaces [while] constantly engaging and negotiating with body/space relations in immediate and challenging ways” (Briginshaw, 2001: 1).

However, it is not only space that is pertinent to choreography’s unfolding as a relational field of altered states of corpo/reality, but also time. Both space and time intertwine in the choreographic process, for which duration plays as much an integral role in its architecting of relations, which, according to Cvejić, “as opposed to disappearance ... counter the perception of movement’s ephemerality or bodily presence/absence by sustaining motion and stillness, by persisting in the transformation of movement and the bodies into the future, by exploring sensations and affects in processes of becoming” (Cvejić, 2015: 25). For Cvejić, these processes “all point to the importance of duration, or time in which change is created, and perceived, and becoming, through which the bodies and movements transform” (Cvejić, 2015: 25). And once again, there is a queer dimension to these interventions in temporality, as according to Muñoz: “The future is queerness’s domain ... Queerness is also performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future” (Muñoz 2009: 1). Likewise, dance and choreography don’t disappear and vanish, they are “better approached as a transformation process rather than as a fleeting act ... which locates the genesis of performance in process and duration, in the nexus of different time dimensions that making, performing, and attending possess, rather than in an act whose meaning transcends or lies outside of duration” (Cvejić, 2015: 25). To that end, we may attribute another kind of fleetingness or ephemerality to dance and choreography, not one that *disappears* but one through which transformation *appears*, as Muñoz highlights: “Performativity and utopia both call into question what is epistemologically there and signal a highly ephemeral

ontological field that can be characterized as a doing in futurity" (Muñoz 2009: 26).

This queering of time and space that is also the doing of choreography renders bodies in processual relations with space—a process which Manning calls “spacetime”. Spacetimes are marked by ongoing processes of individuations where “the skin becomes not a container but a multidimensioned topological surface that folds in, through, and across spacetimes of experience, what emerges is not a self but the dynamic form of a worlding that refuses categorization” (Manning 2013: 12). The body as always already more-than one, for Manning, whose “project is to move life to its limit ... is infinitely variable, not subject but verb. And as verb it persists, infinitely” (Manning 2013: 29). Manning equally locates choreography within the register of the more than human, whose operation is not centered on “the body” and its figuration as such, but rather on an ecology of rhythm, resonance and interval that form, deform and transform bodies through “the force of form that generates position but always, to some degree, exceeds it” (Manning 2013: 90). Manning proposes:

“The choreographic proposition generates less the stability of a complex of form than the foregrounding of a field of resonance that defines a certain quality of activity. It serves not to delineate positions or forms from one another in a normative practice of movement notation but to create a diagram that captures, in a fleeting moment, the qualities of movement expressibility such that their force of form can be felt. Choreography here is concerned with the way movement co-composes with time-felt to create complex ecologies in the register of the more than human” (Manning 2013: 81).

The ecology of choreography, according to Manning, is rhythmic. Its spacetimes emerge out of the intervals of infinitely variegating, co-composing “velocities, vibrations, sensations [whereby] these individuating tendencies of movement in the moving activate environmentalities that in turn inflect how bodies move with and through the world” (Manning 2013: 87). For philosopher Karmen MacKendrick, too, the time of dance is marked by rhythmicity: it “attends to the moment as to the place ... intricately structur[ing] the movement of time ... thereby altering its temporal boundaries” (MacKendrick, 2004: 151). For Manning, “the time of rhythm or movement’s time signature is therefore always more-than (more-than actual, more-than human). Rhythm is how the future of movement-moving makes itself felt” (Manning 2013: 87). Rhythmicity as a spatio-temporal mechanism is linked to modes

of repetition that are never repetitions of the same, but rather of difference, and perhaps it is through the rhythmic force that choreography sets in motion individuations through which multi-natural transindividuations occur. According to MacKendrick, it is the transgressive quality of rhythm that draws us into dance or movement and “holds us there—while defying any permanent placement of the *there* at all. It is not a simple repetition-of-the-same but a repetition that emphasizes the always-changing. It carries us forward and yet it recurs ... not always the same, but always again, always more” (MacKendrick, 2004: 152). In the space of the rhythmic, for MacKendrick, “we cross neither space nor time definitively [rather] we are drawn across, again and again, always-proximate, never fused ... rhythm is the promise of eternity within time” (MacKendrick, 2004: 152). To that end, rhythm carries dance and choreography into the future. MacKendrick observes:

“The time of dance, like its space, is both intensely ordered and, as excess, transgressive of order: it always exceeds us and our attempts to grasp it. Dance remains a fascination, a seduction, and a delight precisely in this excess; we have never exhausted it, we cannot become one with it any more than we can keep our distance from it; it takes us beyond ourselves” (MacKendrick, 2004: 155).

Let us recall the dynamic, vibrating structures and forms that *icaros* write into timespaces through their rhythmic singing—establishing grammatical and morphological pathways that become at once transgressed as well as inhabited by multi-natural, material-discursive bodies, forces and matter. As we came to see, choreography as animate writing also establishes mobile patterns and textures opening up a relational field for incipient forces, in-fluences and ex-fluences to cross over, and thus thinks “choreography not as the organizing principle of precomposed bodies but as a technique for bringing to expression the patterning of incipient activity” (Manning 2013: 76) toward a wider ecology of interspecific, multi-natural becomings and worldings. In their manifesto *Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change*, choreographer Michael Kliën together with Steve Valk and Jeffrey Gormly similarly articulate an expanded notion of choreography as a creative practice concerned with patterns, dynamics and ecologies aimed at setting conditions for new relations to emerge. Patterns, their manifesto argues, are all around, they “are in between, ephemeral but real ... they are only visible to us under certain conditions, on certain wavelengths for us to grasp” (Kliën et al., 2008: 11). In their search for patterns, i.e.,

the structures and dynamics that run through, animate but also govern the world, they attribute to choreography the capacity to re-imagine and act upon them. The manifesto understands these processes as part of a wider choreography, which require responsibility and creativity to thoroughly explore “the wider grammar of patterns, their proportionality and their paradoxes, in order to discover the frames that bind us together and subsequently reveal to us the dances we dance ... shedding light on the illusion of static frames, questioning and exposing the validity of existing frames in regard to a wider knowing (Kliën et al., 2008: 12). They write:

