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**BODIES
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Bodies That Mutter: Poetic Autoethnography and Digital Textuality
Anna Apostolidou, 2022

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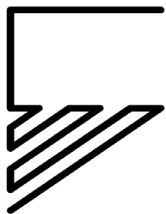
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To N.,
who didn't get to write

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ONE.
IN THE
BEGINNING
THERE WAS
CHAOS.
THEN DE-
SIRE.

ANCHOR

Thus began this story
With her pupils dilating
her skin becoming a thin glass mold
containing only water
and desire
evoked out of [discourse](#)

How much do you really know of a person
merely through their writing?
No matter how much time spent on figuring the shape of
their fingers

as they type the ink-like pixel dots that form the
unprecedented meaning
you're now reading

Or trying to imagine the friction of their brain sleek
round [specks](#)
as they merge to bring forth
a new, freshly acquired, fine idea

She had already wedded herself to the idea that long-
distance journeys of affect are
unambiguously sole-ticket affairs

But when she put the other woman's book down for the
night, the idea had already fallen short of its initial
target

For she'd be henceforth married to that unknown
author's summoning thoughts,
her own distinctive brand of suffering

Before she went to sleep

she spread her legs
And let the [anchor](#) she'd been keeping between them
drop right down into the other person's wound

Home.

FALL FOR

And then you fall
The limbs don't quite grasp the danger
—the sense of freedom is too exhilarating to inform them
of the repercussions of the crash—
Your hair becomes weightless and the roots don't hurt as
much,
eternally bound by gravity
to carry a descending pull of hundred little curls

The window of your childhood room
whose ledge you chose to use
stands open
You can clearly see it as you count the storeys
[rolling](#) down beside you
blading your field of view in slow motion

You never wonder whether it will be head first
or, if your back will take on the impact
Just certain that you're not going up there
[Ever](#)
Certain that insane mid-life love will find a way
to parachute you up,
—oh, glorious in-sanity—
just on time due

You take a moment to fix your [waving skirt](#),
you take a breath to see if air velocity makes it any more
pleasant

And as you turn you head towards the ground
Carefree and somewhat proud of you doing
You realize that the ground is lost

The trees and fences and the crooked pavement are missing
—so is the [neighbor's dog](#)
All you can see are two enormous eye-shaped lakes
Both filled with bright yellow
the color of her [cutting](#) look
when it chose to sit on you
that lazy April
three thousand years back

You fell for her that same ancient moment
And into it this midlife afternoon
(you) readily fall again

BEGINNING

Her breasts have always been irrelevant
They might have been [unpleasant](#) to look at
or wholesome halleluiahs of sight
Honestly, I can't remember

My wife begun on the far northern bone
that concluded the ribcage and went all the way up to the
spiky little hairs
crowning her beacon eyes
She might have had pretty, strong legs
Or no legs [at all](#)
She might have been graciously rolling on a high-tech
glossy wheelchair
I never cared to notice

Cause when she lifted her attention from that book
to tell me how she drinks her coffee
—my short waitering at the time came rather handy for me
to steal lifelong habits from eye-catching guests—
I lost the function of response
a most exhilarating irrevocable damage
The upper edge of a brownish book cover
became the soil for her tree-like [neck](#) to spring up
into the face
that held her eyes in their fixed majestic position

The air got thick with jubilation

We stayed together for three years
Today, if I had to guess
I'd say her back was made of straw
she had a [clay](#) pelvis
and tender iron arms

Nonetheless,
the eyes on the edge of her long lost face
still hang in suspension
notably bodyless
before my very own

T.K.

She's done excited and been mesmerized
She's felt the tingling of desire,
piercing like lava thorns or gentler than hell

She has been touched, and worshiped and caressed,
It has been women and men of this and of foreign land and
language

She has done awkward but fucking great,
awful but kind of interesting,
quiet but screaming intense.

Put any adjective in the [book](#)

–kinky,
divine,
shameful,
glorious,
endearing,
al fresco–

I dare you to think of more
and bet you she's been there

Thence the game changer was not what you would call
another [kind](#) of sex
But rather about being fully enfolded into another being
wholly inside and around them
with all the categories and the clocks
suspended,
and shuttered
For good.

TWO. DADDY -LAND

FIRST SUNDAY

There was a primary attraction to their meetings

Between six and seventeen she saw him twice
each time a puzzling, half-understood occasion
to be unraveled, scrutinized and adored
in the exclusivity of her inner [chambers](#)
for years to come

Before that an out-of-focus glimpse of a painfully
enthralled tall man

Another visit when she had to get his blessing,
—had god existed they'd know why—
and twice more, two weeks apart,
a week before she first gave birth,
and one week after that, holding her child,
explicitly showcasing what this [association](#) might have
been like for them

The only thing that stroke her so consistently
was how he couldn't ever hold her in his arms

She'd come in such a speed as to convey instant oblivion
and forgiveness
She'd raise her hand upon his hair as if she was the
parent one
She'd look him straight in the eye, at some point having
reached his own elusive height

But he had such a [tender](#) trouble to respond,
he'd slightly touch her [shoulder](#) with the far feather of
an eagle wing
and, trembling, look away
Not out of lack of his desire to be what she was asking
of him,
if only for one afternoon,
but perhaps a devastated [excess](#) of this desire

In time she learned it didn't really matter

It was enough for her to smoke one of his cigarettes,
placing her elbow on the same round table as him,
and fully be immersed in the seamless sensation of being
cut out of the same cloth with someone else
As much a part of him as he was hers

(the women in the family, for all their beauty and
affection and indemnity
bore no resemblance to the incongruous little girl)

He drunk himself to a tranquil wonted ending
four days after they last spoke on the phone

She had to tell him, stubbornly in love with the
imperfection of reactions on his part,
that he would soon be holding a granddaughter once again
And hear him pause; then take a breath as if to promise
her that those thirty awkward years
were only but a bumpy, unfortunate outset in their
cherished relation
about to begin
soon
any moment now

The intractable hope that the hoarse voice would utter a
sentence
containing some variety of 'love'
(to be installed into her future [cabinet](#) of curiosities,
under "dear sounds")

She can't indeed recall a Sunday ever spent in his company
—so you may not actually call it 'direful' or 'loss'
or even a different make of [absence](#)—
yet this would be the first Sunday she would spend
without him.

GUIDO

There' s a bird outside my window
singing and chirping since dawn
I open my eyes and throw the yellow pencil I keep on my
bedside table at him
Stop. Go away.

Strengthened by the seemingly applauding gesture
—a groupie throwing a bra at him on stage—
he won't do either.

I fall back asleep to observe a parade of enormous
metallic [poultry](#)
—ducks, sparrows, hens—littering the clouds
Each ending on a thin red fishing line
clasped by a child's fractured hand

The sound they make goes louder as the sun struggles its
way up the creamy sky
One, two, three short ones—pause—a long one
One, two, three short ones—pause—a long one

I reach the curtain, still lying on my side
and wave it jerkily back and forth, in tears
of anger
Leave me alone!

He stops for a moment
An unmistakable expression of acknowledgement:
I see you, I hear you
And then goes on signably meaner than before

I put on earplugs, and pull the pillow above my head as I
turn to the other side,
desperate for some morning peevish sleep
Now I can hear him from within my head
a penetrative melodic worm
messing my leady thoughts with flares of light

You remind me of life, you sordid little thing.
And,

ergo,
death.
Can't you tell I'm missing him?

Another momentary pause before the lilting monologue
resumes

I sit up
Open my eyes
Open the window
Look out—my forehead is a labyrinth of [folds](#)—

A fair blue bird with orange paunch
right in the heart of Athens
A [cardinal](#),
says my high-school dusted database
—no doubt appointed by a leafy godless pope—
Such odd a creature cannot be but a friend

VALISE, LA

The door [frame](#) in front of her
contains a small parallel chunk of the hallway that links
the bedrooms to the apartment door
His heel and ankle on the bottom right side, his grey
socks on,
few inches north his hand pulling a worn-out leather
strap,
a piece of wall and numerous chess tiles make for an
uninvolved interval,
and on the bottom left side
a hint of grandpa's characteristic green valise

For the last hour the closets and the drawers have been
engaged in ominous flappings
of pretty high beauforts:
she chose to comb her doll's sleek straight hair

For the last months the tables and some [ashtrays](#) learnt
to fly:
she chose to assort some cuddly jungle animals to fix two
amazing ear muffs

She's done everything a four-year-old can do to eschew
pain
Oh, she's done more
—an admirable efficiency—

But the valise is not to be ignored,
that much she knows
It is the one that carried all those older grown-ups from
Smyrna to the mainland,
and few years later from there to the city
Its fray material is made to contain belongings solely
for long trips,
[one-way](#) ones,
and carry seeds for new oblivion lands that make the old
ones slowly disappear
The frame has now shifted to plain wall and tiles
and the front door's just concluded the a-symphony of
thuds

She blinks once and pushes the image of the frame at the
furthest end of her own stashed [View-master](#)
(there is no way of knowing yet
but she senses this snapshot is to be garnered in the
uppermost care)
then bows her head and watches the armless Barbie making
its way down towards the orange snickers
followed by salty pellets of unannounced hail

MURDER YOUR DARLINGS

His fingers, agile from a newly-found liberty,
push the tiny seeds back in the joint
He rolls it around tenderly—all the time in the world is
his—
and licks the tip.

The toilet seat is cold and soft
The light comes from the corner little window
in sharp stripes, in issues

He takes a puff, the second one really kicks in,
He appears to have found a way
to weed
instead of weep

All three of them are gone;
the once-his-very-own-darling-woman
still young only now cut in half,
as those in the know often are
One could tell from the sight of her back as she was
walking out
four little arms wrapped around her knees and thighs
she'd carry a subtle limp from now on

The minute they were gone—how very peculiar—
so was the mistress
Who used to balance their effect
in the seesaw of petit-bourgeois compromise
La maîtresse
Suddenly exposed for the lonely colorless bland girl
she'd always been

He sure is free now
To drink
To think
To sink
into the second stage of adulthood, the one he insistently

has sought,
his own crazy thoughts and schedules

He puts the joint out on the triangular bathroom tray
filled with scented pebbles
By his spouse
His ex-spouse
with her kitsch magical taste

He flushes the toilet and lends a wide, contented smile
to the mirror
Scratching his chin
in blessed ignorance that ahead of him
await
twenty-eight years of similar unwieldy mornings
and long and fiddly nights
with no one else in sight

**THREE. TAKE
IT LIKE A
WOMAN**

(R}APE

A nightmare turned friend by way of repetition
The perpetrator/kin
his fierce and tender touch
Her own deplorable response
to a wrong, a [vile](#) desiring

She tried not sleeping for a while
it didn't work
And after that she questioned all the living
that might have known
or might have sensed
uneager all to share

She stayed in darkness playing back the foul act
Those who tried to come real close had to watch, too,
from designated back rows
—not many stayed

The last decade the dream is interlarded
with lovely tints:
a white skirt,
a [duckling](#),
a child's gullet laugh

“It's doesn't matter if it's imaginary or true”
the doc had said widdling her fine pencil.
“For the psychic organ it's just the same”

Last night she woke up almost sad
from [dreamless](#) territory
So much has she rearranged in wake life
it really doesn't matter anymore
Or maybe
just maybe
she's found a way to fool the [organ](#) once and for all.

REFLECTIVE SURFACES

There is a woman in my mirror
I stare at her heavy breasts,
the mild pencil [line](#) around her shoulders
her sea gull mouth resisting all expression

I squat silently on the far left corner of the frame
The light is less blinding there, all fantasy allowed
I sneak at her new moon-like brows
a wrinkle on the bottom of her long giraffeish neck
[Who](#) are you?

All her surroundings are brown-red and purple
A door knob right behind her right elbow bone
Some music in the back, tender and rough
[Where](#) are you?

The expression on her face a constant query
The piercing black core of her eyes remains locked
The face contented yet light blue with unease
[How](#) are you?

Foam coming out of her mouth, sounds of controlled
chocking
A slimy substance covers her rusty skin
“Just brushing and night creaming, don’t you worry!”
[What](#) are you?

Seconds away from the completion of this late-night
routine,
ready for bed
Puts on a light gown and prepares
to get to sleep and feed her midnight whims
A lucky woman, commanding all the airs

[He](#) reappears

(I cannot stay in the corner for much longer

I have to let the actual take over the false)

Her features harden, her body broad and bulgy
“Ready to come out, Thomas?”
I hear my wife pulse

FALL/EN

milk
detergent
muesli
q-tips
cous-cous
milk again, gallons of milk
for cakes and soufflés
and teenage facial masks

pencils, cardboard surfaces, capsized open books
everywhere
capsized open books
times four

capsized

doctor's appointments
research plans
the occasional cold
tax payments overdue
couple of periods overdue

October a-poetics

**FOUR. OF
DAUGHTERS
AND OTHER
PARADOXES**

GRANDMA

I never had a grandma to recount how we kill the big bad wolves

My mother lost her mother when she was twelve
The night had a remarkable set of teeth,
[granite](#) sharp, orthodontist-like

Before that, six years of a long disease
had pulled their magic tricks on all known facts of life:
granny's eyesight, her walking, her breathing, how she spoke,
if at all.

The final year entirely made out of [pending](#)

My mum only remembers the broad back of the kind doctor
not actually examining
just contemplating an untellable announcement
an isosceles triangle of desolation breathing behind his ear

The young husband, broken already,
and on the far corners of the room
[Two](#) tiny dots of girls

My mother, not a mother yet, saw a cherished hand
fall sideways
as the doctor turned clumsily towards the living
A white roll of cloth unfolding
under gravity's indifferent pull
The striking [absence](#) of an owner of this fair upper limb

The time it took to make the distance from the mattress
to the floor
was how she'd come to measure all sizes and dimensions
from then on

She didn't wait
My mother never does

She pushed the door wide open and started running far
away
while a mild rain made its customary descent on autumn
earth

I don't know when she stopped
I haven't cared to ask
Maybe because all I can recall
is the point in time she found a pit in a construction
site,
jumped in,
and stayed in there all night
—a soft, shaking child
eyes deep inside a pit
missing the primal parent—
how could I ever think to ask about anything?
Or, ask for anything from her.

The next day the rain would still go on,
hard and dispassionate this time,
creating a dirty flood out of the soft fair soil
that gulped my valued [ancestor](#)

It may have been a hundred times my mum has mentioned
how she is afraid of mud
—it's only at this moment I dare make the connection—
her never having visited a cemetery since
her manic washing of our house's small front yard
—the same house;
different doors, and plumbing and bookcases,
yet if you were a returning [ship](#)
or worked for google maps
you'd get the very same coordinates, right down to the
sixth digit
in their sarcastic [exactitude](#)—

It must have been a chilly night as October was counting
down its evenings

The wet clothes on her back
a second frigid skin she had to bear

Now that my daughters are that little girl's age
I get to see in front of me
how scars and pleasures are pretty much forever

And, shit, how I've been barking up the wrong tree
the best part of my conscious life

The hardness of my mother's heart
that I keep breaking my cotton-ball head against
years and years on end

is but a heavy [iron](#) coat
hand-tailored to keep that kind of pain
from reappearing,
a warfare membrane shutting that very October cold from
ever being an actual possibility again

The only concessions ever made on her part
are not my doing
They are the four front buttons she unhooked
the very days that four women were engendered
Me, then my sister, then my daughter, and her sister
after that

No. There's no point in telling her how ugly it looks to
others
No point in weaving tinsel-n-feather dresses for her
to put over the hefty compact mass

Now that she's reached the point
when she could be her mother's mum
and she's down on her knees from carrying all this weight,
heavy as it is [invisible](#),
I just need to find a way to sneak behind her,
stroke her grey untamed curls
and softly pluck it off her back.

