



Whistling in the Dark Wind

Azul De Monte and Philip Coyne

This conversation was had in response to Coyne's exhibition *Months of the Year* at Reneenee, Amsterdam, and was an elaboration on many ongoing discussions between the two artists. Initially a dialogue, both contributors then jointly edited and wrote into the text as a whole. To emphasise this the text has been formatted without indicating who is talking at any given moment, however the register of the initial dialogue has been retained and italics have been used to denote a change in voice. This is intended to preserve the tenor of the text as an ongoing discussions, whilst not presenting a single unified voice or set of theses.

The exhibition and this text were kindly supported by Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst and Fonds Kwadraat. Cover art by Anouk Asselineau. To find out more about Months of the Year, please visit <https://philip-coyne.com/monthsoftheyear.html>

Thank you for agreeing to do this, Azu. I feel that there is already a lot of you baked into the exhibition, so I'm really glad to be able to elaborate on some of the conversations we had around its production. Part of the working method for the show was to produce and incorporate a set of mechanisms by which I could acknowledge the forms of collective labour, or the work of others, that were already compounded into the exhibition. So it only seems fitting that we would go ahead and straightforwardly talk about some of the influences that you had upon it all.

I think a lot of people were surprised to hear that this show was so explicitly about collective labour and yet it was a solo exhibition; as though this constituted some sort of contradiction in terms. I think it was actually crucial to insist that there is no contradiction here. While I no longer want to work alone in really any way, I do think that dual authorship, as something like the sole legitimate model for collaboration, can stand in the way of an expanded notion of collective labour. One that might be capable of identifying all of those myriad ways that an individual – even when working alone – is engaged in a deep relational entanglement with work, thinking, and social reproduction carried out by others. Perhaps another way to think of this is how vicinity becomes a form of collaboration in itself. How just being around someone, living under the same roof, studying with them, or sharing a studio block, contributes to your practice and thinking in all of these deep and sedimented ways.

I don't think it's too much of a stretch to expand this further by saying that it also throws into question the discreteness of this use of the term 'labour', and the distinctions between it and social or relational life in general. We met while I was in the early moments of planning the exhibition, when we lived together for about half a year in Slotermeer-Noordoost. It's probably worth saying that this was towards the end of the big Delta winter wave of the pandemic, so it was a meeting under some sort of duress. This text is an extension of the conversations we had hanging out, while stuck in the house during this period. The distinctions here between work and some other state, whether we call it leisure, sociality, rest, etc, aren't clear at all, and yet our talks made their way into my work and my thinking. Maybe the pernicious ways in which art-world professionalism worms itself into almost everything we do goes some way to explain this, but the thing is Azul, even if I had the psychic wherewithal to separate these spheres of my life, I'd still want to talk with you about the things we talk about. I think the difference is not straightforwardly a political one, but ontological as well.

Absolutely! When these conversations started I was also incubating my thesis, and I found myself placing extracts of our conversations into my own writing and thoughts around the actuality and potentialities of collectivity. Indeed conversations about collective work, as opposed to individual work, get us out of a binary contradiction once we start talking about a state of a perpetual being-in-relation. A constant movement, within a system of relations, that is not enclosed in a fixed dynamic but is instead beyond the dialectic, where the membranes of the system's boundaries react to information as difference, transforming accordingly. That's how I considered the movement implied in the physical notions of work, and therefore how I believe it directly affects the conversation regarding 'artistic labour'.

In fact it makes more sense to talk about friendship – as a system of relation that moves across different landscapes of thought and experience – instead of 'dual artistic authorship', if we consider friendship as a political configuration. If we set up this conceptual framework, then a solo show talking about collective labour is not a contradiction at all, as there is no such thing as

a fixed outcome, nor any tangible outcome, of a conversation between friends. These conversations always ripple away and against the materialities they allude to. Materialities, then, enable; they make other parts of what is being whispered possible. That being said, I do believe these types of anti-dialectic configurations or relations have an intrinsic opacity, one that is connected with reflections that you have made on the architectural landscapes holding our intimacy as roommates, but also one that reverberates against the different states of materials from which the city is built.