“Patterns are flexible and fluid constellations, appearing and disappearing, crystallising and dissolving, being born and dying. They are an ongoing dance of creation and de-creation in the world where we have our being, enabling our very own subtle frame of flight, our living. In this dance lies a world full of interaction, relationships, constellations, dependencies, arrangements and ecologies. To enquire into this reality of changing patterns and the forces at play, is to enquire into the choreography of life, examining what makes us dance and why.” (Kliën et al., 2008: 11)

Undoubtedly, we live in a world of patterns to be found everywhere. From skin patterns, tree spirals and ocean waves to weather patterns, solar systems and moon cycles, but also patterns of power, violence and oppression. All of these instances are not only “governed by patterns [but they also] govern our lives” (Kliën et al., 2008: 11). Choreography, therefore, according to Kliën et al., is to “create and facilitate the conditions ... for patterning and re-patterning to occur ... for action, for rebuilding and re-framing self ... for changing and adjusting the way we conduct our lives, interact, love, consume and apply ourselves to the social and ecological sphere” (Kliën et al., 2008: 12). For choreography is a tribute to the fact that “we are inscribed with the capacity for original thought and the possibilities to bring about change [and] doing so is the act of the everyday choreographer ... the architect of fluid ecologies we are all part of” (Kliën et al., 2008: 12). Manning, too, believes that “choreography as a generative practice must ask how the tasks become propositional, how the coalescing ecology becomes more-than the enabling constraints that set it into motion” (Manning 2013: 77).

In his book *Critical Moves*, Randy Martin interrogates the politics of dance as part of a social kinesthetic where choreography mobilizes—both in terms of world-making but

also of social movements. Dance, according to Martin, “occurs through forces applied to the body that yields to them, only to generate powers of their own” (Martin, 1998: 1). By these mobilizing forces he means “not an alien power that is visited on the body, as something that is done to bodies behind their backs, so to speak, but what moving bodies accomplish through movement” (Martin, 1998: 4). Hence, choreography as a force field is also tasked at negotiating “modes of subjection and control, as well as of resistance and becoming” (Lepecki, 2006: 5). This is because bodies—as material-ecological, but also socio-politically inscribed agents—are both subjects as well as being subjected. Hence, choreography is always already a political act: “through mobilization, bodies traverse a given terrain that by traversing, they constitute” (Martin, 1998: 4). Viewed “as a social process that foregrounds the very means through which bodies gather ... dance, so conceived, does not name a fixed expression but a problem, a predicament, that bodies find themselves in the midst of, whose momentary solutions we call dancing” (Martin, 1998: 6). To that end, choreography may not only create new vectors by activating, according to Manning, “a diagrammatic force that exceeds the description or the representation of a process” (Manning 2013: 80), but also engage in problematizing normative and hegemonic instances of inscription and representation. Choreography both emerges out of as well as intervenes into spatio-temporal sets of problems, ecstatically and rhythmically calling into question the here and now, which may “surpass the limitations of an alienating presentness and allows one to see a different time and place” (Muñoz 2009: 5).

These highly complex ecologies that choreography as animate writing patterns across interspecific, material-discursive and multi-natural boundaries through the architecting of dynamic structures and forms in spacetimes that animate, to recall Barad, “bodies in the making, not bodies made” (Barad, 2007: 159), correlate with Manning’s concept of “mobile architectures”, which she defines “as another way of conceiving the choreographic ... not for the individual body but for the ontogenetic architecting of environments in the moving” (Manning 2013: 100). Mobile architectures are precisely choreography’s self-generative forces in its more-than ecologies “when the choreographic begins to shift toward a wider fielding of movement where spacetime itself begins to vibrate with movement expression ... when the bodies begin to move the relation ... when the field of relation itself becomes mobile” (Manning 2013: 101). In architecting relational movements through the

spatialization and mobilization of time, “a mobile architecture is less a structure than an agile surfacing that makes felt the force of incipient form” (Manning 2013: 102). Mobile architectures refer to rather fleeting structures that take shape through collective constructions, yet, rather than fixed and static, they work “when the constructing is felt not as a form in itself, but as the force of form—when the form or the structure is always already deconstructing” (Manning 2013: 102). For Manning, mobile architectures “travel as immanent configurations of possible worlds, tweaking the affective tonality of an event while remaining virtual” (Manning 2013: 106). And it is at the edge of the virtual, much like camouflage and correspondence, that a mobile architecture surfaces: “it is a force that moves the choreographic surface into a multidimensionality that alters the very notion of surface-as-ground, intercalating movement and volume into an architectural surfacing, architectural because it composes with space in complex durations of experience” (Manning 2013: 104).

Rehearsing Alterity

What if shimmering is how you experience time passing? Here and gone, here and gone, here and gone . . . with an emphasis on the here in the here and gone.

—Deborah Hay, *Using the Sky*

Throughout her decades-long practice, choreographer Deborah Hay has been committed to developing her own dance language. In her book *Using the Sky*, which also functions as a dance score in its own right, she offers the readers insights about her explorations of experimental forms of choreographic notation through the deployment of manifold registers of language and writing. Hay’s interest lies less in following movement techniques that impose specific shapes and styles onto dancer’s bodies, rather, she is “fascinated with how a choreography of language, using as few words as possible, can inspire experimentation that expands a dancer’s movement resources” (Hay, 2016: 3). Hay’s choreographic use of language is an attempt to enter into dialogue with what she calls the “cellular body”—beyond the need for mastery of specific movement styles or dancerly figurations of the three-dimensional body—as a site for intra-bodily inquiry and knowing. For Hay, “how one perceives one’s cellular body is a rational, logistic, and analytic conundrum for anyone other than the individual willing to personally experiment with such a body. Creating language that

can potentially stimulate sensually meaningful responses from this cellular entity has been the nature of my work for forty-five years” (Hay, 2016: 3). As part of this ongoing choreographic inquiry, Hay has been creating numerous propositions in the form of questions that begin with “what if?”, for instance: “What if every cell in my body at once has the potential to dialogue with everything I see and cannot see?” (Hay, 2016: 66).