OF DAUGHTERS I, OR, HOW TO BOIL AN EGG

She fixes a hair stride behind the ear with a purple pin,
the pointy [bone](#) on the top of her slidey spine shines
under the freshly shaven nape,
and fetches the little white radio from the other room,
mindfully tuning it to kitchen upbeat music.

–Sit back, mum. I’ll do it for you,
and opens the fridge with a majestic move.

She lays all the equipment on one side of the counter
the ingredients on the opposite one
puts on a yellow apron and ties an even bow
(she’s never seen me wear one, not once)

The perfect white egg is sunken in the pot
under her surveilling [gaze](#)
She won’t look around, won’t ask for help.
She stands so serious above the stove
counting the minutes
3 for the egg
100 for her favorite online show
4.204.800 for coming of age

Such an exact individual
–she’ll pay for it in serenity, I’m (so) afraid–
the moves are surgery-precise, in salting, in arranging
in cleaning after herself

In an instant I’m sucked back into the day she was sitting
on this same counter demanding her first mashed fruit
with a purple plastic spoon

The way she raised her hand in the air
swaying the precious utensil
conscious it would transfer her from breastfeeding era
to exciting adult textures,
This abiding quiet composition

Had the diaper been missing from the scene,
I honestly believe Von Karajan would back away in
humiliation for his clumsy sloppy moves

The light around her head against the kitchen window
Raises a whitish [fur](#) over her hair
Pushes me forward
I see her [veiny](#) hand serving the egg, shaking only
slightly,
her father's watch on the frail wrist having counted over
eighty Novembers

An elderly Tereza
–the only reason for overrated immortality is this:
to be there then, to [witness](#)–

–It's just a cold, you'll be fine soon.
She presents the egg in a small green plate, and
rearranges the covers around me in the sofa.

Smelling her kiss is like spelling s-u-b-l-i-m-a-t-i-o-n

She is eleven.
I sink my teeth on the soft, creamy yolk and wonder who
she'll become.

OF DAUGHTERS II, OR, HOW TO SKETCH AN EGG

She had been crafting things since she was two.
Through her fine lines, so simple only a grander design
could have endowed her with them,
you can be offered a front seat in the unmasked meaning
of form

I read histories of art to understand a predicament
unfolding under my very roof
(hand-painted by her also, in yellows and shades of
aubergines):
How come she's already accomplished the ultimate level of
what we see as art:
the erasure of the maker's hand?
So telling are her works that you dare not—need not—
bring to mind the person
who stood between yourself and the thing depicted.
The form always arrives from within you
like a punch.

I feel under the weather, tucked in our window sofa,
and ask her to fetch my drawing pad: I feel like making
an Easter card for Misel.

—Sit back, mum. I'll do it for you.

I see her sitting on the floor,
reach for the pencils around her,
and it appears that they are chosen randomly,

they just happened to be placed near her left alabaster hand
and since they're here she might as well put them to use

Few—ten? fourteen?—confident moves and she presents it to me
seemingly blasé,
“Here is my Easter egg”
behind which dances the agony of recognition
“Will mum be able to understand this time?”

Her drawing makes the world a kinder place,
(this is more of an egg than all the Arizona [ranches](#) of chicken and geese
would be able to produce if put together)
yet one of wonder and sophistication

The lines a [simulacrum](#) of the real thing, and at the same time a praise to its ability
to elevate itself to something more
It feels as if she put her engines of observation to work some 30, or 300, years before she decided to come join us.

As she is holding up the paper I remember
gazing at her experience her surroundings in the crib,
a synaesthetic kinaesthetic feast,
the epitome of phenomenology

I am convinced she absorbed it all that very morning and never cared to look around since
She came in my life holding a circus cord,
umbilical-angelical,
a fine cord telling apart the sexual from the erotic
To teach me how to [tightrope](#) walk between the two

I worship her skin and her touch makes my heart race and swallow
Her sleeping beside me, from life's day one,
has made cuddling a ritual never known
Not one moment have I been aroused
—nature or nurture prohibitions, I can't tell—
but excitement and daydreaming, remarkably similar to teenager heartache,
have so persisted I came to peace with them

If I could trade all my [nows](#) for something else, that

would have been a life
when I could sit beside her in the second grade during
math, or be her spouse

In any case: be allowed to watch her laugh, give in,
be allowed to get to feel the inside of her mouth

No doubt this is the king of eggs
And if you look real closely there is a [crack](#)
through which you may actually hear the light bird pecking
its way out of the oval surface.

And it's not neatly placed in a basket,
with a bow, with other eggs, as children market narrative
would have it
No, it's on the bottom of an enormous perfume bottle
-all curvy and rococo swirls- and the Easter bunny next
to it wears an eye patch

and extra nail polish and looks a bit like the store
manager at nineteen-hundreds Selfridge's.

Had it only been her subversive humor, I would admit her
to the academy of Greats.
But this is but the least of her relentless talents.

Frida is ten.
I stare at the brittle [shell](#) and ponder who she'll be.

PUNCTURE

To grow up
you need to [puncture](#) the transparent ceiling of safe
woven for you with fine hairs and saliva and skin flakes
by the ones who have loved you during the time that you
were less, far less than your full self

Whether you do it kindly or with a vengeance,
Whether a [timely](#) outing or years overdue
As you grow taller, other parts of you gone stronger and
others more fragile,
all according to plan,
you need to raise the braveness
to tear the tissue wide apart and fly away.
How sad it often makes me
(I am painfully aware)
there is [no](#) other way.

CAMPING

I am the [red shiny dot](#) in the bumper-to-bumper-snail-trail to the seaside
Pony tail boys turning fifty with their bikes mounted on their jeeps
cloud my view
Let me out

Take me to the old cars' gay beeping
When hands held out of the window could touch the real sky
No seatbelts built into this long gone corporeality

I'll even crawl into the tunnel of time
if this will do the trick
(me, the tunnel fearful)

Please take me to the [salty](#) sea and the non-pre-frozen golden fries
When the ice-cream cup held a universe of joys
It feels like paper mash these days: let this impression be my own life's punctuation,
a private ailment,
And not a point in civilization's [grand story](#)

My children went camping for the first time this morning
However dusty and filthy and unglamorously old the world is getting
Summers here sometimes prove to be remarkably resilient
Meaning may be unearthed under a common rock

Oh, let them have it
Their skin is lucent with youth and anticipation
Just let them have it
[plz](#)

TURNING 12

On the eve of her twelfth birthday
She pretended to get her period
I went along with auspicious connivance

For what is [faking](#)
but a desperate desire
to Re-tell the Real?

FIVE. SOFT- EDGED FAIRYTALES

SHE'S LEFT THE BUILDING

The world is coming to an end.

Again.

If she had a nickel for every time she's heard that same [apocalyptic](#) whining, every couple hundreds of years, she could have saved human currency for at least two packs of chewing gums—the nice raspberry ones—by now.
Maybe three.

She elevates herself from bed, changes her head from a sleeping lioness to a highly evolved female [ape](#) with daisies coming out of the ears a thick Poirot-esque moustache and looks down from the 200th floor window of the glass condo building.

Instances of pettiness and greatness flood the streets below, often inhabiting the very same moment, performed in parallel, side by side, or between the [spongy](#) walls of one single thought.

Men who enjoy their boyish [prophets](#)—Jesus, Mohamed, nice lads, Ezekiel, and Job—but cannot afford a daytime's sacrifice for a purpose that surpasses shelter and supper.
Women who fear and obey such senile men.
She turns her head in wearied contempt and fixes Persephone's earrings at the far end of her eyebrows.

She puts on Morning Prayer Radio, a grin seldom interrupted by loud laughter—the nerve of some people!—and tries on the short leather [boots](#) in diabolical bright red divinely contrasting the white cashmere coat

that goes from neck to ankle

She partly blames herself
for their in-built inability to see beyond the carnal and
the ephemeral,
the even greater disability to treasure this innate
fleeting condition
(originally meant to heighten consciousness, ha, ha),
even to simply be.

A hasty look into the ceiling mirror,
the one she keeps by the front door to single out unwanted
visitors,
while fixing the mascara on her forehead
-[third](#) eyes are such fuss-
and is just about ready to skid down the elevator [shaft](#).

On ground floor she puts her Freudian monocle on and
rushes into the revolving doors
to go get a lemon cream donut and a macchiato on the
corner of 57th and 8th.
-Hell, let them manage on their own for a whole spring
morning.

God has left the building.

SIS SINGING

The woman walks to the center of the stage
carrying her unfathomable age and disposition
The instruments begin as she leans closer to the
microphone
and exhales the first three notes
The audience falls apart

Her voice emits no sound
Only eruptions of precious distilled truths
that agreeably shutter the lot of us
She sucks the light from the room,
filters it through her throat
and dismisses it back to us,
making it look she's had the time
to have it re-baptized by the sun

For the length of one song we all become
her children
her lost lovers
her dear stripy cats.

She takes her time in devouring the stage
and then the room
Her body opens up as she knits breath/pause/timbre
She is now our church and our school
no choice is given but to enter her
and it's clear to everybody
that we owe her our sedentary devotion

The waves from her mouth grow their own fingers
and come down to pinch cheeks and shuffle hair and punch
the gut
She literally moves us
The timid ones can feel it in the electrons that have
gone mad and sizzle on the skin

The most courageous in the crowd stand up and close their
eyes,
trusting the voice to shake them into trance, or ridicule
We all look down to see which slit of the wo/man continuum
we usually inhabit, which species kind,

for we are lost

She raises her arm as she reaches down into her baseless compartments
then brings it down, a sword that utters the most wounding
of words—we [suffer](#) for her—

For a whole four minutes everyone gets to feel the tyranny
and freedom of fatherless maturation;
the various rigors that come with the custody of ovaries;
the sage ache of unreturned true love

As the finale closes up
we are ordained to sell all our belongings,
run home and make a fire of books and souvenirs,
empty accounts and shelves and give away
what we thought would carry us through
to another, a safer stage of life

Burn all your lands,
and pierce holes on your [vessels](#)
Put down the pet if you have to,
eat your young,
she now commands
For there is only now, only this voice
and all the rest is but a fear-driven clinging
to thin air

A lightning-bolt apogee
[Time](#) collapsed
And then the voice stops.

Her wings fold back inside her lungs
The frantic snakes return to their curl hammocks

Her mass shrinks down to its initial dimensions
The eyes smile, another tiny miracle unveiled.

In the silent fraction that proceeds
the hypnotized clapping of our hands,
a gate gets shut—the end of blessed [transcendence](#)

A moment later she walks down from her throne
and sits beside me, in humble songless land

—How was it, [sis](#)? she asks only with glimpses.

I point at the sea of resurrected bodies that surround us

-Your average Friday, I wink
and we both laugh

THREE LITTLE PURSES

On his way back from the shop
he spots three little purses
left on the corner pavement
right by the garbage trash.

He stops to pay tribute to the old woman
whose house was hollowed empty today
by greedy or trembling hands,
be loved ones or contractors

In front of him three old-time black handbags,
one oval, one square, one rectangular,
all of the slightest girth,
each for a different occasion,
he surmises.

He picks up the square one, in perfect “mint” condition,
his mother swims up to mind,
in her fine floral dress, ready for Sunday visits,
strolling through her magnanimous forties,
ripping the earth in two,
the same way he did to exit her splendid body.

He brings the oval one close to his [nose](#),
two pieces of soft leather the size of his palm, worn-out
around the stitching,
he is now enveloped in his grandmother’s hanging robes,
[closeted](#) in the warmth of her lavender cupboard,
holding her candy-bearing purse,
safe and shaded from the other, [virile](#), boys.

The third one is a diva purse;
the shiny clutch—in its aristocratic inexpensiveness—
calling for all the looks in every room,
swallowing all attention,
this one wakes his aunt from her deep sleep
and apparels her with silks and face colors,

once again on the cusp of a grand performance night
that most men would ruminare in their dreams,
for sleeps and years to come
beside the pillows of blunt wives.

The woman who died yesterday on either of the streets
that form this pointy corner
might have been nothing of the sort,
or maybe all of these sorts woven together
in a fine exhilaration of being.

Either way, her physical remains,
denounced in public view,
are not to be forgotten
or pissed by stray dogs.

He gathers the three trophies with pious arms
Gently wraps them in his bright yellow scarf
and walks slowly home
to offer his husband this rare token
of street corner poetry

MERMAID, 91

1.

She was nineteen the night she gave birth to him
the border island welcoming the ampleness of fruit
a voice malted with miracle came by the sweat-tempered
bed to whisper something in her ear

unutterable, fell fast asleep, she can't remember nothing

The newborn's father, a captain on the great ship,
He'd met the previous spring with an angry south seas
whim

Up came the exotic wave like a giant unchaste tongue

She couldn't let her sorrow harm the child
she folded all the feeling neatly away and hid it in the
chest

He'd only just read the news that a baby, a boy by the
look of the piked belly,
was on the way. A son.
The ship emitted its final save our souls-or, please,
only the bodies-

the letter in his inside pocket, under the medal, wrapping
her picture tight

Not a great deal extraordinary, he seems to have been
thinking

The great war had plenty such occasions

The letter wet before the water came for it

Tonight another kind of wet

Xanthi takes off her soft black shoes

and places them with care by her side

The skin around her ankles, milky and thin as rice paper

A wee figure sitting calmly on the dock edge

Not one thing odd

The small harbor asleep, the memory lurks by

His first day at school, the pride behind his glasses

such a serious fine boy
Ready by her side whenever needed, until she became half
his height

And how he smiled when he got into navy school

All her attempts to inspire him a landlocked calling
baffled

A son ought to step up to his father's fearless steps
An army of angry waves couldn't have changed that smile

A breeze comes down from the pencil crest, a subtle
spinal drift

She's counted ninety-one summers, performed her grief in
all possible modes

—her mourning measured by dozens village eyes: and judged
impeccable—

The wooden chest got to treasure all petty feeling, all
acid rage

All desire

Her head uplooking

the heart blessing and brave to other people's [bliss](#)

2.

A silver palpitation flashes under her calf

Oh, fish

She doesn't bring them close to mouth, the nasty things

She starts unbuttoning the long black dress from bottom
to chin

Her sense of [duty](#) to remember's just expired

Her fingers ache, each joint carrying a different sort of
sting

Now, this might take a while

Reaching the chest, a brief moment to decide whether to
take off the pendant with his [face](#)

A hasty move, she hides it in the shoe

She needs to travel light

The husband first. That was unbearable enough, but this?

The whole island buzzing with bewilderment

And some relief

Not on our door

Until this too forgotten

She lets her mermaid white hair down
A bright spring morning glistens in the night for a
fraction of time
She hasn't cut it since; the knees get rather ticklish on
the back
*It's funny how in those days a woman, on an island of all
places, was not encouraged to learn how to swim*

Not that it would have made any difference
There is not one bone in her body willing to put up this
fight
Just that she's heard say how the reflexes take over if
you are a keen swimmer,
something about body memory, survival
-trivial things
Oh well, no worries there
an imperceptible girl smile

His bearing on the prow as he waved
half-man half-boy
The youngest captain on the island
His father's figure stitched on his face

She brings her hills together, a shapely tale forms
Right, this should do it
Same moves as every night
lies on her left, hands gently hug the core
She reaches for the bedside lamp.
(Not there: the only difference)
Looks up at milky ways unknown
Peacefully places her head on the vast liquid pillow

And lets go

3.

How odd
At such an age and never having been in an elevator.
What a marvelous thing, the descent

Also the twirling
The disassociated fluids in the hypothalamus
A flying-floating game

What an adventurous [event](#)!