It's really telling that you've brought us to friendship and in doing so immediately to materiality, particularly the materiality of systems that don't act as if they're simply a circulation of objects. As you point out, it speaks to conversations we've had about the landscapes that immediately surround our flat, rippling out via the polders, canals, and infrastructure of the city, as well as my deep-seated preoccupation with wasteland, in both its contemporary and archaic usages.¹ The main wall of the *Months of the Year* mural actually depicts a piece of wasteland across from our old flat. As you know, what interests me about these spaces is that as they fall out of use, however momentarily, they manage to elude many of the forms of political regulation and mediation placed upon public or private space. And in this elusion, new forms of relation are made possible; we are made capable of doing things within them that would not have been possible elsewhere. In your words, a new richer landscape is made for thought and experiences.

Furthermore there is a kind of insurgent beauty to wasteland, where the vegetation is just able to regrow as it intends, allowing us to really see the remarkable material complexity of this new richer landscape manifested into an aesthetic. It reminds us, as is often needed, that aesthetics are also manifestations of material, they are material manifesting in particular ways.

It is often by digging into the materiality of a place that we make a full sense of its affordances. As kids my friends and I were really discerning about those places that we hung out in. We basically scoured the neighbourhoods looking for those spots where the material nature of the space meant we couldn't be heard or seen. We would learn how the sound travelled in particular places, when we could be loud and when we should be quiet. We would learn whose houses we shouldn't pass, who would call the police, who would give us grief, and then new routes to our destination that avoided the trouble. We knew which bush you could run through, which ones had hiding spaces behind, we knew that the bush on the verge between the ring road and the Oadby racecourse was comfy enough to lie back in, receding us from view and drowning out the heavy traffic to the point where you could have quiet conversations through the branches.

¹ The interplay between contemporary wasteland and archaic wasteland, or 'westen' as it was known, is potentially illuminating. The antecedent concept of westen denoted land that had been deemed unproductive, implicitly for human use, and therefore was somehow morally suspect or dangerous. It is no coincidence that this earlier usage of the term meets fever pitch as the techniques of enclosure start to take shape. Whereas contemporary 'wasteland' is land that has temporarily fallen out of productivity, often in relation to the legalistic framework of property ownership. When, for example, land is left empty because the owners no longer have use for it. I have often thought of this as the commons re-emerging momentarily from the enclosure. Through the archaic use of the word, perhaps we can see how it is not the commons re-emerging at all, but westen. Which is to say, a sort of pre-commons, one that is not exclusively for humans and exists before the regime of property ownership, in both complex historical and imminent ways. And to double down on the materiality of these processes, it is westen that bears the scars of enclosure.

As we were trying to withdraw from the regulation of the roads, or the punitive watch of middle-class England, into suburban greenery, into wasteland, it was along the materiality of these spaces that this sociality tracked. We intuitively understood there to be no simplistic distinction between these material affordances and the rich social, aesthetic, political life that we engaged in within them. I think we understood that what was happening was deeper than the idea that we simply went to these spaces because that's where we could get away with the things that we wanted to get away with. I think we understood that there was something constitutive of our subjectivities, something that contributed to them and made them possible, within these spaces. Something that was and is wrapped up in our collectivity, the material affordances of ourselves and our surroundings, and the relative absence of political regimes of regulation.

While I was reading this, this story from your childhood, where you and your friends were essentially searching for those materialities that could shelter you and keep you safe from the other materialities of policing, I found myself thinking about the elements, textures, and sounds with which an imaginary shelter would be built. Under which notion of time and space do we build it? Using which types of language? Which types of interactions and affections? How can we access it? Who can access it?

You can feel how heavy it is for your body to even imagine a place that is not anchored to a hyper-present, and how it would be even more difficult to imagine how to move towards it, across it, and even leave it behind once you get to it. But I think that this is what brought us to this conversation in the first place, the itching need to imagine policing as the predominant materiality of the world around us. And thinking of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, how do we make the spaces we inhabit feel good for us, right here where we can affect change, in order for it to ripple away and reach those materialities that we cannot even imagine, which are out there, that feed and maintain the poisonous complexity of a homogeneous pattern. So with these ideas in mind, friendship can be thought of as a political cell porous enough, fluid enough, to transport, activate, and create those materialities anew. It could also then be a question for a fleeting aesthetics, of a form that is never a shape, a sound that cannot be repeated, a word of un-graspable meaning. How can we begin to imagine ourselves getting there?