These propositions serve as choreographic conundrums that are “meant to inspire and engage the dancer in noticing the sensuality of the feedback from the question as it unfolds in his/her cellular body” (Hay, 2016: 11). The aim of these questions is not to provoke answers in the literal sense but rather to “experiment with words to disrupt, often violently, conscious and unconscious movement behavior” (Hay, 2016: 12). Hay is interested in the ways in which these experimental scores allow dancers to shift from movement technique as the primary means for creating dances, instead bringing to the forefront processes of perceiving and engaging with time and space on a cellular level as the choreography itself—without compromising choreographic rigor and specificity much like operating “like a jazz musician, who turns a song into an eclectic reconfiguration of notes and phrases that defy order, subvert the expected, and yet coalesce masterfully” (Hay, 2016: 20). Hay’s practice of developing other ways of dance annotations through language, in contrast to traditional forms of “music notation, which represents specific notes [or] movement notation us[ing] symbols to stand for parts of the body and their movement through space” (Blades, 2015: 26), demonstrates how experimental movement scores reconfigure language away from representational modes of inscription or description as entities and forces that animate altered states of corpo/realities through spatio-temporal forms of correspondence. For to correspond with the world-in-movement, by recalling Ingold, is not to describe it, but “to reunite perception with imagination, understood not as a power of mental representation but rather as a way of entering creatively into the very becoming of things” (Ingold, n.d.), i.e. to co-respond with multi-natural, material-discursive beings and things themselves “in an ongoing relation between conscious awareness and lively materials” (Ingold, 2021: 14).

Scores, viewed through this lens, are reminiscent of *icaros*. Although they act methodologically as words, phrases, sketches and diagrams, for instance, whereof choreographies arise, “they remain hidden to the viewer ... revealing structures that

are otherwise imperceptible” (Blades, 2015: 29), all the while establishing intra-subjective forms of inter-kinesthetic attunement amongst corporeal, spatial and phenomenal entities and forces. Just like *icaros* are not sung *about* things, but rather establish morphological structures and forms through which beings and things emerge, scores understood this way don’t explain or represent movement either, instead quite literally fleshing out spatio-temporal frameworks through which intra-bodily ecologies and kinesthetic transferences surface. To that end, scores are dynamic and relational formulations through language that establish grammatical and morphological structures seeking to uncover mobile architectures through their re-emergence as forms of choreography as animate writing. Moreover, scores act as translations and transferences between one medium to another—allowing for correspondences between multi-natural, material-discursive bodies and phenomena to emerge. They open up compositional procedures through which dancers co-compose themselves with other bodily, spatial, material and phenomenological subjects and objects. They instance other ways of perceiving and feeling. They lead to “the construction of specific microrelations that connect specific practitioners to specific places on the earth” (Ashley, 2019: 595). Thus, scores construct dynamic patterns and pathways where bodies move in and across the boundaries of their kinesphere, attune to environs, and vice versa, where they co-constitutively establish multi-natural sites of exchange and knowing. Both scores and *icaros* are activations of otherness, they allow for rehearsals of alterity, of another being-of-the-world.

Hence, scores as choreographic forms of language through which bodies and environs co-constitutively affect one another render skins and other surfaces as porous and permeable. As relational devices they alter contours of self and world through relational and response-able acts of correspondence—calling into question the boundedness of bodies and things. Scores as forms of correspondence, therefore, always already call for responsibility. For Barad, “there are no singular causes. And there are no individual agents of change. Responsibility is not ours alone. And yet our responsibility is greater than it would be if it were ours alone. Responsibility entails an ongoing responsiveness to the entanglements of self and other, here and there, now and then” (Barad, 2007: 394). Scores are also affective devices. According to writer Dee Reynolds, “the function of affect is to extend bodily sensations such that they produce a reflexive, conscious experience of embodied virtuality” (Reynolds, 2012: 130). As a practice of “body-to-body affect”, for Reynolds, dance is always already charged with

oscillating responses between bodies “enacted in a kinesthetic mimesis [and thus] escapes confinement in particular bodies, operating rather at the interface of body and world” (Reynolds, 2012: 131-32). Scores as both relational and affective devices animate dancing bodies, whether human or non-human, not as individual, bounded selves and entities, but as intra-active subjects and agents affecting and being affected, moving and being moved, sensing and being sensed. According to philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, “sensation is neither in the world nor in the subject but is the relation of unfolding of the one for the other through a body created at their interface” (Grosz 2008: 72). Scores as choreographic forms of language therefore afford other ways of sensing the world through the emergence of virtual bodies, i.e., the body of the dance, as a relational force of “movement-moving” in a world-in-movement. Or as Manning states:

“The relational field of movement-moving activates the distributed field in which the dancers dance, and in the dancing, they move with it, aligning to it, moving it. The field expresses, the field dances to attention, not the dancers as individuals. And what it expresses is a relational movement that exceeds the terms of the dancers’ individual bodyness, bringing into complex constellations a rhythm that in-forms the speciations their movement-moving creates.”
(Manning 2013: 210)

Part V: Closing

Diffractional Thresholds

Camouflage, correspondence and choreography are morphological processes each preoccupied with notions of thresholds. As boundary-crossing practices, they do not interweave separate, pre-existing entities per se, but rather operate as spatio-temporal and relational frameworks through which multi-natural, material-discursive bodies and phenomena surface intra-actively. Barad writes:

“Intra-actions effect what’s real and what’s possible, as some things come to matter and others are excluded ... events and things do not occupy particular positions in space and time; rather, space, time, and matter are iteratively produced and performed ... with each intra-action, the manifold of entangled relations is reconfigured ... the very nature and possibilities for change are reworked ... and so consequentiality, responsibility, and accountability take on entirely new valences ... intra-active practices of engagement not only make the world intelligible in specific ways but also foreclose other patterns of mattering” (Barad 2007: 393-94)

Thus, if camouflage, correspondence and choreography are to be considered as intra-active practices that cross boundaries across multi-natural thresholds, those that engage them must utilize their inherent affordances of response-ability by practicing responsibility in return, i.e. “responsibility must be thought in terms of what matters and what is excluded from mattering” (Barad 2007: 394). Furthermore, as interventions in time and space, they simultaneously invent new forms of language able to pattern other ways of being-of-the-world—emerging out of the conjunctures of vital forces moving across bodies and matter, always in excess of their reciprocally co-constitutive more-than spacetimes. These infinite and mutually affective acts of alterity, not only produce change, but also agents of change as part of multi-natural and interspecific entanglements that “bring us face to face with the fact that what seems far off in space and time may be as close or closer than the pulse of here and

now" (Barad 2007: 394).