Just as her toes touch the bottom she sees him clearly, a
bodylength away,
his good suit on
his full smile generously rays to the caresses of her
eyes

Dandle me, mommy

the ripple carries his slight inviting gesture

Seconds before the final breathful leaves the lungs
—the dizziness arrives, oh, such delightful lightness—
the nine abandons its position and rushes to rest,
with a conclusive urge, behind the ace

Her white gown uplifted

The hair turn fire red

They are both nineteen [at last](#)

Time to fall in love

**SIX. SUB-
VERT ME UP**

SPRINGTIME

Listen

My bowels have been dressed their butterfly wings
bright yellow, some black dots
They urge me to feast on fresh flowers

My head a clay pot of light
where your words swim and rest

My toes are growing tender leaves
their veins tickle as tiny industrious insects make their
way up on my thighs

My uterus a chubby bird
warm and free

Time to lose your marbles

And
Kiss me

for my lips are never softer than right after their stone
winter cusp has fallen off
under the eventful promise of spring

Yield.

This is much greater than your precious little self

MECHANICS

Mechanical things

That's what she likes

Drilling holes, assembling furniture,
untangling the tubes in the car engines

Things that make sense

Screwdrivers, hammers, huge magnets, pins

dealing with the innocence and straightforwardness of
numbers

Things she can trust

Her genuine inclination entirely geometrical,

the beauty of cogwheels

and orthodox [equations](#)

Instead she chose to live in words

Each one equally [precise and ambivalent](#)

—context, code, beholder—

No way of ever being sure about a thing

She speaks and reads and writes

Words

And holds herself constantly responsible for the

inescapable permanency of their effect,

fleeting as they may present themselves,

a stubborn witness to their devastating powers of
enchantment

She defiles them until all letters are disjointed and she

can charitably weave them back together

in new bright-white gauze

She blows into one until it's large enough to save her
from the roofs of burning buildings

She rubs many of them together until they liquefy and may
sit in for saliva when panicking on podiums

She spends her nights to build the nasty things up

In a 19th century's grandiose [construction](#) ethic

The one that re-arranged the then known world

She sees their handles, their density and volume,

She measures word perimeters and proper angles of

incidence

She sticks to the mechanics

And more often than not, usually after a parenthesis
or an unnecessary semicolon,

she's overwhelmed

The words make it their duty to escape her

She sets the ladder then, climbs up,

Straightens the crooked top shelf of her indoors
plantation

pushes a nail on the soft tractable wood

And starts again

So here we are

TUB

First the toes
Then the ankle
Then the calf
When the first leg is fully in
The other follows
Toes first
The buttocks then
The warmth around the back
Arms, breasts, the neck
And now let go
Who said that water was any less than fancier solutions:
liquid painkillers, insulin, sedatives or dope?
The days she can afford half an hour in the vacuum that
links intergalactic space to mother's womb
Her tongue can suddenly excavate a most precise narration
of the [self](#)

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

One fine winter day [she](#) just tripped.
It never occurs to you
that the person evolving beside you
—sometimes two steps ahead, sometimes behind,
in full view, a little blurred, or out of sight—
would one day be attacked.

Two months later her left hazel [eye](#) went blind
Never thought that the strong, fearless girl you've
watched so closely
would be randomly chosen to undergo
the quaintness of an obscure immune system
turning against itself in adolescent-like self-destruction

[MS](#) you were informed as if this is supposed to denote some
sort of vent
Mandatory Sickness, you start to think,
Missile Suction,
Motherfucking Sclerosis
in its Scornful Multiplicity

And then you go silent for months
to get better acquainted with the beast,
to wheedle them into a kinder abrasion

You push yourself to think back, real hard
—the diagnosis is fresh but the damage has been silently
working for many years—
when did it start? how can I help? what does it feel like?
You make a choice to leave the why unasked

You're out of courteous noble words: it's just plain
[wrong](#).
That the sharp eyes having snatched one too many toys from
your hands
over the years would now be termed of 'compromised vision'
The legs so fast in kicking and break-dancing and making

warrior love
would turn ten times heavier, twenty on a hard day, and
keep her tamed
Her hand, so vulnerable and feisty,
now imperceptibly slower in its response to affection
or to danger

You've always held this hand through hell and fire, big
[sisters](#) are all about picking younger hands,
they doltishly know not of much else

You walk and drive around praying to a new goddess,
[myelin](#),
the idiosyncratic lubricant that nests the transmission
of a feeling (alas)
between neighboring nervous cells

You were caught unaware that one day this never to be
seen essence would dully abandon its delicate,
once underestimated duty;
you think alternating prayer and cursing may in the end
work

You check the bottom of her foot as you exit the rented
room you're sharing for the summer
—notorious MS [fatigue](#) keeps her asleep till late,
her ebony wavy hair arranged on the white pillow in an
inviting vertigo swirl—
then bring your hand back in your other palm,
a consolation of the first one in its uncertainty as to
what portion of sensation has reached the other brain

And right before you slide shut the door behind you
She cracks half a mischievous smile, eyes closed
“All right!” I hear myself crying out
in a high-pitched voice that springs up from the [bowels](#)
of time
“it's still her.”

EVOL

She took her body off the market
it's been ten years or so
No noticeable change on it, maybe fewer tears

She can observe much clearer now
the movements of the [tide](#) of bodies
their sudden merging and collisions
their violent tearing apart
—tentatively, or for good

Sometimes she misses the smell of [raw](#) desire
Fresh flesh
Behind which lays no identity, only contingent
incarnations
Pumped with uncountable netrina of possibility
From orgasm to forever

This is goodbye then
to the intelligibility of sex
Love's washed it all away

**SEVEN. MI
ÚTERO ES
TU ÚTERO**

ONE^M

If I am One,
One should not attempt to write about mothers,
it is too futile a task,
them being the catalyst or the [antinomy](#),
often both,
that guides the writing hand.
Mothers should be dealt with in interior silence.
They irrevocably do write themselves through one's deeds
anyhow,
[One](#) weens.

WAITING ROOM

My mate has just given birth
They keep her in the recovery room until her [vitals](#) come
back
Her most vital part, the tiny elfish daughter,
lays under a lamp next-door

Fathers and sisters come in and out of the salmon-white
stripey door
Bridging the gap between 'family' and 'friends' with tiny
bits of rather useless information
We wait patiently outside, unable to cross the line that
leads to a city state
where kinship forges her dominion
where kinship is being irrevocably fabricated

I see them come out of there
thrilled, curious, anxious
to meet all the prerequisites
To fully [become](#)

All the eyes that exit the door are radiant with
achievement, and pride
Some with newborn love
Where do the other parents [exit](#) from?
The ones whose babies didn't make it?
All eyes here seem so successful in their task

Only hers are oddly hidden behind sunglasses
She comes out and stands tall and gracious
in her white airy clothes
Her mother has been sitting next to me all this time
I hadn't noticed the different kind of agony,
a type of [waiting](#) not to be shared with the purple-
balloon-holders and the beer-reeking granddads
The mother stands to support her child's pace, a bit
unsettled
the drugs coupled with loss
The woman blows her nose in one swift move
And thinks of the other delicate mucus blown out of her
in presto mode
All done in clinical respect and full free will

Yet still
This gendered space
oozing with hope and rites of passage
and lullaby-ridden tongues
notably hurts her

Not on the body
(the two sanitary towels she holds will prove to be more
than enough)
but on morale

The architecture of the space is meant to punish her
for recklessness
for unmotherability
—could it also be the sin of excessive desire?—
I see her walk this walk of timid shame
Through waves of gift-bearing formalities and
congratulatory calls
Each step somewhat more stable as she approaches
the sliding glass doors that keep the summer out

She squeezes her mother's hand
Who readily smiles back in complicit tenderness
And firmly marches into the fiery afternoon
That melts down every guilt

RESEARCHING GESTATION

A glance underwater
Tiny toes stretching out
in the soothing privilege of a municipal pool
Soft round bellies and stripy suits
All of them preschoolers, untainted by restriction
grasping the clumsy dives of light
How they chat
Their high pitch gets muffled and watered before it
reaches the far end of the pool
At the bottom of which I stand
Holding my breath
—goggles on—
Observing
Little girls waiting to blossom
Anything more miraculous than this?
Only in the last instance of the 60-minute slot do I take
my head out for a breath
And let my pupils manifest the shock
A dozen seniors!
Politely termed old ladies
[Dancing](#) like toddlers underwater
While heavily carrying their years above surface
I walk to the changing room with my eyes shut
I hold on to the playful toes, the sounds of whimsy
And head for the next interview
Ages, genders, ethnicities up-set
Everywhere around me people turn into babies,
toddlers,
tiny inscriptions of themselves
carried through complex
unexpected
variations of surrogacy

CESAREAN

Incision meant death

For the best part of human history at least

A cut

—be it by the wolf's teeth, a sharp stone or His anger—
penetrating all the layers of skin and flesh,
deep and exposing

Incision meant death

In the lacy condition of the miracle

it was the baby's duty to come out and be

All she had to do was accommodate,
to the best of her mundane intelligence,
and endure

It was only after 1794 when incision
her deep precise wounding

—in real life, not in mythology or oriental imaginary—
would start to be synonymous to life

A date is set, a frigid light is shed,
a calculated cut masterfully performed

And right there an incision becomes
enabling
if not of life
existence nonetheless

Thus Cesar got his bearings

S/M/OTHER

If m is to othering
What s is to smothering
This temporal mothering
s/m/Other me so.

**EIGHT. FOU-
CAULT GOT
IT WRONG
(THIS IS
IN FACT A
PIPE)**

OFFICE

I sit very still
on a white metal chair
in the middle of a rampant [Victorian](#) garden

Two male snakes, broad and thick and royal-looking
are mating on my lap
Their sleek bodies slowly escalating to my eye level as
they become one
A moist [braid](#), made up of pure muscle and desire

My eyes remain closed, I only hear their hissing

Right before climax I get suddenly scared
and hold my breath
Not to interrupt, or judge them

Thankfully a fin-de-siècle acrobat lands on my head
and tapes two origami wings on my back
So I escape

And I wake up
My baby daughters are sleeping on my thighs,
one on each
Over my chest lies open a book on same-sex desire
And my earl grey cup of tea beside me untouched
I gently put them all aside

[Dualism](#) over

Time to get to the office

SEASONING/ REASONING

What she remembers of that day is the thin thread of [sound](#) making its [arrow](#) journey to her ear as she was being told The eyes and forehead of the announcer needed say no more

Thus, she produced a bright [icy](#) helmet and put it on at once, before the actual words made it to the brain
A bright layer of frost between the hair bush and the scalp
to withhold,
to contain

Only a slight tilt of the head to the left,
as if to look away from a blinding light approaching in a hurry
No bursting into anything

Well into her seventh month
there were all sorts of preparations to attend to
Never had there been a mother so eager in the task
—the room, the drugs, the compilation of songs, the
bedhead lucky charms, oh, mainly those.
She gave an outstanding birth, all measurements a
reassuring [average](#),
no pain or rupture of any apparent sort,
surrounded by dear friends and her two teenage brothers,
breathtaking in their awkwardness to fill in all the
gaps.

The baby grew stronger in no time.
She put her guard down from time to time to wholly witness
his fascinating addition to odorless humankind
—the helmet would melt and dribble behind the ears well
into her neck bone line—
and faultless Mrs Time never ceased to count a funky
beat.

This morning,
three years to the day,
she woke up before dawn,
put on her white trousers with the tunik from Tunisia
and prepared two large portions of English breakfast,
with real lard, like the ones they used to have in Dorset
seaside,
the winter that the glare of his front laughing teeth
made the ordeal of being not only bearable,
but welcome altogether.

Before removing the sausages and pot of beans from the
stove
she climbs on the wooden stool
and reaches the little vase behind the rosemary and the
oregano,
takes a whiff upon opening the lid
and sprinkles a couple of pinches on the key ingredients
of the royal breakfast.

“There is no chance he felt a moment of pain, so immediate
was the crash”, pointed out the coroner.
No pain, she now can strugglingly accept.
But fear?
She places the ceramic vase back on the top cupboard, in
the quiet.

She takes a seat on the set table,
tilts her head on the right side,
the fully melted [casque](#) now trickling down her spine
—same route as his midnight kisses

Her shoulders shake in silent rhythmic sympathy only for
a few seconds
Today she is allowed to cry
She does, then takes a bite and chews her way into a
wide, full smile.

Each year on this day she may perform the [pain](#)
the canned emotion is let out
and feed the feeling with a special treat,
nobly seasoned with a precious secret ingredient:
the exuberant taste event of her dear man’s ashes.

INSTITUTION- ANALYZED

Read, dear
Read and learn
You'll only know about them
What I've chosen to tell you
an anthropography that seemingly amounts to a set of
[information](#)—not a contingency
Painting a picture of a pipe that seems to be the only
one standing to smoke
Do you ever ask what I've been doing to your emotional
inventory
when laying truths, and facts, and complex illegible
pseudo-academic riddles?
If in representation we try [restore](#) the other to herself,
paddling through overlapping traditional embroideries of
self-subjugation
Let us at least acknowledge
We are the helpless captives of our pre-linguistic
patterns of affection
the nape of our pen eternally dipped in pre-logic ink
Let us not pretend that
the epistemic misalignmenet of their births—ours and the
other's—
is nothing other than chance
ratified as wisdom
by this or the other [institution](#)

NINE. HORMONAL PANIC ATTACKS

THERAP-I

There is a deep dark [well](#)
I often climb down
I cannot see the light from in there
Still I keep climbing until I reach the ground

You wouldn't know but tunnels are my greatest fear

Cracks on the surface all around release my every awful
thought
The air is moist from memories breathe out
And all my dead, even if they are not,
each have a stone
-no [permit](#) asked-
they call their own

At first I used to sit down on the moist earth
My [backbone](#) against the rough wall,
fingers constricted
My feet most uncomfortable
-bugs are another small concern, frightwise, you see-

Awkward, unwilling and bereft
As if dropped there from an enemy airplane
I'd stay for months, basic supplies, no amenities
but a comfy [armchair](#), how very odd, right in the middle

I daren't come close
Such comfort always finds a way to bite you back

I reckoned that seeing only with my hands
would cause me danger
Sure that my memory held such evil I'd erupt

Oh, just resist

Yet through the rigid repetition I got to see
the heavy bombing was mostly done outside
and my attire had gotten somehow strong
-bones, hair, kidneys, even heart-
there came days that I longed to spend some time in the
quiet

And thus five years went by

Tuesday at twelve the well flat door appears
Put on my corduroy overalls, a cup of tea
And I fall willingly,
not without some self-indulgence,
right in the armchair warmth
into the universe
of eunuch [cyclops](#) and reckless charmer dads
where size and age flip over and get dud

I reach out then
I fumble freely,
the lace-n-iron gloves I knitted are back on
Whatever may appear I can caressingly punch, or vice
versa

Five hundred hours
I still find hidden wonders,
corners I didn't know were there
joys unseen

After the fifty-minute slot,
sometimes lasting for a month
others a 'tic'
I get to keep
the shimmering out of the creaking shadows
celestial music [out](#) of the beastly roars

The cost is tiddley to climb up
—some mud under the nails,
few scratches here and there—
No matter how dim and long my own vertical tunnel
I eagerly go
And always wage half a glance behind before I leave
Cause now I know

No matter how it hurts
I've trailed my way out so many Tuesdays

*A deep black well, one of my dearest places—who would
have known?*

I eagerly go
I give another pull

Cause when back up

I dare be in full

THE CAT AND THE WORLD

One autumn afternoon I found myself
happily living with a cat
I've been a dogs' person all my life
Is it the animal kingdom or myself that took a [leap](#)?

UNDONE

At the age of forty-one she eventually came undone

She had witnessed too much
And read too much
And done so too intently
That minor constant distress suffered
from time to time
finally amounted to a [permanent](#) condition
“A keen awareness of the absurdity of life”
as later, poetically, diagnosed
and all the little pieces that held the self together
came crumbling down at once.