Ironically, this is why I like paintings so much. They offer us ways to see radically new relationships to space or materiality, and I think despite their solidity they rarely stay the same from one viewing to the next. Though, I think this gives credence to the idea that perhaps the answers are in some sort of speculative relationship between aesthetics or materiality and our capacity for collective political action. Maybe this is even clearer in the case of the Sanrizuka struggle,² and particularly the Ogawa Pro documentary that we screened alongside the exhibition, *Narita: The Peasants of the Second Fortress*.³ The farmers who were engaging the Japanese state in contestation over the building of the Narita International Airport made full use of the material nature of their surroundings. They built fortresses into the wooded hillsides and, because of the soil quality, were able to dig huge tunnel systems under them, in which they lived. Networks of oil barrel drums were placed at audible distances from each other to warn the next valley over of incoming police or company men. They even built a large makeshift tower at

² "Sanrizuka Struggle," Wikipedia, last modified March 18, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanrizuka_Struggle.

³ *Narita: The Peasants of the Second Fortress*, directed by Shinsuke Ogawa (Ogawa Productions, 1971), 2:23:00.

the end of the main runway to simply obstruct the planes taking off. The dense material opacity of their tactics finds common cause in the dense aesthetic opacity of the filmmaking, and sends out its own ripples to help others deal with their punitive materialities.

But I think the way you lay out friendship as a possible model for understanding this expanded form of collaboration is also really compelling. I have often offhandedly thought that making work for your friends, or with friendship in mind, is a good ethical orientation, particularly when it feels that the other option is making work for an art scene or an art world whose concern for myself or concern for the world does not seem genuine. So it's really interesting to hear you lay out a kind of metaphysical grounding for this.

Of course, when talking about making work for your friends there are issues of access, or inclusivity, here, but I don't think we should be so quick to assume that access is some sort of normative good, nor something that everyone should want. Access is something that capitalism demands of us and demands we engage in,⁴ while it also tracks along those pernicious forms of transparency that Édouard Glissant rightfully calls into question in *Poetics of Relation*.⁵ Perhaps lack of access to resources for your immediate community is a problem that comes before lack of access to some sort of centralised hegemonic culture, where large art galleries act as some sort of consolation prize for underfunded community centres or the theft and destruction of those shared, collectively held aesthetic forms that do naturally occur in situ.

Also it is interesting to think about what access means within and outside of a periphery/centre binary, and what potential politics can be enabled while thinking of queering access to dynamics that can exit certain patterns of enclosure or individuation.

In a text that started as my MFA thesis, called *Being Sent to Coventry: Friendship and Weird Inquiry*⁶, I was starting to get some way towards your thoughts about friendship as a model for understanding the ways that this expanded notion of collaboration might work. As seems to be continually the case with our conversations, we came to a similar place via different routes.

In the text I was trying to theorise something like an erotics⁷ of friendship, which is to pose friendship as a potential site for profound intersubjective speculation. This was extrapolated by talking through the ways that particular friendships refuse or break those strict regulatory or legalistic frameworks imposed upon our engagements with each other in most spheres of our lives. It argued that friendship is propelled through the breaking of processes of exchange or possessive individualism, through the decommodification of our time, the breaking down of our individual discreteness, and collective subjective speculation. Food is shared, time is wasted, personal space is intruded upon, resources are pooled, rounds at the pub are broken, we forget

⁴ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, "Mikey the Rebelator," *Performance Research* 20:4, (July 2015): 141–145.

⁵ Édouard Glissant, "For Opacity" In *Poetics of Relation*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 189–194.

⁶ Philip Coyne, "Being Sent to Coventry: Friendship and Weird Inquiry," MFA thesis (Sandberg Instituut, 2018)

⁷ To adopt a term from bell hooks and her remarkable text "Eros, Eroticism, and the Pedagogical Process", in which she outlines an erotics education. bell hooks, "Eros, Eroticism, and the Pedagogical Process" In *Teaching to Transgress*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 191–199.

to pay each other back, boundaries are attended to and the right ones are mutually transgressed. Through these breakages, friendships, in much the same way as an expanded notion of collaboration, become more than the sum of their parts, and they become sites of profound aesthetic, poetic, political, and interpersonal speculation and solace.