As boundary-crossing, intra-active practices, camouflage, correspondence and choreography both enliven and alter the here and now diffractively. In classical physics, diffraction is understood as "a physical phenomenon that comes into being when a multitude of waves encounter an obstacle upon their path, and/or when these waves themselves overlap [and] waves in fact always already overlap and extend into one another" (Geerts and van der Tuin, n.p.). In the tradition of feminist new materialisms, diffraction has been employed as a model "to denote a ... difference-attentive mode of consciousness ... in relation to thought, difference(s), and alterity" (Geerts and van der Tuin, n.p.). Here, "we can understand diffraction patterns – as patterns of difference that make a difference – to be the fundamental constituents that make up the world" (Barad, 2007, p.72). Donna Haraway considers diffraction as a "more subtle vision" in contrast to conventional scientific modes of optics and its claims on objectivity, when she writes: "Diffraction does not produce 'the same' displaced, as reflection and refraction do. Diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of difference appear." (Haraway, 2004: 70). This rendering of a new model of optics through diffraction, for Haraway, as opposed to reflection, "gives us the opportunity to become more attuned to how differences are being created in the world, and what particular effects they have on subjects and their bodies. Seeing and thinking diffractively therefore implies a self-accountable, critical, and responsible engagement with the world" (Geerts and van der Tuin, n.p.). Diffraction can also be applied to reading, not only *through* texts and thought, but also *across* disciplinary boundaries—simultaneously calling into question "how and why boundaries between disciplines and strands of thought have been made and how they can be (re)made" (Geerts and van der Tuin, n.p.). Barad writes:

"One important aspect that I discuss is that diffraction does not fix what is the object and what is the subject in advance, and so, unlike methods of reading one text or set of ideas against another where one set serves as a fixed frame of reference, diffraction involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter." (Barad 2007: 30).

Diffraction as a mode of differentiation, for Barad begins by “re-turning – not by returning as in reflecting on or going back to a past that was, but re-turning as in turning it over and over again – iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities ... new diffraction patterns” (Barad, 2014: 168). Re-turning highlights the manifold multiplicities of lively processes that trouble binaries—between bodies and environs, animate and inanimate and self and other. It is “a mode of intra-acting with diffraction ... since the temporality of re-turning is integral to the phenomenon of diffraction [which] is not a set pattern, but rather an iterative (re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling” (Barad, 2014: 168). Moreover, diffraction as a dynamism of forces is never “a singular event that happens in space and time; rather, it is ... an infinitely rich condensed node in a changing field diffracted across spacetime in its ongoing iterative repatterning” (Barad, 2014: 169). Thus, reading camouflage, correspondence and choreography diffractively as well, highlights the ways in which they repattern altering spacetimes through which entities “diffractively crisscross, interfere, and co-establish one another (Geerts and van der Tuin, n.p.), all the while re-turning to the fact that “there is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then” (Barad, 2014: 168).

Let us turn, then, to a relational movement practice that may give an insight of the intra-active co-constitutions of bodies and environments towards trans-individual, multi-perspectival and multi-natural entanglements, namely that of Contact Improvisation (CI). As a form of somatic inquiry and improvised dancing—initiated in the early 1970s by American choreographer Steve Paxton—CI comes into play out of the affordances that emerge between dancing bodies and their kinesphere as they practice the abilities to respond to one another and their environments. CI unfolds forms of attunement and response-ability *to* as well as *through* the emergent field of intra-bodily relations. Through spatio-temporal encounters, movers share and redistribute vital forces such as weight, support, balance, orientation, awareness, and most of all, agency—“all the while negotiating personal and sociocultural boundaries of what it means to touch and to be touched” (Heil, 2019: 2). To that end, CI re-turns—in terms of turning bodies and spaces over and over again, diffractively overlapping—to fluid reconfigurations of agency away from the notion of a purely self-contained subject, where “agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world” (Barad, 2007: 141). To that extent, CI mobilizes entanglements intra-actively, since “to be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in joining of

separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating” (Barad 2007, ix).

Viewed through a Baradian lens, CI is also a boundary-crossing practice. It comes to “matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity—its performativity” (Barad, 2003: 823), enacted quite tangibly along the thresholds of skins and other surfaces. Thus, CI is a diffractive practice through which dancers negotiate their always already exceeding bodily boundaries, mobilizing them as corporeally co-responsive matter, slipping and leaking into the other as agentially and intra-actively permeable and porous interfaces for world to move with and move through. Bodies in CI are always “in the making” (Haraway, 1994: 67) and precisely do not end at the boundaries of their skin. As dancer and scholar Ann Cooper Albright remarks in her essay on CI, “the skin is no longer the boundary between the world and myself, but rather the sensing organ, which brings the world into my awareness” (Albright, 2013: 240). Thresholds are diffractively engaged in CI, much as in camouflage, correspondence and choreography—not only between bodies but also other non-human bodies, entities, forces and matter. Thus, CI can be read diffractively through a new materialist and posthumanist account, which “calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman,’ examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized” (Barad, 2003: 808). And this is because CI quite literally shows that “boundaries do not sit still” (Barad, 2007: 171). Barad writes:

“Physics tells us that edges or boundaries are not determinate either ontologically or visually. When it comes to the “interface” between a coffee mug and a hand, it is not that there are x number of atoms that belong to a hand and y number of atoms that belong to the coffee mug. Furthermore, as we have seen, there are actually no sharp edges visually either: it a well-recognized fact of physical optics that if one looks closely at an “edge,” what one sees is not a sharp boundary between light and dark but rather a series of light and dark bands—that is, a diffraction pattern.” (Barad, 2007: 156)

How close does one need to look at an edge to understand where something begins and another ends? How can one see that boundaries are indeed not static and fixed, but rather dynamic and alive? It is quite clear to Barad that “we do not see merely

with our eyes. Interacting with (or rather, intra-acting 'with' and as part of) the world is part and parcel of seeing. Objects are not already there; they emerge through specific practices" (Barad, 2007: 157). CI as an intra-active practice clearly questions "how much of dance practice materializes as visible, or should be understood in visual terms alone" (Franko, 1995: xiii). This brings us back to the nights at the *maloca*, where, due to the affordance of dark space, our bodies diffracted across intra-subjective and multi-natural thresholds allowing for states of altered corpo/realities through the *icaros'* sonic perspectivism and by defocalizing our gaze. Both in CI and during ceremony, we softened the eyes. This softening of the eyes perhaps equally affords a more subtle vision, as in Haraway's diffractive mode of optics that attunes to difference and alterity. Defocalizing and softening the gaze, allows movers in CI and *pasajeros* in ceremony to make oneself permeable to the dark: the "dark" space inside the body, i.e. the cellular body hidden from sight, as well as the darkness during the Amazon nights, where multi-natural entities beyond the visible spectrum appear and diffractively move across the somatic alterity of the present bodies, both present and absent, both past and future, never here but always elsewhere. In her book *Borderlands*, scholar of Chicana feminism Gloria Anzaldúa dismantles colonial hegemonies that violently forced darkness as the Other of lightness:

"There is darkness and there is darkness. Though darkness was 'present' before the world and all things were created, it is equated with matter, the maternal, the germinal, the potential. The dualism of light/darkness did not arise as a symbolic formula for morality until primordial darkness had been split into light and dark. Now Darkness, my night, is identified with the negative, base and evil forces – the masculine order casting its dual shadow – and all these are identified with dark skinned people." (Anzaldúa, 2021: 49)

In her reference to Anzaldúa's working of a new mestiza consciousness, Barad observes how those colonial instances figure "darkness as absence, lack, negativity [when in fact] darkness is not a lack ... darkness is not mere absence, but rather an abundance ... darkness is not light's expelled other, for it haunts its own interior ... there is no sharp boundary separating the light from the darkness: light appears within the darkness within the light within" (Barad, 2014: 170-71). For Barad, "quantum physics radically queers the classical physics understanding of diffraction" (Barad, 2014: 176), and, diffraction, on the other hand, "queers the binary light/darkness story [as well as] binaries and calls out for a rethinking of the notions

of identity and difference” (Barad, 2014: 171). Differences, according to Barad, “percolate through every ‘thing’, reworking and being reworked through reiterative reconfigurings of spacetime-matterings ... each being (re)threaded through the other. Differences are always shifting within. Intra-actions don’t occur between presences. Intra-actions are a ghostly causality, of a very different order” (Barad, 2014: 178-79). As discussed in the previous chapters, those nights in the maloca intra-actively and diffractively call forth “a dynamic through which that which has been constitutively excluded re-turns” (Barad, 2014: 178). And it is due to the affordance of darkness, that allow for such intra-subjective and interspecific crossings of thresholds—where those excluded, forgotten and invisible entities surface from the undercommons, demanding to be felt. These are the ghostly re-turns of intra-subjective and diffractive practices, as, according to Derrida, “a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come back” (Derrida, 2006: 99). For Barad, diffraction reconfigured through intra-action “is a ghostly matter!” (Barad, 2014: 177). She points out:

“To address the past (and future), to speak with ghosts, is not to entertain or reconstruct some narrative of the way it was, but to respond, to be responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit (from the past and the future), for the entangled relationalities of inheritance that ‘we’ are, to acknowledge and be responsive to the noncontemporaneity of the present, to put oneself at risk, to risk oneself (which is never one or self), to open oneself up to indeterminacy in moving towards what is to-come” (Barad, 2014: 183).

In light of Darkness

In his text *Ghostly*, André Lepecki conceives of the notion of the ghostly as “any active threshold where a system of presence is transformed or becomes another by the means of a persistent movement whose origin must remain indeterminate, but that nevertheless be manifested [which] gives all ghostly matter its critical power” (Lepecki, n.d.). Lepecki calls on Caillois’ essay on mimicry, which describes the morphological transformations caused by organism’s attraction *by* and *to* space as “sudden apparitions”, in order to think such an instance of apparition as “a system of presence at the threshold of the perceptible and the imperceptible” (Lepecki, n.d.)—a process that is also intrinsic both to ghosts and to dancing bodies. Caillois, as discussed previously, views such boundary-crossing instances where organisms

become indeterminate as a pathology, as exemplified when he writes: “Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put.” (Caillois, 1984: 30). However, as we have come to argue, there is a radical potential to such multi-perspectival acts of alterity. There is a critical power in the invisible, in the space of the dark. During his talk titled *In the Dark*, given during the conference *Are You Alive Or Not?*, Lepecki pursues a critique of full visibility in dance, instead putting forward his interest in “thinking about what might be revealed in the dark [in reference to specific choreographic performances] where darkness appears as the key element of an illumination without light” (Lepecki, 2016). He sets out his lecture by stating:

“I would like to explore how darkness offers the possibility of a collective modality of experience where depersonalisation and speculation coassemble a non-enlightened critical stance in order to propose a more resonant aesthetics, away from photological imperatives” (Lepecki, 2016).