She couldn't go from one place to the next without a
strenuous effort to assemble their various parts
and consciously coordinate their nervous interlinkings,
hiding the exposed lack of doer behind the deed

The main tear was in the middle
resulting to a [babushka](#) effect
with streams of blue ink dripping in lieu of blood through
all the horizontal cuts
all the way in
to her core miniscule hand-painted wooden doll

The waist-up self would take up all the thinking,
the subtle orchestration of function upon which the reign
of thought is built
The waist-down, overpowered by an instinctive rebellion
to all of the above,
would get excited by all the wrong and inappropriate
stimulations,
would run away from over-interpretations,
fleeting the scenes
of criminal settlements for less

At first she took it for a passing stage,
a chapter break of hormonal [discontent](#)

But as the feet kept on pursuing abrupt directions
—calling the arms, and chest and ears to an unholy

coalition against vile [rationality](#)–
she just gave in.

She felt the comfort of the white blouses
would keep her calm at night,
when dreams become more real than she could bear
Not so.

Four months later,
while exiting a shabby gate,
she sure could tell that all the pieces had been rabbeted
together around a common piece of rope
–same one used by laymen for carrying out [menial](#) dirty
tasks–

And thus she has been living ever since
At the end of this unsavory rugged rope.

TEN. DEATH COMES KNOCKING

BROTHER

Four chairs in a row
Beautifully arranged with their front legs at the edge of
the abyss
Upon which his right [leg](#) will henceforth be left hanging

He feels the pressure of his flowing blood making its way
to his nose and ears every other second
A circular re-sentencing to guilt
for being warm and rose-cheeked
against his better judgment
Alive
against all odds

His mother on the first brown chair
She's been undressed out of her body
and left it sitting upright while she has taken a
comforting [leap](#) on the freshly opened gorge
—Don't mind me. Nothing will ever bother me again.

His father next,
still wrapped in the bedazzlement that men,
ignorant to the violence of birth,
bear for finite matters

Right next his mother's mother,
who's had to interrupt her calm descent to a blissful
ending
cause she got called back into the barracks
to hold her daughter's falling hair
Above the abyss

The fourth chair is his
who doesn't dare move
Cause even the slightest gesture would be a betrayful
affirmation of [ability](#)

To breathe, and be
and shamelessly claim a future
A mockingbird in the auspicious land
of bodies non-broken,
bodies-non refrigerated,

bodies non-blue

A strong young man
destined to be a glorious thinker, a caring father, a
lover that lends to the act of merging
his last commanding cell

This afternoon, he sits there still
and tries to hide the single vesicle of relief
emerging from the far depth of his lake of sorrow
As he is bidding this last and grim farewell

[Brother](#) no more
but to his own self

NEVER MEET YOUR HEROES

If you can help it, please follow the title
So very true of art
and politics
and ~~ouch~~ the academia

MR K.

departure 27/7/19

I'll sneak into your [room](#) tonight
Wearing my floral dress, the one we bought last spring
You'll nod an unnoticeable nod with your eyes closed
and your breathing will accelerate,
your heart rate gone upbeat

Please leave a blipping light on so I can see
cause I want to sit beside your head,
scoot the [angel](#) gently aside,
hold your hand in mine, all germs and life,
and tell you about our day.
The children's silly fights, the summer heat
—the one reported on the news, the true one felt—
the progress of my silly book.
For lunch we [stuffed tomatoes](#),
your ring on mum's middle finger, stuffing with such
determination, tearing the tender vegetables apart

I will pretend not to notice the octopus of tubes
springing out of your lean, defenseless body
—I know how you detest such tasteless [infirmities](#)—
I'll take a seat with my back to the silver grey sign
Intense: for the expensive air-conditioning
Care: for the young man who bosses your limbs around on
the hour

She is so sorry she can't come
Her broken leg won't let her up before September
She said to kiss you
[once](#)

I'll light a birthday candle
right under the no smoking/fire hazard
so you can blow it off right now—all right, I'll give a
blow, too—
No reason for you to wait impatiently another whole month
And then I'll light a fag

She'll never visit you with flowers as you know,
never [forget](#) you either

Your wrist will slightly move,
I'll take it to be our long agreed upon signal
Me and the angel will get up,
both shy,
another random [reflex](#) will cause your face to smile

I'll hold the bottom of your head in my right hand
-it will feel every bit like the shell of the sea turtle
eggs we saved that summer-
[lest](#) you fall,
and sing you a trusted tune

And when you 're ready
-my fingers will be able to tell,
the wool brain beneath them bidding subtly farewell-

I'll simply kick the plug out
and send you off
to [merciful](#) un-medicated silence

And night,
and life
-how cruel an observation-
will not have missed a beat

MAN ON BENCH

He used to have a gender,
a kinship [affiliation](#),
a societal membership,
small islands of sanity to help him swim through the
irrational beauty of it all.

I pass by his bench at ten in the morning while he is
asleep
and inhale deeply on the alcohol and concentrated dust
upon his garments.

There used to be digits and titles and degrees,
corresponding to his various capacities.

A thin newspaper shuffles under his right shoe, under a
minor stretch

He used to have possessions to validate his multiple
identities, his needs and preferences,
dress codes to observe his shifting moods.
And there used to be others around him

Holding and grabbing and tickling him,
pushing and verifying that there he has,
discernable in his bodily limitations,
in all his palpitating [entirety](#).

I dare not touch his forehead, and so I squeeze my fingers
in the soft and warm pocket of my coat,
Nor give him money or food or paper and a pen.

As such impulses on my part
would at best be a jeering reminder
of numbers, essences, and personhoods
that once were

As such an act would be exposed for its impudent posture

the very sequent minute
So I will open the door to my car,
turn on the music,
and go through all the blessed figures in my life
2 kids
1 sibling
1 parent still alive
1 partner for life
200 clothes
1.200 euros
5 million memories
[some](#) hope.

ZIG ZAC

beaten to death
help yourselves to a fresh bite
eaten to death
have a front row seat

switch on all [devices](#)
the monster has entered the gates
it' s gone viral
it's just pierced our pores and no longer sleeps within
share

count from one
to
ten
to death

MY LITTLE COUSIN

for Dina, aged 49

There is a simple truth, I tell you
when upon the frothy bed of the one about to sail
when stroking their index with your blue rubber glove
and watching their [serene chest](#) performing a mechanically-
supported up and down

It's shameful
as truths sometimes are
Wish you could help it
but you can't

It's the wild joy making its journey
through the molecules of air to your lungs
thousands of oxygen-coated bits of joy
swashing their ceremonial [gongs](#)
as you exhale a blessed hallelujah
—unindexed by all faiths—
that you're still here,
breathing, all on your own,
and with this tritest of functions,
keeping two worlds apart.

LIST OF IN- SINU- ATIONS

All visual and aural insinuations have been digitally crafted by the author unless stated otherwise.

ONE. In the beginning there was chaos. Then desire.

discourse

Body carrying excerpt from: Foucault, M. (1971). *L'ordre du discours*. Paris: Gallimard.

specks

Visual comment that juxtaposes French philosopher Michel Foucault to French physicist Léon Foucault.

anchor

Layne, B., & Tóibín, C. (2018). Colm Tóibín: The Anchored Imagination of the Biographical Novel. *Éire-Ireland*, 53(1), 150-166.

rolling

Alice in Wonderland (1903) - Lewis Carroll, BFI National Archive (downloaded from [here](#))

ever

Αποδομητικά Πουλιιά [Deconstructive Birds], song by Opera Chaotique (downloaded from [here](#))

wavying skirt

Scherzo di Follia, Virginia Verasis Countess of Castiglione (1863 - 1866) Musée d'Orsay (downloaded from [here](#))

neighbor's

merging of images: female body (Photo by [Ivan Stern](#) on [Unsplash](#)) with city map.

cutting

Photograph of author's hand with cut, quote from Maya Angelou.

unpleasant

McLean, A., & Leibing, A. (Eds.). (2008). *The Shadow Side of Fieldwork: Exploring the Blurred Borders Between Ethnography and Life*. John Wiley & Sons. (full text downloaded from [here](#))

at all

Μην Ξεχνάς (Ντίνος Χριστιανόπουλος, από τη συλλογή Το κορμί και το σαράκι) by Το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής (downloaded from [here](#))

[neck](#)

Michel Foucault quote on human neck (Photo by [Nsey Benajah](#) on [Unsplash](#))

[clay](#)

From author's dream diary (entry 13.02.2012)

[book](#)

author on/as Foucault's tooth

[kind](#)

Note on the book Macey, D. (2019). *The Lives of Michel Foucault*. Verso Books.

TWO. DaddyLand

[chambers](#)

View of the interior of Cavafy's flat, Alexandria, photo by Apostolos Ververis (doi: <https://cavafy.onassis.org/object/3szz-hnmm-e8s5/>)

[association](#)

Hollway, W. & Jefferson, T. (2008). The free association narrative interview method. In: L. Given, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (pp. 296-315). California: Sage.

[tender](#)

my/her hand (1978), photograph of author's hand at the age of 19 months.

[shoulder](#)

Visual rendering of the poem 'Touch' by Octavio Paz.

[excess](#)

Digital collage of the faces and the last email between the author and Irvin Yalom (November 2020).

[cabinet](#)

Zytaruk, M. (2011). Cabinets of Curiosities and the Organization of Knowledge. *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 80(1), 1-23.

[absence](#)

Recurring dream from author's dream diary (early February 2012)

[Guido](#)

Digital comment-sketch.

[poultry](#)

Digital collage with quote by Julia Child.

[folds](#)

Print screen from Irvin Yalom's *Becoming Myself* (2017).

[cardinal](#)

A pentagram of birds, 6.35 a.m. Photo by author's dog.

[frame](#)

Photo by [Daniel Fazio](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[ashtrays](#)

Canniford, R., Riach, K., & Hill, T. (2018). Nosenography: How smell constitutes meaning, identity and temporal experience in spatial assemblages. *Marketing Theory*, 18(2), 234-248.

[one-way](#)

Photo of my desk and my tea; one of author's favorite reads.

[view-master](#)

Photo of 1980s viewmaster. Credits unknown.

[licks](#)

Art Licks: platform that supports artists, curators & project spaces throughout the UK (link [here](#))

[darling](#)

His smell, L'Eau d'Issey, Issey Miyake.

[exposed](#)

Digital collage of skype psychotherapy sessions (2015-2019).

[sink](#)

Daddy, You're Not Watching Me, by Chilly Gonzales & Jarvis Cocker, track 11 on album Room 29.

[sight](#)

Collage of anna and her surrogate father, CP Cavafy.

THREE. Take it like a woman

[vile](#)

Word analysis by Google translate.

[duckling](#)

Sounds of the forest, Auditory project (link [here](#))

[dreamless](#)

The Waste Land, by T.S. Eliot (full text [here](#))

[organ](#)

Dream by author, dreamt on 24.02.2012

[line](#)

Line of my beloved women anthropologists. Print screen series from Wikipedia (summer 2020)

[who](#)

Collage of 1) Installation view of Betty Tompkins, WOMEN Words, Phrases, and Stories at The FLAG Art Foundation, 2016. Photography by Genevieve Hanson, ArtEcho LLC, DOI and 2) mobile phone selfie

[where](#)

Mixed timeline 'a story of my research interests'

[how](#)

Thousand Violins, The Tiger Lillies (link [here](#))

[what](#)

Digital collage

[HE](#)

Hurt, by Johnny Cash (link [here](#))

[capsized](#)

Collage made from book covers of Judith Butler's Bodies that Matter (in English, Turkish and Spanish).

FOUR. Of daughters and other paradoxes

[granite](#)

Digital collage of a smile

[pending](#)

Exhibition 'Family matters: How the 20th century changed family life', Europeana (link [here](#))

[two](#)

Dream in 23 languages. Dreamt by the author in spring 2011

[absence](#)

Digital network-theory-driven collage

[ancestor](#)

Scheffler, H. W., Gray, R. F., Leach, E., & Plotnicov, L. (1966). Ancestor Worship in Anthropology: or, Observations on Descent and Descent Groups. *Current Anthropology*, 7(5), 541-551.

[ship](#)

Carruth, H. (1985). The Ship [Poem]. *The Sewanee Review*, 93(1), 121-123.

[exactitude](#)

Digital collage 'genealogies of exactitude'

[iron](#)

«Μάγισσα μανούλα» του Τζίμη Πανούση. Τραγούδι: Δέσποινα Αποστολίδου, Ενορχήστρωση: Ορέστης Πλακίδης

[invisible](#)

Medical examination, Photo from canva.com image gallery.

[bone](#)

Excerpt from Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1999, p. 312-3) placed on human figure.

[gaze](#)

The motherhood archive, A film by Irene Lusztig (2013) trailer (link here)

[fur](#)

Tereza's self depiction

[veiny](#)

Faircloth, C. (2009). Mothering as Identity-Work: Long-Term Breastfeeding and Intensive Motherhood. *Anthropology News*, 50(2), 15-17.

[witness](#)

Sketch by Frida Kagiali, 2020

[ranches](#)

Digital collage of clinic and ranch

[simulacrum](#)

Jean Baudrillard on mammography

[tightrope](#)

Rope, short film. Directed by Theodore Gersten. Written by and starring Kres Mersk (link [here](#))

[nows](#)

Author's astrological birth chart

[crack](#)

My Demons - Starset [F's favorite song, 2020] (link [here](#))

[shell](#)

Hayden, C. P. (1995). Gender, genetics, and generation: Reformulating biology in lesbian kinship. *Cultural Anthropology*, 10(1), 41-63.

[puncture](#)

membrane puncture (in Polish)

[timely](#)

Venetia Kantsa's bibliographical reference in the form of visual poetry

[no](#)

Ain't Got No, I Got Life - Nina Simone (link [here](#))

[red shiny dot](#)

Early summer day's map

[salty](#)

Clam soup recipe (link [here](#))

[grand](#)

Virtual tour of the British Museum (link [here](#))

[story](#)

Lamma bada, Despina Apostolidou (permitted from performer, link [here](#))

[plz](#)

Digital collage

[faking](#)

Mythologies, by Roland Barthes (full text link [here](#))

FIVE. Soft-edged fairytales

[apocalyptic](#)

Book cover from Severino, C. C. (2019). *Hacia el giro corporal en la antropología visual: imágenes, sentidos y corporalidades en la Colombia contemporánea*. Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Centro de Estudios Sociales, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas Sede Bogotá.

[ape](#)

Dream from author's dream diary; dreamt at 29/8/2012

[spongy](#)

Cleopatra's face, made spongy by the author

[prophets](#)

Article 'Abandoned Suitcases Reveal Private Lives of Insane Asylum Patients' (link [here](#))

[boots](#)

Photo by [Isabella and Louisa Fischer](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[third](#)

Wright, C. (1998). The third subject: Perspectives on visual anthropology. *Anthropology Today*, 14(4), 16-22.

[shaft](#)

Archive of forgotten memories (link [here](#))

[eruptions](#)

Photo by [Cristian Newman](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[devotion](#)

Chore score; composed, arranged and performed by the author

[suffer](#)

Susan Sontag's quote

[vessels](#)

Kinkaid, E. (2020). What's the Use? On the Uses of Use by Sara Ahmed. *Feminist Formations*, 32(2), 264-267.

[Time](#)

Lovers are Strangers, by Michelle Gurevich (link [here](#))

[transcendence](#)

Lingua Franca Ensemble, 19 Steps of Separation (downloaded from [here](#))

[sis](#)

My sister

[nose](#)

now machines learn to smell (link [here](#))

[closeted](#)

Cleopatra's note, facebook post, 2015

[virile](#)

Robert Mapplethorpe, Phillip, 1979 (link [here](#))

[ruminare](#)

Poems from England, Ruminare blog (link [here](#))

[pious](#)

Photo by [Karsten Winegeart](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[unutterable](#)

Photo by the author on her 43rd birthday

[letter](#)

online form for requesting tangibility

[wet](#)

Photo by [Johann AKA](#) on [Unsplash](#), Croatia

[bliss](#)

A page from the author's childhood book «Η κοινότητα της Βατομουριάς»

[duty](#)

Molesworth, H. (2000). House work and art work. *October*, 92, 71-97.