There are of course friendships in which exchange and property relations are kept completely intact or even strengthened, and I discussed these using the term nepotism, where nothing is done without a ruthless reciprocity. This is the friendship of power, the friendship of the golf course, in which the informal, opaque, and affective are leveraged for an even more profound and insidious form of accumulation.

Perhaps we could say that dual authorship⁸ maintains many of the same processes that nepotism does, however unintentionally. Of course, this is not to denounce those who engage in these kinds of practices outright, instead it is to track the tendency along these lines. The constant duress that we find ourselves under makes a total repudiation of nepotism or dual authorship almost impossible.

Following these ideas of reciprocity and how it unfolds differently, depending on the type of power structure through which it is being performed, we could say that reciprocity also holds in itself a specific temporality. The differences between thinking about friendships as political configurations, which generate new types of access, and thinking about nepotism as the perpetuation and maintenance of entrenched epistemologies and ways of accessing them, could be found in how we practise the temporality of reciprocity. And I think defining the 'we' in this last sentence is key when we are also thinking about individuation and certain types of sociality, or when we think about what sociality even means for us, and who and what can access this or that type of 'social' structure.

Yeah, I don't know about you, but I always feel that the word 'we' is worth fighting for. I think the we that is often, and rightly, argued against⁹ is actually an 'I' masquerading as a we. Partly because it is the powerful claiming their individual selves as the universal, but also because genuine collectivity is unfathomable for people who use the word in this way. I think the we I'm interested in is a complex we, one that behaves more like a metaphysics and often doesn't include me, even as I use the term. Perhaps it is a we that cleaves through the individual, between those parts of themselves that have been inherited from power, those parts that are

⁸ It is worth pointing out that we're not objecting to the process of working with others on a particular work here, but instead dual authorship's categorisation as a distinct form, its legalistic frameworks and the bleeding of these frameworks into a common sense about how collaborative works are made. Whereby, the ownership, and thus the assumed production, of a work is split discreetly and transparently in two, largely to facilitate the works' easy circulation as a commodity. Here the nuanced densely entangled web of working-in-relation is tidied up to the point that the artists might as well have been working entirely alone, only to converge in the final instances. Even when the collaborative nature of the labour within the work is clear, dual authorship can show up as simply a phenomenon that individuals engage in, as a form of labour that is fundamentally distinct from those carried out by individuals, and not a general condition as we're positing. For us, working together on a single work is simply one modality within an expanded notion of collaboration; one which should also be attended to, after all it is at least one of the modalities that we're currently working through as we write this text.

⁹ This being the 'rational' universalising we of hegemonic western discourses, that assumes that the we is made up of white, male, heterosexual, cisgendered, able-bodied, monied, and upper class subjects, or the nationalistic we that assumes a kind of ethnic homogeneity.

punitive or see other people as a problem, and the parts of themselves that exist before and in spite of these forms of intra-subjective regulation.

Sure, and to expand a bit more on Glissant, there is no individuation but a continual being-in-relation. This on its own implies a constant becoming that can be considered as non-linear movement, which defines its paths as it moves into unknown finalities. By this I mean that we shouldn't consider sociality to be attached to enclosed systems, instead it is part of porous configurations that overlap, spread, contract, vibrate, and affect each other. The in-between spaces that surround these configurations create a heterogeneous pattern where traces of transparency, moments of latency, shades of opacity, spontaneous commencements, and stubborn persistences, are altered and iterated. How we decide to resist, comply, avoid, or transform these movements is what creates in itself a sphere of collective individuation that defines itself as it simultaneously defines its relationship with movement.¹⁰

There are some fugitive propositions within the works you presented at Months of the Year. As murals, the works vibrate between being whole in themselves and also being elements of something that isn't and can't be contained solely by the space they are exhibited in. They evidence a conscious refusal of an art space that extracts complexity from a fractal landscape by layering it out into a static and linear one. By this I mean that there is a repetition without an active difference in the way that current paradigms resonate across spaces allied to them, one being the art gallery. This stubborn repetition is disguised by performative care for the multiple, when it is in fact a policing of it and an ordering of it into a single universal, a single multiplicity.