It was through the threshold of darkness that made it possible for us *pasajeros* in the *maloca* to intra-actively and diffractively cross over the edges of our bodies, as well as for multi-natural, interspecific and vibrant bodies, entities and matter to move through and across us. It was the “immersive hold” of dark space that allowed us to extend beyond the boundaries of our selves—“beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead” (Barad, 2014: 183). The vegetal ceremonies in the Shipibo tradition always take place during the night in the dark, to allow for “visions” that are otherwise hidden from everyday sight. For Caillois, “the magical hold ... of night and obscurity, the fear of the dark, probably also has its roots in the peril in which it puts the opposition between the organism and the milieu”, a process he sees as an “assimilation to space [that] is necessarily accompanied by a decline in the feeling of personality and life” (Caillois, 1984: 30). While these vegetal ceremonies are more frequently than not feared by those who attend them, most likely due to the loss of control over any notion of a bounded self, it is precisely through these boundary-crossing acts of alterity that open up the kind of porous and permeable being-of-the-world that is discussed here throughout this thesis. In fact, a decline of the contoured, individual self, as depicted by Caillois, does not equate to the loss of life at all. Quite

the contrary, it reveals our embeddedness within much wider life forms—human and non-human; past, present and future. And perhaps it is due to the dark space inside our bodies, the cellular and molecular body extending beyond the visual register, that connects us to all those “spacetime matters”, which Barad believes to percolate through every thing and every body.

In his book *The Cosmic Serpent*, which seeks to discover correspondences between ayahuasca and molecular biology, Jeremy Narby observes that it is through “defocalizing” the gaze that allows persons under the entheogenic influence to access information at a molecular level of reality. According to Narby, it is through “plant-induced hallucinations” that indigenous Amazonians have over centuries developed their extensive botanical knowledge and mastery, which “has long astonished scientists” (Narby, 2003: 10). Through decade-long field research and numerous conversations with curanderos and curanderas, Narby argues that “their astonishing botanical and medicinal knowledge, can be attained only in defocalized and ‘nonrational’ states of consciousness” (Narby, 2003: 117), i.e., through altered states of perception through the ingestion of and communication with entheogenic plants. It is by defocalizing the human-centred, rational gaze, instead attuning to a more-than-human point of view, that allow curanderos and curanderas to both access as well as gain knowledge from the multi-natural worlds of plants, animals and spirits. To that end, what Narby is referring to here, I would argue, is a form of ecological seeing, which exceeds the “limits of the rational gaze [and] tends to fragment reality ... exclud[ing] the complementarity and the association of contraries from its field of vision” (Narby, 2003: 139).

Narby recounts an experience of looking at a book containing “three-dimensional images”, i.e., pictures that are hidden in pictures, realizing that “to see a coherent 3-D image emerge from the blur, one had to defocalize one’s gaze” (Narby, 2003: 46). In order to see the full spectrum of the image, he had to “let his eyes go ... as if he were looking through the book without seeing it ... relaxing into the blur [and] as soon as I focused normally on the page, the dolphin disappeared” (Narby, 2003: 46). He came to realize that it was hitherto due to a “focalized perspective [that] failed to grasp shamanic phenomena in the same way that the normal gaze failed to see” (Narby, 2003: 46) the stereogram. For his Ashaninca friends, an indigenous Amazonian group, with whom Narby lived with for many years, “it was precisely by reaching the

hallucinatory state of consciousness that one crossed the impasse [i.e.] the passage that led to the shamanic world was certainly hidden from normal vision, but perhaps there was a way of perceiving it stereoscopically” (Narby, 2003: 46). For it was due to recalibrating our point of view, for readjusting our sight, for reconditioning our capacity for vision, perhaps similarly to the “recharging” or “retooling” of the mimetic faculty, that we could practice a new kind of perception during those nightly vegetal ceremonies in the *maloca*, one which allowed us to bypass binaries of inside and outside, virtual and real, visibility and invisibility. In his account of a more-than kind of perception in and of the sensible world, Merleau-Ponty writes in his book *The Visible and the Invisible*:

“Meaning is invisible, but the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible: the visible itself has an invisible inner framework (membrure), and the invisible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it, it is the Nichturpräsentierbar [unpresentable] which is presented to me as such within the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 215).

Which seems like a paradox, Merleau-Ponty shows that it is in fact vision that enables us access to the invisible. According to Merleau-Ponty, the chiasmic, intertwining relation between the visible and the invisible are such that they are precisely not contradictory as one would assume, suggesting that “one says invisible as one says immobile—not in reference to something foreign to movement, but to something which stays still. The invisible is the limit or zero degree of visibility, the opening of a dimension of the visible” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 21). The visions induced during vegetal ceremonies, which Narby describes as “ecological hallucinations”, precisely emerge through these oscillations across visible and invisible thresholds. These acts of diffracting rational optics towards a more subtle view towards difference and alterity both flash over and flesh out an animist world view of multi-natural, interspecific and vibrant forces that mutually co-constitute one another. For the Ashaninca peoples, according to Narby, “there [is] no fundamental contradiction between the practical reality of their life in the rain forest and the invisible and irrational world of ayahuasqueros. On the contrary, it [is] by going back-and-forth between these two levels that one could bring back useful and verifiable knowledge that was otherwise unobtainable” (Narby, 2003: 47).

Multinatural Morphologies

“Indigenous peoples have never forgotten that nonhumans are agential beings engaged in social relations that profoundly shape human lives. In addition, for many indigenous peoples, their nonhuman others may not be understood in even critical Western frameworks as living. ‘Objects’ and ‘forces’ such as stones, thunder, or stars are known within our ontologies to be sentient and knowing persons.” (TallBear 2015: 234)

As Indigenous Studies scholar Kim TallBear demonstrates, notions of a multi-natural world in and through which a much wider animate sociality intra-actively and diffractively co-establish one another, has been central to indigenous ways of being-of-the-world for time immemorial. As such, humans along with all other life forms are part of a much larger living organism, i.e., the earth. And as humans, we are not *in* the world, but *of* the world, as Mohawk writer Beth Brant articulates: “We do not worship nature. We are part of it.” (Brant, 1990: 119). Thus, indigenous relationships are interwoven with all life forms including those of non-humans without making distinctions between animate and inanimate categories. However, this relationship is not only ecological or spiritual, but also ethical, as Cherokee writer Thomas King writes:

“While the relationship that Native people have with the land certainly has a spiritual aspect to it, it is also a practical matter that balances respect with survival. It is an ethic that can be seen in the decisions and actions of a community and that is contained in the songs that Native people sing and the stories that they tell about the nature of the world and their place in it, about the webs of responsibilities that bind all things.” (King, 2011: 113-14)

Such animist understandings of the world in which all matter is alive, dynamic, and co-responsive, in which all of life is intrinsically interconnected and interdependent through their ongoing intra-active spacetime-mattering, radically call forth an ethics of reciprocity. In the Quechua language, for instance, there is a word for such multi-natural acts of reciprocity, namely *Ayni*. According to Peruvian indigenous scholar Mariaelena Huambachano, “*Ayni* has its origins in the Andean peoples’ worldview of maintaining and reciprocating their intimate and sacred relationship with the spirits, the earth, the sky and the sea” (Huambachano, 2015: 107). The principle of *Ayni* is not only a worldview, but a way of living and acting with and through a multi-

natural world that is fundamentally “connected to the protection and ethical use of the community’s natural resources” (Huambachano, 2015: 107). To that end, indigenous understandings of the world have always already been the kind of world that new materialist thinkers such as Barad et al. envision as posthumanist. In indigenous cosmologies, the agency of humans is always already entangled with those of non-human beings and entities.

For Barad, a post-human world view requires responsibility for all phenomena, all forms of matter, which must necessarily render questions of ethics, ontology and epistemology as inseparable from another, because “practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated. We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world.” (Barad, 2007: 185). Instead, she re-formulates a notion of “ethico-onto-epistem-ology”, as “the separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object” (Barad, 2007: 185). For Barad, “ethics is not simply about responsible actions in relation to human experiences of the world; rather ... it is a matter of the ethical call that is embodied in the very worlding of the world. Intrinsic to these concerns is the question of the boundaries of nonhumans as well as humans and how these differential boundaries are co-constituted” (Barad, 2007: 160).

In her book *Earth Beings*, which studies the complex entanglements of indigenous and non-indigenous worlds, Peruvian anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena makes frequent mentions of another Quechua as well as Aymara concept of reciprocity named *Ayllu*. The term refers to the conception of a world where human beings and “other-than-humans” are intrinsically interconnected: “*Ayllu* is like a weaving, and all the beings in the world – people, animals, mountains, plants, etc. – are like the threads, we are part of the design. The beings in this world are not alone, just as a thread by itself is not a weaving, and weavings are with threads, a *runa* [Quechua] is always in-*ayllu* with other beings – that is *ayllu*” (Cadena, 2015: 44). Both humans and non-humans are all interwoven in the web of *Ayllu*, of which they are all part and which, in turn, is part of them. *Ayllu* highlights how all beings and things exist not as merely being-in-the-world, but of-the-world.

This intra-relatedness is fundamental also to understanding Amazonian indigenous

political and environmental struggles, as many indigenous communities across the basin continue to endure the effects and after-effects of colonial and neocolonial hegemonic threats and violence. Cadena claims, therefore, that politics must be thought differently in order to grasp indigenous' relationships to the land. A politics, that is able to inquire "both within the cosmos—the unknown and what it can articulate—and within 'politics as usual' [and] be capable of alliances or adversarial relations with that which modern politics has evicted from its field" (Cadena, 2015: 279). Cadena draws on Isabelle Stengers to consider the Quechua's practices as cosmopolitical, thinking "relations among divergent worlds as a decolonial practice of politics with no other guarantee than the absence of ontological sameness." (Cadena, 2015: 279). Like Viveiros de Castro's concept of multinaturalism and perspectivism, Cadena too believes that the notion of culture is not adequate to comprehend indigenous world politics: what they require instead is a very different political praxis, one that is plural not only culturally, but also naturally as they render non-human subjects and agents into the political sphere. Such a multi-natural politics reveal wholly different understandings of the relations between humans and nonhumans, which are not only irreducible to distinctions between nature and culture in the West, but furthermore exceed Western socio-political concepts and practices regarding the animate world altogether. Words like *Ayni* or *Ayllu* don't exist in most Western constitutional languages that shape social and political life.

Multinaturalism, for Viveiros de Castro, designates "one of the contrastive features of Amerindian thought in relation to Western 'multiculturalist' cosmologies" (De Castro, 1998: 470). He claims that "if Western multiculturalism is relativism as public policy, then Amerindian perspectivist shamanism is multinaturalism as cosmic politics" (De Castro, 1998: 470). Perspectivism, furthermore, defines a common conception among many indigenous groups across the basin "according to which the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view" (De Castro, 1998: 469). Multinaturalism and perspectivism combined provide a conceptual framework in contrast to multiculturalism: while the latter is understood as "the mutual implication of the unity of nature and the plurality of cultures [the former] would suppose a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity" (De Castro, 1998: 470). In other words, a multinaturalist perspectivism attributes to both humans and non-humans a shared humanity with differing corporeal "natures" that share common perspectives and

points of views through which differing and moving natures emerge as part of one multi-natural and multi-perspectival animate sociality. Hence, according to Viveiros de Castro, “every being to whom a point of view is attributed would be a subject; or better, wherever there is a point of view there is a subject position ... whatever is or 'agented' by the point of view will be a subject” (De Castro, 1998: 476). These forms of co-existence of differing “natures” reveal a much wider domain of the social, where not only humans and animals, but also “gods, spirits, the dead, inhabitants of other cosmic levels, meteorological phenomena, plants, occasionally even objects and artefacts” (De Castro, 1998: 470) are all conceived as subjects, not objects. Viveiros de Castro states:

“It is not that animals are subjects because they are humans in disguise, but rather that they are human because they are potential subjects. This is to say Culture is the Subject’s nature; it is the form in which every subject experiences its own nature.” (De Castro, 1998: 477).