[face](#)

Short video shuffle; all photos from Despoina Apostolidou (all rights reserved)

[girl](#)

Project 'A cyberroom of our own' (link [here](#))

[event](#)

Banoptikon videogame project, Personal Cinema & Collaborators (link [here](#))

[at last](#)

Bird Guhl, by Antony & The Johnsons, Album Bird Guhl (link [here](#))

SIX. Subvert me up

[cusp](#)

Photo by [Mimi Stofle](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[equations](#) [leads to two links: [equ](#) - [ations](#)]

1. Daddy, by Sylvia Plath (embedded on unsolvable equation proposed

by the author)

2. Sound collage (original sounds downloaded from [here](#))

[precise and ambivalent](#)

Digital self-portrait

[construction](#)

A collective work (in Greek) produced by the 17 participants in the community course on intersectionality (which took place February-June 2019), published as an open-access e-book by the Feminist Autonomous Centre for research (2019). (link [here](#))

[self](#)

Photo collage (original photos by Despoina Apostolidou)

[she](#)

Book cover of Weston, K. (1996). *Render Me, Gender Me: Lesbians Talk Sex, Class, Color*. New York: Columbia University Press.

[eye](#)

Sketch by Frida Kagiali

[MS](#)

Multiple sclerosis collage

[wrong](#)

piano breaking (downloaded from [here](#))

[sisters](#)

sretsis collage

[myelin](#)

Victory by myelin

[fatigue](#)

Photo by [Matt Seymour](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[bowels](#)

Painting study by Frida Kagiali

[tide](#)

David Bowie, Wild Is The Wind (link [here](#))

[raw](#)

Title hanging (2020), *Feministiq* 3, Anna Apostolidou (link [here](#))

SEVEN. Mi útero es tu útero

[antinomy](#)

Three academic papers on surrogate motherhood

[One](#)

Fictionalism in mathematics (source [here](#))

[vitals](#)

Infographic with vital information

[become](#)

Kolryri, C. (2020). The Body Without Organs in Schizoanalysis. *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, 14(3), 481-506.

[exit](#)

flatline sound (downloaded from [here](#))

[waiting](#)

Photo by [Loren Joseph](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[architecture](#)

Collage (original photos by [Ricardo Gomez Angel](#) on [Unsplash](#) and by [ThisisEngineering RAEng](#) on [Unsplash](#))

[guilt](#)

Bright Red - Laurie Anderson (link [here](#))

[Dancing](#)

Black and white video of interpretive dance (link [here](#))

[Incision](#)

Image-text merging (Photo by [Amit Gaur](#) on [Unsplash](#)) (poem source [here](#))

[1794](#)

The Embryo project Encyclopedia, Entry: Jesse Bennett (1769-1842) (link [here](#))

[s/m/other](#)

Digital ethnographic artefact, Ethnography and/as hypertext fiction (enter [here](#))

EIGHT. Foucault got it wrong (this is in fact a pipe)

[Victorian](#)

Google map street view a la Magritte ([image](#) crop from Twitter); building inhabited by the author

[braid](#)

Collage; original photo by [Gift Habeshaw](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[Dualism](#)

Digital collage emerging from Magritte' 'The treachery of images'

[sound](#)

Papaeti, A. (2020). On Music, Torture and Detention: Reflections on Issues of Research and Discipline. *Transposition. Musique et Sciences Sociales*, (Hors-série 2).

[arrow](#)

Foucault, M. (1983). *This is not a pipe* (No. 24). University of California Press.

[icy](#)

teeth chatter (downloaded from [here](#))

[average](#)

Digital collage; arranged by Frida Kagiali on her mom's phone

[casque](#)

Data garden project (link [here](#))

[pain](#)

Tango till they're sore, by Tom Waits (downloaded from [here](#))

[information](#)

Sacks, O. (1995). *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales*. New York: Alfreda Knopf.

[restore](#)

Self-portrait; afflicted by the author

[institution](#)

Photo by [Miguel Á. Padriñán](#) from [Pexels](#)

NINE. Hormonal panic attacks

[well](#)

Digital collage

[permit](#)

Cover and contents of book Remaking memory

[backbone](#)

The Backbone Flute, by Vladimir Mayakovsky (copied from [here](#))

[armchair](#)

Strathern, M. (1987). The limits of auto-anthropology. *Anthropology at Home*, 16-37. (downloaded from [here](#))

[cyclops](#)

Queer character form Onward (picture downloaded from [here](#))

[out](#)

Kleopatra Vagia – Şeker Oğlan (downloaded from [here](#))

[in full](#)

Visual recommendation to read: Buch, E. D. (2015). Anthropology of aging and care. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 44, 277-293.

[leap](#)

Fassin, D. (2014). True life, real lives: Revisiting the boundaries between ethnography and fiction. *American Ethnologist*, 41(1), 40-55.

[permanent](#)

From the author's dream diary; dreamt on 4/10/2015

[babushka](#)

Buranovskiye Babushki – Party For Everybody (Russia) 2012 Eurovision Song Contest (link [here](#))

[discontent](#)

Zembekiko, Sotiria Belloy & Dionysis Savvopoulos (link [here](#))

[rationality](#)

Leibing, A., & Cohen, L. (2006). *Thinking about Dementia: Culture, Loss, and the Anthropology of Senility*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

[menial](#)

Definition from Thesaurus.plus

TEN. Death comes knocking

[leg](#)

Anna's legs in sawing

[leap](#)

Athanasios, A. (2005). Reflections on the politics of mourning: Feminist ethics and politics in the age of empire. *Historiein*, 5, 40-57.

[ability](#)

Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art" from *The Complete Poems 1926-1979*.

[Brother](#)

Photo by [Charles Deluvio](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[ouch](#)

Small ad when you can't make rent

[room](#)

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929)

[angel](#)

Poster of *Der Himmel über Berlin* (Wings of Desire) by Wim Wenders (1987) (link [here](#)).

[stuffed tomatoes](#)

Recipe from myGreekdish (link [here](#))

[infirmities](#)

machine breathing (in loop) (original sound downloaded from [here](#))

[once](#)

Falling Slowly, by Glen Hansard, Marketa Irglova (downloaded from [here](#))

[forget](#)

Book cover of Papalías, P. (2005). *Genres of Recollection: Archival Poetics and Modern Greece*. Springer.

[reflex](#)

My hand

[lest](#)

Souls in Other Selves, and the Immortality of the Body, lecture by M. Strathern, 6/18/2018 (link [here](#))

[merciful](#)

Photo by [Pablo Pardo Chuliá](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[affiliation](#)

"Do not go gentle into that good night", by Dylan Thomas (read by Sir

Anthony Hopkins) (link [here](#))

[entirety](#)

From the author's dream diary; dreamt on 14/6/14

[some](#)

Photo by [Peng Yang](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[devices](#)

Video by [Александр Копейкин](#) from [Pixabay](#)

[serene chest](#)

Harris Lambrakis Quartet - Myrto (link [here](#))

[gongs](#)

Note by Fridaki

ZERO.
OUTRO.
INTRODUC-
TION BY WAY
OF CONCLU-
SION

A post-modern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect. It is, in a word, poetry—not in its textual form, but in its return to the original context and function of poetry, which by means of its performative break with everyday speech, evoked memories of the ethos of community and thereby provoked hearers to act ethically.

—Stephen A. Tyler, *Post-modern Ethnography*

Why is an introduction in order? A bit of background

This introduction is an epistemological remnant; hence its placement as a supplementary outro here. It comes from the place from which I myself come: the kernel of book-centered academic cultures of the 20th century. It seeks to explain away a process of digital writing, which is intended to produce contrasting understandings of anthropological knowledge, while the author would rather leave the experience of multimodal poetry generate by itself the immersive effects it wishes to ignite.

The book appears to be a poetry collection that is based on auto-ethnographic observation. However, it stems from, and incorporates, various elements of current theoretical discussions in a multimedia format. It employs digital affordances in order to address textuality differently and implements the verse with visual argumentation; sonic engagement of the reader; insinuation and irony as key feminist writing principles that take, here, the form of hyperlinks. Thus, if it is to venture into a “performative break with everyday speech”—in Tyler’s terms—then poetry ought to be left alone to provide context and function without further explication.

I sincerely wish I was able to resist having to explain myself, to ‘come clean’ as an experimental anthropologist and simply deliver this unorthodox theoretical (?) text in the form that engulfs its very argument. Nonetheless, it appears that at a transitional historical time when

the controversial academic codes of the emergent digital humanities are not (yet?) widely acknowledged and shared, some justification is indeed in order. As a way to soften the effects and gravity of this justification, I have chosen to place this discussion at the end of the book so as not to overshadow the centrality of the autoethnographic account.

The writing form that the book supports is a move away from exhaustive explanation, annotation, and bibliographical referencing—an evocation of several reading modalities that support sensory and aesthetic identifications with the theoretical ideas and ethnographic experience it illustrates. It subtly posits that visual-sonic gestures as affective monologue can work in a complementary way with what we are accustomed to view as ‘theory’ and engage wider audiences in the reading of ethnography, in unprecedented ways. If a positionality is to be inhabited in crafting such a text, this would occupy the slim land at the intersection of four malleable rivers: design anthropology, autoethnography, feminist scholarship, and the digital turn. All four are hard to pin down and define, with such queer and liberating qualities I have found hard to either exhaustively detail or resist. So, this outro sets out to do just that: to briefly identify the premises of multimodal poetry and inscribe it in the writing repertoire of contemporary anthropology.

My initial urge to produce such a book chronologically precedes the practical ability to write in this manner. My concern stemmed from the observation back in the late 1990s, when I began studying anthropology, that no writing modality has ever been sufficient in itself. Elegant theoretical proclamations about the purpose and nature of ethnography kept falling short when finally confronted with the actual deed of writing the other. When, a few years later, I was faced with ethical issues of writing ethnography myself, I grew gradually uncomfortable with the limited repertoire available for conveying anthropological knowledge.

This project, in particular, brought with it the same old ruminations along with a fresh set of options. An academic paper about writing experimentation would be a contradiction in terms. An unsupported poetry collection would be identified as nothing different to ‘art’ (and not

a very good one at that). A navigation through various links and images would probably amount to a digital installation missing the necessary context and inner connections that would grant it the status of ethnography. Once this became allowed by current narrative tools and environments, I decided merging it all was worth a try. Given recent technological affordances, this book is an innovative attempt towards this under-represented and under-published direction, in accordance with an evident shift in the humanities and social sciences towards acknowledging emerging readerships and supporting experimentation vis-à-vis writing tropes.

So, the experiment went like this. I started taking notes of self-observation in 2006, when Tereza was born and many of the constitutive parts of my mental and corporeal experience were largely destabilized. The autoethnographic process took many turns and was full of gaps and intense periods of productivity—but it never stopped. Thoughts, references, books, songs and films were collected, along with my research journals (alternating four major research areas on which I have focused throughout the years); my dream diary (some 210 pages long); photos, ideas, and fears; breakthroughs and frustrated thoughts. Then, suddenly, in 2018, after experiencing major discontent with academic writing and the extreme limitations that the academic text posed in conveying the various ‘fields’ in my work and my experience, poems started to emerge—as if out of nowhere—containing concentrated information of what at first seemed like scattered outbreaks and soon (within roughly a year) took the form of distinctive themes or cycles of specific interest. I timidly shared some of them with a handful of persons I trusted at the time and was rather amazed to witness the various effects that these texts had on other people. This is when a vague desire started to become a possibility: what if I placed the collected autoethnographic material inside these poems? What if this staging of diverse auto/ethnographic material could be an analytic contribution to current anthropology and, at the same time, a deep sigh of relief?

The product of the period that followed was a rather overloaded text with hundreds of links and many more poems

than the ones included in the collection onscreen/on the page. As it so happens in 'conventional' ethnography, most of the 'evidence' didn't make it to the final text. I left out what seemed extremely hard to grasp or unrelated to the other pieces of work in the same chapter. I chose not to include material that was compromising for loved ones or research interlocutors. Many pages from this introduction were also tossed away, in a hard bet to keep this book/artefact actually accessible, easy to read, and as light and theory-free (in terms of jargon and standard referencing) as possible. What finally remained in the present artefact maintained its original form: i.e., the dreams and notes are presented uncut, just like they were in the first take, as are the pictures or the sounds recorded (sometimes the words have been rewritten on paper or on a word processor in order to be easier to read, although in this way they have lost a considerable chunk of their scribble character). In any case, an exhaustive presentation is the opposite of the attempt I am making in refining ethnographic meaning in abstract language and multimodal narration, so the largest part of documentation/information ultimately fell outside the final draft.

In this respect, this work was no different than other texts, theses, books and articles I have shared with readers in the past. What I believe needs to be noted, however, is that in this case, each piece of evidence, despite its often abstract nature, has for me a very traceable root and follows a very specific route for it to enter a poem or a hyperlink. But given the centrifugal, non-linear and largely speculative quality of the artefact's constitutive parts, what is theoretically or emotionally apparent to the end reader/user/listener/participant is something that cannot be guaranteed or safeguarded but to a very minimal extent.

Serving the implicit genre of poetic autoethnography, I tried to allow for sufficient stimulus for the word or concept to function in my own imagined-desired-manner. Some links refute the content of the word they accompany, others play with the word's placement in the text, some support and intensify the meaning attributed to it. There is a very

specific and highly personal trail of thought that has led to the selection of words, the production of the multimedia content and the assemblage of various sources, but the intention of this discussion is not to resolve doubt and explain complexity out of ethnographic meaning—quite the contrary. Therefore, it is up to the reading routes, choices and modalities of each visitor as to how she is going to approach the poems, the underlined words, the collection of supporting evidence or the chronology implied in the chapters of the unfolded autoethnography. In my view, this is the limit of authorship, after which I am somewhat obliged to let go and trust that the fragile multilayered narrative will perform an effect, if not equivalent to my own initial trigger, then maybe at least engaging enough.

To that end, the content engulfed in the hyperlinks is inherently dynamic, which means that it may change from time to time, rendering the core text open to different readings over time and allowing the author(s in me) to maintain an open dialogue with the material and the visitor-reader, as well as ‘tamper’ with the ideas and abandon the very idea of a closed, finished, final ‘text’. I find that this malleability, inherent in feminist writing as well as in the anthropological sensibility of multiple and contrasting readings of social reality, is made possible through digital annotation and multimedia experimental writing, for which I have become increasingly grateful. Nevertheless, this stance inevitably encompasses the instability of the text in two ways and the reader needs to be informed for this programmatic gesture: first, the ability to periodically change the content of the links and perpetually re-create the underlying layer of information is offered as a playful and dynamic way to (re)layer an initial text and comment on the nature of meaning to subtly change with each new visit. Secondly, by acknowledging the malleable and transitional character of the world wide web and leaving room for the possibility that after a certain period some links may cease to be functional or, even lead to different sets of information, we are entering an era when control is willfully surrendered in favor of understandings of networked knowledge, connectivist communities and emergent

ways of un-learning and re-learning how textual navigation works.

The sections that follow in this short outro address some key themes as they relate to the origin of the experiment. Initially I posit that, while digital ethnography has gained considerable ground within digital humanities in researching cyberspaces (chatrooms, fora, videogames), internet technosociality, and data-driven practices (Schüll, 2016, 2018a, 2018b) and has begun to systematically explore the collection of data in virtual space, not much has been done in the direction of the (re) presentation of collected data in digital form. Therefore, the interplay between emergent forms of digital textuality and anthropological representation needs to be briefly discussed.