The murals in the show, on the contrary, enable a continuous feedback between binaries of space, binaries of time and nostalgia, and also the unlearned. They perform as an invitation for collective learning (and unlearning), and as a key process in the creation of new narratives. There is also something about the technique that you used and the fact that they are murals but aren't applied directly to the walls, as if they were some sort of a temporal projection in the threshold right before the binary of our attention comes to the self-inflicted realisation that there is the individual and there is a space. They are murals that transpire and that, during the processes of remaining insistently incomplete, define themselves by simultaneously refusing themselves.

Well that's very kind of you, I think this is a really remarkable way to talk about an ontological ambiguity or ambivalence that I think good sculpture often has, though I think perhaps there is an interesting divergence of sentiment here that we could tease out. I do think we would say that there is a repertoire of defences within the act of keeping moving; defences against the

¹⁰Alluding here to Gilbert Simondon on his analysis of the principle of individuation. Individuation for Simondon is only relevant under an ontogenic perspective that considers it as a relative state in the operations that enable a complete being, and not as an end to itself. Therefore the individual is considered as a partial and temporary phase of the living being in its becoming, and not the being's finality. This consideration makes individuation a process of relation that acts towards multiplicity instead of a process towards unity. For Simondon, entropic homogenisation is not the only possible end to the analysis of matter, substance, and energy, but can be incorporated as an element or state in the processes of individuation. As becoming is the dimension of being "the mode of resolution of an incompatibility full of potentials", there is no possible becoming in a state of equilibrium where all potentialities are being extinguished. For Simondon, what the principle of individuation embodies is then the existence of a pre-individual concept of what an individual is, limiting a further analysis of its potentialities as a being in relation and therefore considering the individual only in its physical individuality. Individuation, then, is embedded in a system of partial resolution of beings in relation that are more and less than unity.

theft of what it is that we are trying to share, against the breaking up of community, against the production of the individual, against capture, regulation, etc. Capture is of course only possible if things can be held in place long enough for value to be extracted from them. But I am wary of any uncritical claim made about the radicality of movement, flexibility, circulation, let alone traction or speed. We need to look no further than the informality of the contemporary labour market to see that these kinds of demands can and do get used against us.

To add to that, there is a fluidity in capital that feeds upon an illusion of multiplicity and the fractal becoming that we mentioned before. We can say that capital uses fluidity as an aesthetics, as a methodology for creating value, as a method for extracting and reproducing itself by perpetuating binary and static power configurations that rest upon what is considered the periphery and what is defined by the centre. We can call this a single-multiplicity, one that always follows a linear movement of time towards a universal and 'progressive' idea of truth.

It is interesting then to think about the ways that staying put might provide a bulwark against the smothering, theft, or destruction of social life, through its own forms of opacity. How embedding, digging in, settling down¹¹ might not only provide defences by repudiating the forms of circulation and centralisation that make extraction of value from our social life possible, but might also proliferate and instantiate the very thing that we want, rich aesthetic, political, social lives in difference. Providing defences, as well as the object, and stamina, of those defences.

I think we can see some sort of vague vindication here, in the ways that settling or getting stuck are often posed as individual failures, how it is assumed that a rich internal life is only to be had by constantly moving, from one metropolitan hub to the next or, as is often actually the reality, from one precarious living situation to another. That the good life, or your "best life", is out there somewhere. And that everything that stands in the way of this life, whether it's your friends, family, dependants, your communities, your other hopes or loves, your notions of how the world might be better for yourself and others, should all be cut from your life with extreme prejudice.

This all touches on an upcoming body of research that I'll be carrying out as a sort of extension of the research done for *Months of the Year*. The idea is to work through a set of pervasive notions about time and space that seem to have been inherited from the political and theoretical tradition of Liberalism; where time and space are posed as empty and easily moved through, and full of potential or freedoms precisely because of this. Using this framework, I will be thinking about a kind of non-liberal time/space, one that is fundamentally full and derives its potentiality out of this fullness. Out of a deep relational entanglement with the people and the world around us. Out of a collaborative vicinity if you will.