It is the body that determines specific points of views, i.e., “the body appears to be the great differentiator in Amazonian cosmologies” (De Castro, 1998: 479). While viewed as animals by humans, animals and other subjects, according to Viveiros de Castro, not only view themselves as humans, but also live under similar conditions to them, i.e., their social lives are congruent to humans living in Amerindian villages. Humanity, therefore, is the self-reflexive and self-perceived condition of subjects towards themselves, whilst animality is a corporeal condition of bodies perceived from external points of views. In other words, multinaturalism conceives of differing corporeal natures that share a common cultural and human condition, while multiculturalism assumes a common nature inhabited and constituted by varying cultural points of view. To that end, multinaturalist perspectivism conceives of radically relational corpo/realities through which “bodies are the way in which alterity is apprehended as such” (De Castro, 1998: 478). For Viveiros de Castro, “it is important to note that these Amerindian bodies are not thought of as given but rather as made [and thus] must be re-read in the light of somatic perspectivism” (De Castro, 1998: 480). It is through the lens of somatic perspectivism that allow multi-natural bodies and entities to “transform into other figures of bodily alterity” (De Castro, 1998: 482).

During my times spent with the Shipibo peoples in the Amazon, I was introduced and

initiated into the practice of *samatai* (also called “dieta” in Spanish, referring to the act of dieting). The *dieta* is a method for coming into contact and communication with non-human entities, particularly with plants. In order to undergo a *dieta*, a person chooses, or at times is chosen by, a specific master plant (sometimes the *curandero* or *curandera* might recommend a specific plant ally depending on human-to-plant affinities and sympathies) by ingesting a decoction prepared of those plants. What follows is an extended time of seclusion from everyday life affairs accompanied by minimal body cleansing, alternating periods of fasting and consuming only small amounts of plain natural foods, as well as being in silence at times—all the while establishing modes of attentiveness and response-ability towards the chosen plant ally. Further, due to these altered bodily activities, the persons during a *dieta* gradually begin to blend with the forest, i.e., the plant’s local habitat. Over time, their bodies become hosts for all kinds of microorganisms, inside and out, and eventually begin to feel and smell like the surrounding forest with which they become entangled co-extensively. It is through such a spatio-temporal amalgamation of body and environment that the human body becomes sympathetic to the plant they “diet”. The aim of a *dieta*, therefore, is for humans to undergo such bodily and somatic forms of alterity so that they become inhabitable by the plant, much like the *icaros*’ vibrant morphologies or mobile architectures, in addition to developing sensuous and perceptive abilities to feel and see from their points of view.

According to Brabec de Mori, “the dieter may dream, have wake-state visions, hear voices (one could say, the dieter generally adapts to a fairly psychotic perception), and thus communicate with non-humans ... and shares time and localisation with them in order to learn from them” (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 82). Here too, during the *dieta*, both human and plant intra-actively and “diffractively crisscross, interfere, and co-establish one another” (Geerts and van der Tuin, n.p.) through trans-specific transformations. The *dieta* could be understood as an intra-specific field of relations through which humans think and act *with* and *through* plants, and vice versa. For Brabec de Mori, “when acquiring knowledge via dieting, the dieter experiences a form of ‘going native’ among non-humans. This is not expressed in terms that e.g., the dieter’s soul (*kaya*, or any other instance detachable from the dieter as a physical person) travelled to the non-human’s realm, but rather that the fully conscious dieter completely transcends the interspecific border” (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 83). Through dieting, humans together with plants alter bodily and sensory perception to attune to

vegetal temporalities “in order to achieve knowledge of perspectives, or ‘multi-natures’ as is thought to be experienced by non-human persons. (Brabec de Mori, 2012: 77). The practice of *dieta* highlights how “the body is the site of differentiating perspectives” (De Castro, 1998: 482), and, therefore, could be understood as a method for trans-specific “bodily metamorphosis”, as Viveiros de Castro writes:

“The performative rather than given character of the body, a conception that requires it to differentiate itself ‘culturally’ in order for it to be ‘naturally’ different, has an obvious connexion with interspecific metamorphosis, a possibility suggested by Amerindian cosmologies” (De Castro, 1998: 481).

“Bodies in the making, not bodies made” (Barad, 2007: 159). Let us re-turn here to where this journey began to unravel: my *tambo*. It was here—all-enveloped by the pulsing and rhythmic forest, where the thickening, immersive hold of darkness softened the edges of my body in relation to other elemental bodies, choreo/graphed within a dance of animacy in sensuous correspondence with multi-natural forces and entities, suspended between the visible and invisible, osculating along the contours of where the real and the virtual began to crisscross and interfere—that I felt interpenetrated by another corpo/reality, a somewhat *camouflage consciousness*. Such a process of somatic alterity through which any given knowledge of a bounded self shifts across interspecific, multi-natural thresholds, reveals other ways of feeling *through* the world; other kinds of perception that perceive bodies and other surfaces as connective tissues interwoven as part of a much wider animate social fabric. “Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world since the world is flesh?” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 139). Where are when we are not *in* the world, but *of* the world—a circulatory world of shifting, porous presences morphing in and out of one another, co-producing “a feeling of pressure, of presence, a proximity of otherness that can bring the other nearly as close as oneself?” (Barad, 2012: 1). According to Tria Blu Wakpa, a scholar and practitioner of Indigenous contemporary dance, such a renewed form of interspecific relationality “transcends human-to-human interactions and presents an alternative to Western epistemologies, which hierarchize humans above plants [and] illuminates the importance of reciprocal relationships for sustainable living and the survival of Native and non-Native peoples and non-human animals and plants” (Blu Wakpa 2016: 119).

In this sense, let us re-turn to that pitch dark night in the Amazon. For Barad, “responding – being responsible/response-able – to the thick tangles of spacetime-matterings that are threaded through us, the places and times from which we came but never arrived and never leave is perhaps what re-turning is about” (Barad, 2014: 184). I had arrived, yet every night was a new beginning. Each night kept re-turning, over and over again, yet always differentially; never simply in the here and now, but always already elsewhere and otherwise through infinite re-turns. This time around, I arrived in the dark of the night.

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