Secondly, I address the fact that the legitimacy of autoethnography has in recent years gained escalating ground as a sub-field of anthropology and now constitutes a somewhat privileged locale for experimental writing. Thus, a growing body of feminist reading and writing pushes this direction forward and the inherent ties between (auto) ethnography and experimental feminist writing are further illuminated. There is also an expansive literature concerning anthropology's affinities to art, both in regard to the collection and interpretation of data and in the process of textual representation of our interlocutors in the field, which is discussed as a foundation for employing fictional/poetic autoethnography. Following recent anthropological work, I view interiority as a vantage standing point for researching, and reflecting upon, social life. In this process, theory-based poetic language delivers an accurate and appropriate vehicle for the understanding and narrating of this viewpoint. The key objectives of the approach include the cultivation of pleasurable ways of reading ethnography, in motivating the affective, imaginative, sensory and intellectual capacities of the reader (with minimum digital literacy required); and secondly, it boils complex theory down to carefully distilled quotations and references incorporated (or 'hidden') within the text, thus promulgating an independent exploration of layered text on

the part of the reader.

Hopefully, the artefact at hand/onscreen encompasses long-standing debates in anthropology and literature, and gestures towards the limitless capacity of documenting human experience, inhabiting the border between poetic and ethnographic writing, conceptually and epistemologically troubling both.

After this rather confessional beginning, a set of pressing questions immediately arise. Why poetry? Digital in what sense? Which feminism? Autoethnographic to what degree? And perhaps more pressingly so: how much can you subtract from a discipline's principal orthodoxies and still claim citizenship within it? As noted, I chose to include the introduction at the end of the book, entertaining the idea that it is less intrusive this way, but mostly indulging in the conviction that such a declaration of intention, brief and concise as I can make it, might stimulate many more such experiments registered under the rubric of 'anthropology', 'theory', and 'science'; not plain 'poetry' or 'prose'. So, in the pages that follow I seek to situate the book in the emerging area of the digital humanities and to address visual and digital representational narrations of ethnography, as they have been problematized in recent discussions in the field. I interrogate the limits and the potential offered by autoethnographic and feminist writing modalities and argue that multimedia poetry is a fine conductor through which to carry ethnographic meaning. In doing so, I seek to challenge a series of disciplinary and academic boundaries in order to join forces with emerging modalities or writing, reading and thinking through (and about) anthropology.

Autoethnography and poetry: an inextricable tango

Autoethnography is a somewhat embarrassing genre. It often implies a certain self-indulgence in the part of the ethnographer, if not a lack of seriousness as implied in the—indirectly objectivized—distance between the observer and her subject. For a discipline that reserves for the anthropologist the most central and critical position

among the research instruments, it is often quite puzzling how little we actually come to know about the internal processes, complex positionalities, political stances, and private blockages of the persons who write ethnography. That does not necessarily mean that a full disclosure of all aspects of the writing subject's life is in order; it does however push to the direction of acknowledging that a genre that deals with reflexivity *par excellence* should not be dismissed off hand as a lesser form of representation. In my view, it is astonishing that it has been thirty years since Lila Abu-Lughod advocated experimenting with narrative form and creating what she called "narrative ethnographies of the particular," pointing primarily to autobiographical ethnographic accounts that could encompass several genres (1991, p. 138) and yet, still today, there are actually so few attempts to challenge the dominant assumptions of disciplinary writing.

In this book, autoethnography is about the telling of stories drawing explicitly on the personal experience of the author; that is, recounting stories of and about the self, filtered and delivered through the lens of culture. The emergence of autoethnography as a genre and its disciplinary acknowledgment and inclusion within the methodological array of qualitative research was a result of shifting considerations about social research, which include: the full recognition of the limits of scientific knowledge; the increased importance of social identities and identity politics; and a gradual appreciation for personal narrative, story, the literary and the aesthetic, which accompanies concerns about the ethics and politics of research practices and representations (Dicks et al., p. 8; Livholts, 2011). Since the mid-1970s, when autoethnography first appeared as a term, it has come to mean various things: from the self-account of informants to that of researchers dealing with 'home' anthropology, and to the more recent inclusion of personal narrative, reflexivity, and subjectivity that comes with writing 'the other'. During the past decade, and with the emerging blurring and merging of disciplinary as well as artistic expressive modalities, autoethnography has come to denote "the investment researchers have in their

research; by being personally, emotionally, aesthetically, and narratively connected to a cultural group or experience, autoethnographers may take more responsibility for and greater care in representing themselves and others” (Ellis, 2011, p. 18-19), which oftentimes entails academic prose being imbued with “different representational forms—for example dialogues, scripts, stories, poems, diaries and journals, photographic essays, biographical reflections and multi-layered writing” (Dicks et al., 2005, p. 33).

The use of poetry, both as a tool for collecting data (Furman et al., 2006) and as an expressive outlet for the anthropologist has been unexpectedly pivotal to the self-observation entailed in this project. Research poems are generally used as guides for practicing educators for building relationships in the field (Cousik, 2014); or for juxtaposing research tools such as in-depth interviews to more expressive means for representing the same sets of observations (Langer & Furman, 2004). But they also have been exceptionally popular in articulating autoethnography (Shelley, 2008) and underline the inevitably expressive character of note-taking and arts-based approaches to ethnographic knowledge (Duncan, 2004). Poetic language has a prominent position in this problematisation, even though, in my case, it presented itself as a possibility after years of self-observation—I suppose more as a culmination of note-taking and less as a creative outlet *per se*. Laurel Richardson views poetic representation in research as a ‘method of inquiry’ that contains both creative and analytic research work and the use of non-traditional academic genres, such as poetry, drama, conversations, etc. (Richardson, 2000, p. 929-930). Nina Lykke (2010) takes the dimension of the poetic further when discussing Richardson’s work, and argues for a certain ‘poetic truth’, which can be raised against a positivistic view of truth as objective and generalisable. Drawing on Hywel D. Lewis’ definition of poetic truth, she sees the benefits of the use of poetic genres in research as being composed “around their effects on the reader, effects that are both aesthetic and ethical; they fascinate, give a sudden experience and make us both think and feel around what is presented to us” (Lykke,

2010, p. 190-191).

There are valuable lessons to be learned from attempts to combine ethnography with fictional writing which are mostly performed on the level of autoethnography, where issues of reflection, memory, and consent are easier to handle when compared to 'standard' fieldwork with other research interlocutors. This is not a coherent genre in the humanities, since it covers a wide range of themes and approaches—from methodological novels (Ellis, 2004) to narrative research; it suggests that tales of personal experience are especially useful for understanding how disciplinary life and work can be realized (cf. Heuston, 2011; Tedlock, 1999). Arts-based research and autoethnography are both efforts to employ and emphasise the expressive qualities of generative forms of feeling “in order to enable a reader of that research to participate in the experience of an author [/writer],” a place, or a situation (Barone & Eisner, cited in Manovski, 2014, p. xvi).

Autoethnography as a “passage between disciplines” that scrutinizes the implications of borders between constructed and organized universes of knowing (Hagoel & Kalekin-Fishman, 2016) valorizes literature and the visual arts in considering them not only as objects of knowledge but as possible modes of anthropological engagement (Apostolidou, 2022b). Autoethnography, in its various affinities to visual research (Oliver, 2017) and to feminist theory delivers extraordinary accounts of the writing self (Boon et al., 2018; see also Sheriff, 2011). It has made use of new and changing ideas about and ideals for research; setting a recognition of the limits of scientific knowledge; and has resulted in an emerging appreciation for personal narrative, story, the literary and the aesthetic, emotions, and the body. This contemporary strand of thought presents a heightened concern over the ethics and politics of research practices and representations, with notable interest on using the potentials of new media (cf. Pensoneau-Conway, Adams & Bolen, 2017).

Storying is a prominent feature in such bodies of work, bringing together pieces of cultural and personal narratives, although it is only evidently embraced in the

Anglo-Saxon world (Grant, Short & Turner, 2013)—coinciding with contemporary literary trends such as magical realism (Hegerfeldt, 2005)—than in Greek and southern-European academia. This is presumably because of the anchoring of the humanities to local epistemic orthodoxies and a rather conservative view of expressing and articulating ‘scientific facts’ and the complex ethics of writing about oneself in a ‘non-exposure’ culture. The genealogy of the disciplinary emergence of the humanities in modern Greece attests to a rigid and canonical view of what falls into the category of ‘academic’; despite the progressive proclamations of numerous contemporary scholars, performed on the level of articulating theory, there are very few exceptions of troubling the very vehicle and gesture of the dialogue, that is the academic text. What is more, the erasure of the writing ‘I’, an erasure that is thought to safeguard epistemic credibility, showcases the deeply-rooted anchoring of the Greek academia on the (obscured) dogmas of objectivity as a validator of knowledge.

Critical autoethnography is presented as a highly creative genre of doing ethnography, which inherently engages ethnographic work with performance (Holman-Jones & Pruyn, 2018) in bringing together gender, sexuality, and theatricality (Taylor & Villegas, 1994) and is especially reflexive in the case of motherhood—a principal concern in my own research and personal routes. Bringing attention to tensions and binaries rather than resolving them, autoethnography shows how the use of personal, family intimacies is a way of constructing empowering narratives that question taken-for-granted cultural discourse surrounding women’s work, mothering, and relationships (Faulkner, 2018, p. 110).

Therefore, the present attempt to engage in creative autoethnography as an exercise in expanding my writing repertoire and intensifying dialogic reflexivity makes a case for autoethnographic stories as

artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience. With autoethnography, we use our experience to engage ourselves, others, culture(s), politics, and social research. In

doing autoethnography, we confront the tension between insider and outsider perspectives, between social practice and social constraint (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015, p.1).

On mediations: when feminism and anthropology met the digital

Definitions of digital humanities have long demonstrated a tension between a computer-based framework and the culturally-oriented appropriation of digital media (Nyhan, Terras, & Vanhoutte, 2013). Information technologies and the humanities are often seen as antithetical and very few approaches see them as a spectrum of the same questioning, wherein the digital aspect is part of the humanities' traditional interrogation, on the one hand, and the sociocultural is reflected in all aspects of digital culture, on the other.

Going through recent discussions, we may observe a tendency on the part of 'digital ethnography' towards the problematisation of all aspects of anthropological work: politics and relationships, visibility, temporality and space practices, infrastructures; but also, the importance of art and play in contemporary digital spheres, as well as the elements of design that guide the production of knowledge (Hjorth et al., 2017; Whitehead & Wesch, 2012; Boellstorff, 2015, 2021). The most prominent issue that has arisen from this vibrant research area are digital subjectivities¹ and the incorporation of ethnography in the studies of rhetoric in digital humanities (Ridolfo & Hart-Davidson, 2015). Also, this discussion has ignited a problematisation of material culture as imprinted in the representation of knowledge-bearing artefacts (Tilley et al., 2006; Eglash, 2006; Pink et al., 2016; Sumartojo & Graves, 2019). Collected works of practitioners in digital humanities working across disciplinary boundaries show that such representation requires scholars to make explicit what they know about their material and to understand the ways in which that material exceeds or escapes representation.

But let us take a step back. The digital turn in

anthropology and ethnography is not a sudden rupture to the field's epistemological quest. There is a distinctive genealogy in reflexive discussions about representation that have evolved from the textual to the visual and more recently to the digital 'turn' in anthropology.

Anthropology of media has long acknowledged representation of self and other, the relation of technology to truth and the active audiences as the key components of (textual/narrative) mediation across cultures (Askew & Wilk, 2002). Mostly focusing on photography and video, the early discussion raised some intriguing questions about the mediation of cultures and the production of identities through partial representations of cultural instances. I believe that anthropology has made peace with the partial character of represented social reality and might now endeavour on a more adventurous terrain, given that technological opportunity makes it possible—or even imperative (in terms of reading practices and modalities of understanding and everyday communicating in the west). In the past 40 years, media anthropology has mostly been about technologies of communication; however, it is very difficult to separate the operation of communicational media cleanly from broader social-political processes of circulation, exchange, imagination and knowing (Boyer, 2012).

Examining mass media production in the mid-twentieth century, and media reception after the 1970s, the anthropology of media in recent years follows the crisis of representation (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Rabinow, 1986; Clifford, 1988; Minh-ha, 1989; Clifford, 2015) and problematises the uses of technology in ethnography (Borgmann, 2006; Alarcón-Medina, 2020) and in scrutinising colonial, national, and global hegemonic projects. From the documentations of the internet as enabling identity and community expressions (Miller & Slater, 2000), we have begun to address more sophisticated questions which move away from reductionism, naturalisation, essentialism and binary oppositions that prevailed the analysis of early anthropological work on the power of technology (carried out by Bateson, Mead and Boaz). Anthropologists do not view media technologies as scientific modes of cultural documentation or as technical means to

capture 'the truth' anymore. Furthermore, media technologies are not restricted to visual forms. The term media implies two or more poles of engagement: "Media technologies do not mediate between themselves and people. Rather, they mediate (medius: middle) between people and this is what defines them as a distinct variety of technology" (Askew & Wilk, 2002, p. 2). If the understanding of mediation ceases to rely on substantialist and essentialist models of culture, then it becomes apparent that technology does not occur after or outside culture but is in itself the foundation of most activity nowadays (Mazzarella, 2004); which is to say, cultural technologies and practices and technological mediations produce contemporary meanings. In this orientation, ethnography has a responsibility to expose the centrality of mediation in current communication, kinship (Madianou & Miller, 2013), religion, and education. After the anthropology of new media and the limitation of research to digital technology as a research tool, the challenge for digital anthropology is to accurately build up analytic categories from which we may be able to capture the complex imbrications of technology and society (Sassen, 2016; Horst & Miller, 2012, 2020).

The work at hand strives to situate itself on the tension within media anthropology between its common research foci (which are most often technological or representational in their basis) and what we might gloss as processes of social mediation. That is, social transaction in its broadest sense: of the movement of images, discourse, persons, and things. In this respect, I follow the turn through which 'mediation' becomes a significant presence within the analytical language of media anthropology, wherein the ethnographer is also producer and receiver of mediated meaning (for discussion, see Boyer, 2012, p. 386). My preoccupation with mediation goes back to 2000, and it began with my postgraduate studies in anthropology of art and visual culture, a territory which exposed me to the powerful position of visibility, way before digitality became an object of interest.

Visual culture was indeed the first to enter the anthropological methodological array of mediation, through

the use of visual empirical material since the mid-twentieth century (Berry, 2012) in the form of what we call visual anthropology, which has always been 'inherently interdisciplinary' (Kalantzis, 2017) as the act of studying the production and circulation of meaning of visually perceived objects (Tsilimpounidi, 2016; Carastathis & Tsilimpounidi, 2020). Visual research and representation in anthropology has been a rapidly growing field the last thirty years, with many interesting contributions on a theoretical and methodological level, such as the problematisation of representing visual knowledge; the technical means of capturing and reproducing cultural conceptualisations; and hypermedia as anthropological texts (Pink, 2004).

In this vein, anthropological hypermedia, which combine image and writing, have also been viewed as capable of resolving the unsatisfactory relationship between film and text in anthropology (Pink's contribution in Pink et al., 2004). Even though fifteen years ago, this trend heavily relied on illustration, Sarah Pink suggests that to close the divide between visual and mainstream anthropology requires not simply new ethnographic film forms but also anthropological texts that combine and mutually situate visual and written ethnographic materials with anthropological theory. She claims that hypermedia offer one route towards such an anthropology that allows the visual to make critical insights that inspire us to rethink the way anthropological arguments are conventionally constructed (Pink, 2004, p. 164) within a media-oriented production of knowledge.