¹¹ It would be fruitful to think about this use of the term settling, as well as its pejorative usage, in light of their linkages to settler colonialism. During a 2018 talk at Woodbine NYC, Fred Moten made this link explicit while talking about how his more wealthy students seem to have already settled for a 'profound unhappiness'. He poses this as indicative of the lived experience of Weber's Protestant Ethic, where we see the radical closing down of the potential forms of life and organisation, in favour of the static relations that make the accumulation of capital possible. So how might our settling, as a form that looks to proliferate and deepen our capacities to act in and relate to the world, correspond to the settling of settler colonialism? A settling that looks to calcify and strictly regulate all forms of relationality, even at the cost of greater complexity, or at the cost of genuine happiness, which Moten argues is actually in the pursuit.

Of course there isn't room to get right into this here, but for our purposes I suppose this is all a highly speculative way to say that the sense I have is that learning to love something, precisely because you find yourself near it, is first and foremost not a failure. It isn't the easy way out, nor does it necessarily pose a diminution of the complexity of your life. I would even argue that particular forms of this learned love could be far in excess of the found love, in its richness, its rigour, its ardour, its ethics, and its politics. Really genuinely learning to love those around you, despite your disagreements, gives us a model for solidarity that doesn't resort to violent transparency or dogmatic universalism, while also having the means to deal with things like complicity or problematics.¹²

So definitely a question that arises is how should we inhabit or perform collective movement under this paradox of movement and embedding? I think we want to believe that the mural in itself can be conceived of as a case study for this purpose and as an anchor point from which to gravitate towards the ideas of maintenance and care. How can we sustain a collective individuation in order for it to remain unsettled enough, porous enough, to not be translated into something static? Can we find care through a careless maintenance? And how can we actually define something as static? Those structures that seem motionless hide behind themselves forces that are indeed constantly enabling the networks of maintenance needed for their perpetuation. So what is there to find under the embodied paradox of a mural?

For me this paradox throws up some ways in which the work potentially fails, ways in which it potentially doesn't live up to the ethics that I hoped to situate it in. Part of the reason the mural is such an interesting art form is because of its spatiotemporal embedding. As wall paintings tend to be difficult to move or reproduce accurately, they also tend to resist circulation, often resulting in ethical orientations towards this in the content of the work. They're regularly made for those communities who live around them, depicting the characters or things important to that community, and incidentally making them difficult to read for those from elsewhere, at least without fostering a deeper relationship with that place. They also tend to forfeit compositional concerns for simply including everything that's important for that particular mural. I would argue that these practices don't pose an issue for the format, but instead they foreground a resistance to the universalising and canonising instincts that are endemic within the arts, and at the same time they pose potentially a more interesting and more ethical form of localised inclusivity. One that promotes cohabitation and a productive complicity, while also offering a just approach to the working class avant-gardism that underpins so much of contemporary culture.

How the work of *Months of the Year* might have actually lived up to these ideas is a generative question, leading us to think about what one is actually exiting as we attempt to elude the forms of circulation of the contemporary art world. Questions that maybe have answers within our conversations about receding from punitive materialities, or within a non-liberal time/space and its corresponding metrics of success.

¹² Perhaps it's important to explain that we base this argument in a belief in the General Antagonism, which is to say the nascent idea within the Black Radical Tradition, and to some extent the Autonomist Marxists, that insurgency comes before stasis; before political designations, before the individual or identity, before the cops, regulation, private property. And when forms of regulation are broken we are returned, however momentarily, to this insurgency. This is then seen as a materialist basis for solidarity across difference. The term itself seems to have been coined by Harney and Moten in the last chapter of *The Undercommons*. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons; Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 100–159.

But as a kind of leading response to your questions above about maintenance, there are ways in which murals are also temporally specific or embedded. Of course they're always of the time they're made, and this is important in a number of ways but I think questioning the ethics of preservation is potentially a more interesting proposition. Murals are often outside, exposed to the elements, or to the daily wear of the collective life of public buildings, neither of which are ideal environments for conservation. If we are saying in some way that there is a process of extraction in the production of art, and that art or culture that is allowed to retain a vicinity to the social or relational life of those who contributed to its production is an ethical aim, and if this vicinity also deepens and enriches the significance and significations of the work, then is there some sort of violence or an ethical misstep to the way that we drag artworks through time, under the rubric of preservation?