In this context, many subfields of anthropology have emerged, including anthropology of technology, anthropology of cyberspace and cyberspace, virtual ethnography, anthropology of information technology or multimedia anthropology (Cohen and Salazar, 2016, p. 5). As Athena Athanasiou points out, the internet, an archive of cultural processes and dynamics, is also a lab for reflection and critique. Internet ethnography (Athanasiou, 2004) has not only set new correlations between 'local', 'global' and 'cosmopolitan' localities, but it has also redefined the anthropological conceptions of the body, the senses, the experience, the community, and ethnographic time, further

nuancing the discipline's highlighted concepts such as population, community, public sphere, social interaction, but also cultural intimacy and familiarity, participant observation and ethnographic text. Athanasiou follows Arturo Escobar in asking: How does cyberculture transform these modern arrangements of life (body, self, nature), labour (production, economy) and language (speech, communication)? In attempting to answer such questions while practicing ethnography, a tentative answer may be that the ethnographer cannot afford to occupy the space of the observer and sit comfortably behind the written text as a quasi-invisible yet authoritative voice. The transformations which have already taken place in most areas of everyday social life demand more engaged tropes of doing ethnography, fresh lenses of interrogation and, equally important, new modalities of ethnographic 'writing'.

This dovetails with recent research that is oriented towards visualisation in sociology and anthropology (Pauwels, 2015) promoting the idea of the visual researcher as producer, facilitator, and communicator. This figure employs genres such as the visual essay—a blending of art and social science that is a work in process and as a scholarly form resides in the synergy of the distinct forms of expression that are combined (Apostolidou, 2022a)—images, words, layout and design, which add up to a scientifically informed statement (Pauwels, 2015, p. 139–166). Thus, the project registers writing in the realm of technology, and attempts to challenge some of the dogmata that run through one of the strongest western metaphors for thinking, acknowledging that the very process of writing constitutes a way of constructing, producing, circulating and representing cultural knowledge.

As Penelope Papailias further demonstrates, the rhetorical solutions offered by the literary crisis of anthropology in the 1990s (dialogic experimentation), however useful in placing reflexivity and self-criticism at the core of the anthropological endeavor, did not offer a let-out from the crisis. Rather, the professionalisation of anthropology was implemented on the degradation and annulation of other practices of cultural documentation

(Papailias, 2016, p. 38). In an attempt to bring to the fore these 'other practices', at the expense of which professional academics often claim and exert their institutional power, the effort made in this artefact is to show that digital ethnography presents many affinities and similarities with feminist ethnography as far as the main theoretical and methodological approaches are concerned. In a sense, they are both disturbing or peripheral subdisciplines—supplements in Derridean terms—which have triggered parallel critical commentary to anthropological thinking. On a methodological level it may be argued that a focus on gender in ethnography has also corresponded with greater reflexivity with respect to the contexts of knowledge production, such as that in the work of Ruth Behar (1996) or Kamala Visweswaran (1994), who examine women's lives and the practice of feminist ethnography (see also Behar and Gordon, 1995; Bell, Caplan & Karim, 1993). Similarly, the increasing focus on the visual (e.g., Pink, 2014; Banks & Ruby, 2011) and on the senses (Howes, 2003; Pink, 2014; Vannini, Waskul & Gottschalk, 2012) at the turn of the century came with new methods as well as a challenge to the dominant ways of 'knowing' and 'researching' that privilege particular senses.² My own work is situated on the intersection of such ethnographic, feminist, and media studies interrogations; it attempts to bring together methods and modes of sensual writing that constitute a timely and ethnographically applicable convergence of recent discussions.

A second common feature of feminist and digital anthropology lies in the heightened interest on the body as a primal location of interrogation. This book envisages digital anthropological practice as embedded in the wider area of material culture and underlines the centrality that the human body occupies in this strand of ethnographic interest. Indeed, most approaches that problematize material culture deal with the human body, in one way or another. For example, Chris Tilley's work (1997) on the phenomenology of landscape makes an interesting point in correlating spatial narrativity with the landscape and the art of narration. He notes that the praxis of movement is an act of understanding space (as incubating both place

and time), so the description of a place is also already a description of a bodily movement and a shifting landscape, that allows for narrative understanding. Language as already physically invested stands at the core of this digital autoethnographic project. To the extent that gender is an assignment with a specific citationality, I wish to trace the difference “between embodying or performing gender norms and the performative use of discourse” (Butler, 1993, p. 231) in the instances of gendered subjectivity construction portrayed in poems. In this sense, then,

language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified (Butler, 1993, p. 68).

Judith Butler follows Jacques Lacan in viewing language as essential to the development of morphology, the process of how bodies materialise, how they come to assume the morph, the shape by which the material discreteness is marked; and insofar as language might be understood to emerge from the materiality of bodily life it constitutes a primary act of displacement and condensation (Butler, 1993, p. 69).

So, the interrelation between embodied genders and technology lies at the core of my most recent research concerns. As Donna Haraway (1997) notes, “[b]roadly conceptualized reproductive practices must be central to social theory in general, and to technoscience studies in particular.” This very interrelation has been the object of attentive study ever since ‘new reproductive technologies’ gained attention from prospective mothers/parents and theorists alike. Historians of technology have identified the aspect of reproductive technologies as one of the prominent areas of interest in late modernity—along with the limited presence of women in the design and sciences of technology, the gendered use and consumption of technological artefacts, and the multiple masculinities associated with gender (Rendezi, 2012, p. 44). What is of great interest in the genealogy of the relationship between gender and technology is the traditional apprehension of women as consumers and passive users of technology

(which is traditionally designed and circulated by men), a thesis that has been widely contested by historians and anthropologists, who have proved that both gender and technology are culturally constructed concepts in constant resignification and mutual interrelation.

This also coincides with recent feminist views on the technosocial understanding of the female body and processes of physical reproduction. In Rosi Braidotti's work (2011) the notion of 'the human' is both de-stabilized by technologically mediated social relations in a globally connected world and is thrown open to contradictory redefinitions, arguing for a sustainable modern subjectivity as one in flux, never opposed to a dominant hierarchy yet intrinsically other, always in the process of becoming, and perpetually engaged in dynamic power relations, which are both creative and restrictive. The central concern in this framework is the constructive theorization of post-humanity, as well as the multiple aspects of the experience of techno-cultural somatization, where multiple processes of mediation are pivotal in the cultural conceptualizations of reproduction that merge the boundaries between the human and the technological (Floridi, 2015; Whitehead & Wesch, 2009; Kornwachs, 2021), and indeed "the very intelligibility of that which is human" in modern biopolitics (Athanasidou, 2003, p. 125). The theoretical starting point of such reasoning is that the subject and object of anthropology must shift from the exclusive focus on the "human" so that more complex "post-institutional" forms of subjectivity and cultural action can be detected (Athanasidou, 2004, p. 66-67).

Feminist critique early posed the problem of patriarchy as an omnipotent one, stretching well into the very mode of representation, be it artistic or academic. Even the very distinction between artistic and academic might be argued to derive from a positivist stance sanctioned by centuries-long phallogocentric writing documented in western medicine, philosophy and politics. For example, Judith Fetterley's proposal of resisted reading (1978) describes how the female reader, raised in a language system and literature that still presumes its authors and readers are male, often

‘eavesdrops’ upon a literary conversation that was intended entirely for male authors and readers. She argues that they become psychologically “immasculated,” in the sense of being culturally trained to think and read and write like men. She proposes that “the resisting reader” fights that transformation and detects the ways in which the text’s constructions of its world reflect assumptions about gender itself, as well as reproduction, marriage, careers, and many other things in a culture which may be identified by the gender of their participants. Reading women writers offers us a chance to experiment with this thesis. Taking Fetterley’s proposition about the resisting reader one step further, I argue for an ethnographic accommodation of the notion of a resisting writer (cf. King, 2007), in terms of experimenting with the very vehicle of western academic orthodoxy: the monograph, the paper, the academic text. In portraying a slice of human experience that is fragmented, embodied, and imbued in metaphoric meaning (like multimodal poetry), the ethnographer is in a position to challenge the claims of social ‘science’ itself by way of articulation of research findings. A notable danger of this approach, however, is falling into essentialist notions of gender and women’s writing, as evinced by gynocriticism’s focus on ‘feminine’ subject matters in literature, the literary history of female tradition, or even a distinctive feminine mode of experience, or “subjectivity,” in thinking, feeling, valuing, and perceiving oneself and the outer world (Abrams, 2012 [1957], p. 505-506). Being cautious about such homogenising preconceptions, I propose that the resisting writer will stubbornly look for ways that subvert the qualities of truth of the academic text and seek to portray the intersectional construction of gendered experience (Carastathis, 2016).

To this end, the body as a vehicle for reflection is presumably the optimum locus of attention. *Écriture féminine*, from Virginia Woolf to Hélène Cixous, has been heavily theorised on the inscription of the feminine body in writing and the breaking up of the constraints of western logical, linear, normative discursive schemata (cf. Hawthorn, 2000, p. 56-58). In my work, female embodiment

is inscribed in language and culture according to Luce Irigaray's "insistent reference to the elemental economy of the female body designed to retheorize the specificity of the feminine and not to essentialize 'woman' or 'anatomy' by way of fluid textual corporeality" (Tzelepis, 2017, p. 203). It is indeed an attempt at the rewriting of feminine morphology through the metaphors of multiplicity, plasticity, and tactility (Tzelepis, 2017, p. 205). Elena Tzelepis warns us of the essentialist topographies entailed in this process:

the work of reappropriating the feminine entails displacing, relocating, and relayering both essence and difference, as well as on the inside and outside the realm of phallogocentric intelligibility (Tzelepis, 2017, p. 205).

In its actual application to our academic writing tropes, this technocultural and embodied practice calls for a challenging of conventional academic jargon. In her book, *Gender Research: a Guide to Feminist Theory, Methodology and Writings*, Nina Lykke identifies five elements relating to how and why experimental writing has influenced research work in the field of gender studies: epistemology and the speaking subject (different telling positions); research 'objects' as subjects with agency; the language and narrative turn effectuates a move beyond traditional texts and genres; to write body and passion; to write understandably (Lykke, 2010, p. 178-197). The present text fully embraces all five discursive gestures as a political positioning vis-à-vis elitist, cryptic, and phallogocentric academic language, which has become established as a dominant western trope, and which, more often than not, is uncritically performed by self-identified feminists in the academia.

Another strand of interrogation that runs along both fieldwork and ethnographic writing in this project is the relation between gender and space (Moore, 1995). Anthropological research on the relationship between space and gender has long indicated that the organisation of space and the exploitation of spatiality is not a backdrop to social activity but is the active and interactive context within

which social relations and structures are created. Central to practices of pregnancy, sexuality, and childbirth are often the shared experience of pain and bodily restrictions (such as prohibitions over food intake and physical activity, or seclusion). Yet, it is interesting how women emphasise the positive aspects of motherhood and childbirth because it gives them power and social responsibility. As Henrietta Moore (1996) shows, the female renegotiation of representation often challenges the socially dominant representations of women. Space is therefore a flexible medium of presentation and communication that facilitates gendered visibility and challenges gender ideology (p. 198-199). Maintaining this emphasis on space, both material and discursive, Moore also registers poems in a genealogy of feminine strategies to express a corporeally determined positionality and the inherent creativity-imagination work this voicing often entails.

Writing praxis, hypertext and ethnography

A central stake of this sort-of-book is to attempt to resist the established format of academic and ethnographic writing (lecture, paper, book and so on) and provide alternative spaces for conceptual problematization through the convergence of ethnographic writing, feminist writing and digital poetic form. On an epistemological level, this emphasis on crafting a new media text, allowed by the freedom of digital media, is, in a way, a return to the epistemic origins of western modernity. The emphasis on making, tinkering, and design transcends research, reproducibility, and corroboration in science and pushes to the forefront educational, emancipatory, exploratory and aesthetic-centered uses of our experiences as academic subjects/objects. In exploring the potential of open science hardware available to researchers today, Denisa Kera (2017) discusses hybrid and ambiguous practices, which have the potential to bridge divides between present disciplines and skills but they also define science as an everyday activity directly connected to the private and public interests of

citizens. She follows Hannah Arendt's 1958 critique of *homo laborans* and *homo faber* and claims that science artisans (citizen-scientists, geeks, makers, and hackers) offer an alternative to professionalisation of science as practiced in university and research and development laboratories. Central to this endeavour are playful, expressive, and performative strategies and define the present practices as "artisanal science" (Kera, 2017):

[t]he science artisans strive for and explore sovereignty, dignity, and freedom in an age immersed in science and technology controversies by bridging the divides between art, science, engineering, and humanities (Kera, 2017, p. 97).³

A look at the historicity of writing and its technologies is quite illuminating if we are to explore such attempts at bridging. Jay David Bolter (2006) examines writing as a technology (an art and a technique), as one of the most powerful cultural practices in contemporary western societies, which is at the same time a powerful metaphor of the metaphysics of writing. He reminds us that the organised text is a relatively recent construct, which took its current form at the end of the eighteenth century. In recent years, this form is being disorganised, partly due to the acknowledgment of the visual and acoustic dimensions of writing. Following Christina Haas in underlining the importance of technical, visual, and physical means that organised reading, Bolter stresses the tangibility of computers as a new materiality for writing and dismisses the conceptualisation of writing as an external technological force, viewing it, rather, as a shifting social practice. He commends new rhetorical relationships, proposing a multiplicity of meaning that does not support the hierarchy of the written text, and is not topical/thematic but topographical: the view of text as a space, which contests the logocentric notion of writing being a servant to spoken language (Bolter, 2006 [2001], p. 54-55). This is not the end of typography; but rather, it is yet another stage in the genealogy of writing.

Recent interest in the materialism of literature is also fueled by the tendency of the study of textual

technologies or textual media, which stand at the crossroads where digital literary studies meet the history of the book. What has recently been described as a “material turn in digital studies” includes computers and computational processes as purely material phenomena by their very nature (Sichani, 2018). In *Transferred Illusions*, Marilyn Deegan and Kathryn Sutherland (2016) observe the persistence of reading and writing technologies and the inability of imagining a total replacement of old technologies with new ones. They claim that in the early 1990s, hypertext was briefly hailed as a liberating writing tool for non-linear creation; however, the newspaper, print’s most powerful mass vehicle, largely shapes its electronic remediation through huge digitisation initiatives, dominated by a handful of centralising service providers, funded and wrapped round by online advertising. According to these authors, it is faulty to assume a culture of total replacement. This is precisely why

it is important that writers, critics, publishers and librarians—in modern parlance, the knowledge providers—be critically engaged in shaping and regulating cyberspace, and not merely the passive instruments or unreflecting users of the digital tools in our hands (Deegan & Sutherland, 2016, p. xi).

The hypertext-based navigation of the poems in this collection pushes for this emancipatory use of the available tools. Although writing practice has not penetrated academic formal text as one might expect given its ease of use, its enriching potential, and the fact that, as a writing modality hypertext is not that recent an idea. Roland Barthes—following Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche and Ludwig Wittgenstein in their respective attempts to demolish the linearity of argumentation and narrativity—adopts the style of fragmentation and rupture in commenting on the rigidity of the writing style of established typography. Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Irigaray, and Butler each has also in one way or another supported an elliptical style of writing. In discussing hypertext environments, Andrea Austin (1997) highlighted the blurring of distinctions,

which renders value problematic, and thus has its impact on the practice of literary criticism: “The dissolution of the opposition between style or look and content in hypertext is a fascinating terrain, one which is just beginning to be mapped” (Austin, 1997, p. 212). Bolter holds that hypertext entails a transition from the footnote to the link and identifies several elements of the text as ‘hot’ elements (the ones accompanied by a link), thus changing the roots of meaning. The participatory actions demanded by the reader (activating, or not, the material through a click) might work in the present artefact in two ways: either cool down the temperature of the nodes/links (since, as one anonymous reviewer pointed out, they engage vision and hearing and ask of the reader to connect the dots between word and insinuation); or, alternatively—and in fact ideally—the act of choosing will intensify and further deepen the heat of the links and the overall surrounding text. The reader is encouraged or invited to go through the links freely and maybe come back to them after they have read the present outro. In discussing hypertext as fluid, dialogical, multi-routed and multi-rhythmic text that has not fully fulfilled its potential in the uses of educational or scholarly form, Bolter (2006 [2001], p. 150) points out the element of not-yetness and the risk and uncertainty as speculative methodologies introduced by emerging technologies (Ross, 2017).