Of course as I write this it feels unnatural; I wouldn't want to argue against the preservation of artworks or other things from the past, I love many of them dearly. And as the original ways to think about this or that work drops by the wayside, as they are smudged up against the progression of time, they enter into new affective assemblages, they become new and beautiful again for people who are disconnected from their context. We should figure out ways to make this process as ethical as possible. But maybe this is again an argument against the centralisation of culture, and for genuinely radical redistribution. If communities were able to have much greater access to resources to decide how they wanted to maintain their own stuff, how much would this violence be reduced?

These ideas do seem to describe how processes of acculturation work, where indeed certain elements are extracted from the outlines and perimeters of a mainstream constellation to be translated into the system's language for assimilation towards a centre. There is no alienness at the periphery of any dialectic system since everything that inhabits that threshold is already being made ready for consumption into the binary. Every monster gets digested at the edge of enclosed systems. So coming back to the mural and the question of maintenance and care, even if these two words seem to be working in opposite directions here, could we imagine a maintenance working against clarity as a form of care for a continuous overlapping? Can we imagine what it would be like to preserve without stretching existences into a continuous and static present? Can we imagine a maintenance of an active care that would help us avoid the gravity pull of a singular multiplicity?

For me these questions get right to the heart of the things within your writing that I find most compelling, and frankly most heartening, which is to say the focus on anti-entropy¹³ or, to paraphrase something that you once said to me, how things can be sustained without becoming static. When reading your writing on this topic, I'm made acutely aware of a crude essentialism within my own thinking that, despite my best efforts, I don't seem to have shaken. Regardless of my assertions about friendship or collectivity to the contrary, this manifests itself as an intuitive feeling that things should be commensurable with each other; that, when we really get down to it, even our desires should behave like objects.

¹³ Azul De Monte, "Collective Avatar: A Fractal Becoming Against the Human," MFA thesis (Dutch Art Institute, 2021)

Far from being some hyper-speculative, rarified philosophical discussion of little importance or effect, I think that this actually poses a fundamental problem for the politics that we are espousing. If, for example, desire behaves unpredictably and in-discretely yet burns through discrete units to propel itself, how is it maintained without something like endless pointless growth and consumption? How then can we argue for desire and against its diminution and at the same time demand action on climate change? So when you pose the Collective Avatar¹⁴ as “a constant mutation and a perpetual fractal becoming of the self always in relation, always multiple, never human”¹⁵ against entropy, as a maintenance that is expansive and profligate yet not based on the exhaustion of a finite set of resources, this fills me with a deep sense of hope and vindication.

All of this is not to argue that we should be replacing this crude essentialism with a crude constructivism, which I hope should be clear from this conversation already. Instead the sense I have is that it's a problem of scale and abstraction. Both are inadequate philosophical positions, but at different scales and abstractions one is less inadequate than the other, and to demand reliable clarity at the moments where these imperfect systems come into contact with one another is untenable once you're out of the realm of the purely theoretical.

So maybe to finish up, and to preempt a future conversation, I can put this into my own speculative terms and say that I think other people constitute a renewal. Other people, met in momentary absence of punitive materialities or subjectivities, constitute a form of interpersonal, ardent, boundless renewal that can far outstrip that of constant pointless growth and consumption. A renewal that I am happy to lose sight of between scales and abstractions, precisely because my own demand for conceptual neatness is a reactionary tendency, one which serves to diminish the potency of this renewal, perhaps out of fear of an even more profound unhappiness. Instead, maybe there is something to be learnt in the opaque buckets of butternut squash that are left in Bigfoot country¹⁶ or from our practices of whistling into the dark wind.

¹⁴ Within the text the collective avatar is linked to the original Hindu usage of the term, meaning the descent of the multiple incarnations of deities such as Vishnu to earth. The word *avatāra* here not only can be understood as a godly privilege tool that can trespass space and time but also as a process of mutation and non-binary sexual reproduction. The word also implies a movement from the magical realm to the material world in a process of trans-codification, as a codification across different systems. The CA is therefore proposed and analysed against the perpetuation of singularity that makes its way through the embodiment of Digital Avatars.

¹⁵ Azul De Monte, “Collective Avatar: A Fractal Becoming Against the Human,” 37.

¹⁶ Joshua Cutchin and Timothy Renner, “Gifting” In *Where the Footprints End: High Strangeness and the Bigfoot Phenomenon, Volume I: Folklore*, (self-pub.: Dark Holler Arts, 2020), 127–150.