In my view, these technologies are not to be viewed only as technical systems and applications but whole orchestrations of phenomena, such as the technologies of reading, writing and even reflecting. There is tremendous potential for impregnating academic texts with varying intensities and contrasting meaning and hypertextual fiction—notably poetry, in this case—provide a space of interrogating both an individual (hyper)text and its very placement in an epistemological viewpoint about human knowledge. Indeed, hypertextual fiction has been the most convincing expression over the idea of the hypertext (Bolter, 2006 [2001], p. 169) and includes: hypertext novels or short stories; hypertext narrations within film and television; hypertext digital performances; and interactive or kinetic poetry.

The main characteristic of this trend is the surrendering of control of the text on the part of the author and this letting go is at times very soothing, a gesture also to be found in familiar fictional writing (Bolter, 2006 [2001], p. 171), which embraces the rhetoric of multilinearity and seeks to upset the conventional order of meaning, the organisational principles of printed fiction, and the clear monologue or dialogue of the parties involved. Another characteristic of hypertext fiction is the contesting of the chronological order. The condition of waiting, a great concern in contemporary ethnography (Khosravi, 2021; Janeja & Bandak, 2018) brings to the reading of multimodal poetry the physical and intellectual proximity to field research. Waiting on the part of the reader for the succession of the story to be continued and implemented might not be rewarded since “these consecutive delays or postponements put forward by the hypertext may never come to an end” (Bolter, 2006 [2001], p. 181).

How do these fragmented technologies make sense (auto) ethnographically? The use of hypertext in ethnography has a short and rather timid history (Coover, 2003). Ethnographers who embrace the technology make strong claims regarding its usefulness, suggesting that hypertext might alter the ways that we represent experiences from the field and create more reflexive texts (Pink, 2004). Three characteristics of hypertext make this possible: multilinearity (Dicks et al., 2005); multivocality (Pink, 2012); and multimodality (Coover, 2003). Careful attention to their implications with proper and adequate design features in ethnographic representation is needed (Drazin, 2013): “although there is great potential afforded by the technology, one must be careful not to overstate its usefulness” (Wood, 2011, p. 12). Rulon Matley Wood (2011) provides an account of the attempts that anthropologists have made to incorporate it into their work since the early 1990s and presents the limitations this has posed for ethnographic practice. He concludes that there is ample room for further research and notes that “although the technology has been in existence for some time, we lack practical applications that might help us better understand its strengths and limitations as

applied to ethnography” (Wood, 2011, p. 9-11).

Moreover, hypertext fiction has done a lot to eliminate the distinction between writing and interpreting, in performing a turn over the construction criticism in adopting a vocabulary that contested the very principles of typography and “serious” academic and fictional writing (Bolter, 2006, p. 250). This coincides with the view of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) in their articulation of the theory of the rhizome. They describe theory and research that allows for multiple non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation. This collection aspires to be a rhizome, which

pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectible, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21).

Literary hypertext abolished the logocentric character of literature, in accommodating extra-linguistic forms of mediation such as images, graphics, sound, moving picture etc. Hypertextual literature is perceived as a *de facto* reconfiguration of printed literature, somewhat inherently revolutionary and transgressive of the narrative order. Sofia Nikolaidou traces some initial features of the hypertextual form in earlier modernist and postmodernist attempts, from Borges to Sterne who use the element of *παίγνιο* (playfulness) in their writing (2009, p. 84-85). This almost intrinsic connection of hypertextual narration to playfulness is, I believe, the key element upon which to build a multimodal (auto)ethnography, in accommodating the intertextual and intratextual references available that link social phenomena to the interpretative mediation by the anthropologist and, ultimately, their performative representation.

Apart from the rather short history of hypertext use in anthropology and literature, this experiment also draws on more recent digital literary approaches. Digital literary studies are a flourishing experimental field that ranges from perspectives of game studies, social and ubiquitous computing, to e-literature, and visualisation, among many

others (Siemens & Schreibman, 2013). Large interdisciplinary compilations have recently been released stressing on the transformation of disciplines that has taken place in recent years on account of the technologization of language (Fairclough cited in Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011, p. xxiv); but also, due to the evolution of media methods both in traditional fields such as cinema and telecommunication as well as evolving themes is the extraction of big data, virtual photography, cybernetics and so on (Arthur & Bode, 2014). Some go so far as to describe online reading as a ‘big bang’, which is in grave need of cultural criticism in order to become a flourishing academic domain (Liu, 2014).

These approaches take hybridity as a given and attend, instead, to the inherent multimodality and cultural embeddedness of these different ways of (inter)acting with/through new media. Most of them stress that practice and creative generative research methods are also a requirement for digital humanities to remain a flourishing realm of study. The mere application of media capacities and the digitisation of analogue forms of data are not enough to revolutionize the field. New media sociolinguistics, when studying not the “grammatical” language of linguistics, but rather the everyday life of language in use—or just discourse—recognise a series of creative genres in digital discourse, including texting, messaging and multimodality in everyday communication (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). The turn to the user-generated content and the new narrativity formats that spring from the digital media promote an experimental tendency in the ways we think, reflect on and produce/disseminate ethnographic information (Manovich, Malina & Cubitt, 2001). Herein lies much of the potential in new media for invention and creativity:

time and again, research shows how users overcome apparent semiotic limitations, reworking and combining—often playfully—the resources at their disposal. These approaches illuminate that it is the situated, spatialized (which is not to say static) experiences of new media that are also crucial to an understanding of their meaning (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011, p. xxvi)

And, I might add, for the expansion of contemporary publishing practices (Jefferies & Kember, 2019).

In defending the value of narratives in reflexive digital humanities, Lai-Tze Fan (2018) addresses the difficulty of representing the figurative meaning of narratives through digital tools and proposes a critical view of the limitations of computation materials and databases. He proposes alternative models of content management and organization that more closely resemble figurative meaning-making in human language. The epistemological differences between digital technologies and the humanities are in one way exemplified by the relationship between the database and the “traditional” narrative. Fan proposes two modes of enquiry as applied to the digital humanities which encourage the critical comparison, juxtaposition, interpretation, and reflection of digital tools and research. More specifically, she argues for two kinds of meaning in the creation of textual artefacts in the digital humanities: the first one is ‘humanistic thinking’, which implies the reflexive and interpretive modes of inquiry in which humanities scholars and students are trained and an interrogation about risking any priorities and responsibilities of the larger humanities project. The second is ‘narratological thinking’, which is an understanding of the linguistic play and semiotic depth of language, as it is used to construct works of narrative literature. This second mode of thinking calls for an engagement of literary elements such as plot, theme, imagery, poetics, medium/media, and intertext.

Narratological thinking is, in this sense, a mode of inquiry that is necessary to understanding how figurative meaning functions as a unique and vital quality of meaning making in general, including how we communicate with each other by offering information in the form of stories (Fan, 2018, p. 4-5).

As far as their application for (auto)ethnography, these approaches are always evaluated in conjunction to the writing surfaces upon which the narrative is inscribed.⁴

Again, this is not a groundbreaking new trend that sprung from the catchphrase ‘digital era’. In *Reading*

Writing Interfaces, the contributors seem to defend a return to the book, bound up with a logic of demystifying devices—promoting, especially, writerly demystification. By opening up how interfaces limit and create certain creative possibilities and going back to older writing interfaces, such as the typewriter (Emerson, 2014, esp. pp. 87–128), they remind us how poets in the 1960s and 1970s (working heavily under the influence of Marshall McLuhan and before the widespread adoption of the personal computer), sought to create concrete poetry as a way to experiment with the limits and the possibilities of the typewriter. Widespread attempts to digitise literary texts (Aljayyousi, 2017) present results about the capacities of the digital medium and stem from an understanding of the material repercussions of the migration from print to digital.

Recently, there have also been some attempts to articulate a theory of performative materiality and its potential application to interface design from a humanistic perspective. They connect the materiality of digital media to investigations of materiality and the specificity of media in critical theory and aesthetics (Drucker, 2013). The ideal of performative materiality, the enacted and event-based character of digital activity supported by specific literal and physical conditions, promote the thesis that a system should be understood by what it does, not only how it is structured.

By re-engaging with the intellectual traditions of critical theory from structuralism to post-structuralism, deconstructivism, cultural and critical studies, and complex systems grounded in ecological approaches that posit emergent properties, we can bring an analytical framework for approaching the materiality of digital activity into focus. In this framework, we chart the shift from a concept of things as entities to a concept of them as events; from a notion of what is to that which is always in flux; from a literal to a contingent materiality that is exposed by the performative dimension of use (Drucker, 2013, p. 3).

I hold that today an ethnography in flux may well be demanded by its very subjects, its amateur practitioners,

its end listeners/“users”.

Most recent volumes on digital ethnography portray it as inherently unorthodox, a field that requires attention to alternative forms of communicating, a highly reflexive research practice that engages with multiplicity and perceives ethnography as an open event and, most importantly, a field that decentres the digital and views media as inseparable from other activities, technologies, materialities, and feelings (Pink et al., 2016).

Advocates of the power of literature in digital times (Pennington & Waxler, 2018) argue that reading literature in the digital age is politically important since it puts into motion the ‘educated imagination’ of readers as opposed to contemporary quick forms of narration, communication, and political engagement (Socken, 2013). So, bringing this quality in the realm of ethnography and using digital means to create literature might be a beneficial move in more than one disciplinary terrain: it could even promote “the encouragement of tolerance” (Frye cited in Socken, p.6).⁵

In this context, I think it is indeed fascinating to employ (auto)ethnographic layering, which has been indicated to coincide brilliantly with narrations about kinship and family ties through the compilation of recollections, family tales and dreams (Rath, 2012). This trend derives from early approaches to explore the potential of hypertexts in viewing the text as a set of horizontal layers with vertical interconnection mechanisms enabled by encoding with relevant material (Kynde, 1998). Layered texts, largely used in education and children’s narrativity (Watson, 1993) are texts that either consist of words and phrases that to a large extent are the same, or texts that allegedly constitute the same objective and are interconnected by nodes. The critical understanding of western textual tradition and the re-instating of layering in a wide range of fields, is also timely in the backdrop of the emergence of digital culture, but also *vis-à-vis* the gradual disempowerment of the theoretical humanities within academia, and helps us revisit persistent concerns, such as the interplay between writing and the body, textuality and history, *différance*, and the feminine (Margaroni, Lampropoulos & Chatzichristou,

2017). This may well be performed on a practical level, by systematically upsetting the orthodoxies of the normative text (such as linearity, orthography and truthfulness in writing).

So, I have attempted here to evoke politically incorrect reactions from the audience by use of subversion within the narratives. Strategies usually expelled from the academic text such as mockery, mimicry, sarcasm, and insinuation have been employed as narrative gestures in order to challenge the epistemological foundations of academic and ethnographic ‘givens’. Furthermore, these codes and literary gestures are somewhat endemic in cyberspace; satire and irony are to be found as frequent—at times dominant—modalities in online communities, e-identities, social media, techno sociality, cybertechnoscience and multi-player gaming, and so on. After all, the hybrid figure of the cyborg represents for Haraway an “ironic political myth”, a hope of extricating women from the dualities of western epistemology (nature/ culture, body/mind) that have historically put women in a tightly restrictive gendered “nature” (Athanasίου, 2004, p. 65). As noted before, upsetting narrative modalities, such as irony and sarcasm (Tzelepis, 2017, p. 201), has been employed in my work in order to destabilize authoritative ethnographic writing. Tzelepis discusses Irigaray’s ironic intervention that has posited the feminine as the radical alterity of discourse through a complacent seriousness that lies at the heart of the master narrative, thus destabilising preconceived claims of knowledge (Tzelepis, 2017, p. 201). Such a writing orientation coincides with the digital turn and the attendant writing modalities discussed above, since it interrogates both the message and the medium of ethnographic *écriture*.

Who will listen in? Reaching out to the reader

In preparing this book’s draft proposal for FAC press, I was urged to address the following questions: for whom are you writing? Who do you imagine will “listen in”? Over the years, this has become one of the most pressing questions

for me and it was indeed exhilarating to see this overtly stated in a book proposal format. Is it our teachers, our professors, and/or parental figures, echoing commitments we made to ourselves years before we started to write? Is it peers, evaluators, or judges with often arbitrary criteria that will define the evolution of our academic routes? Is it funding bodies, administration mechanisms, and institutional check-lists? Or, as I see it, students, daughters, and friends that might be interested in what anthropology has to contribute to a deeper understanding of selfhood and otherness?

This brings us back to ethnography as a reading-writing hierarchy and a highly topographical positioning: there is often a hypothesis in reading ethnography that the author represents reality to the best of their capacity. Thus, the ethnographic text is a performance of the actual (i.e., cultural) text, much as a theatrical play is a performance of a work of literature, that somehow presents and seeks to approximate the text as best as possible. Following this analogy leads us to the assumption that “the work itself, i.e., social reality anticipates, even authorizes, its many occurrences and somehow contains their variety” (Sayre cited in Lentricchia & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 91), thus possessing an *a priori* status in relation to its manifestations. Performance itself becomes an event of the second rank, including imperfections, mis-readings and mis-interpretations, which, in turn, brings us to the intricate relation between reading and writing.

“Writing and reading are not separate, reading is a part of writing. A real reader is a writer. A real reader is already on the way to writing,” writes Hélène Cixous in her book *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (cited in Livholts, 2012, p.12). The ideological division of keeping genres of writing and reading separate as ‘science’ and ‘literature’ does something to the spaces people inhabit and the ways in which the world is perceived and imagined. Recent research shows that reading is an activity that goes on at different levels simultaneously. As Mona Livholts notes,

[s]cholars read the texts of other scholars, but they also read work that does not ‘count’ as academic or feminist theory, yet nevertheless does provide important influences for critical analytical thinking. Also, the academic author is the first reader, the first audience of their own work in the process of its becoming. Listening to and transcribing an interview involves careful reading/listening skills. Writing the multiplicity of bodily sounds involves re-visiting and re-thinking the scene through acts of memory and imagination (Livholts, 2012, p.12-13).

Moreover, the experience of reading involves the very materiality of a ‘text’ (be it printed, digital or acoustic) as well as the physicality it entails as highly bodily, active, and immersive action. For some electronic texts

the ways of reading demanded by an installed text may require a physical engagement, may require bodily movement either to activate aspects of the installation, or to access portions of the text. The reader’s body may provide a continuity for an otherwise fragmented text, or the experience of the text as complete may be conceivable only through being in it (Siemens & Schreiber, 2013, p. 312-313).

In some ways, this might be our century’s witnessing of the death of the author as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault theoretically established it in post-structuralist thought (cf. Landow, 1997); rendering the text as a “methodological terrain”, which seeks to eliminate the distance between author and reader and engage them in a single signifying practice (Barthes, 2017[1967]) with dialogic characteristics. I trust that in multimedia autoethnographic poetry this dialogue takes three different forms, as Bolter has identified them (2006 [2001], p. 163): namely, dialogue between author and reader; dialogue between linguistic, visual and sonic means of representation; and dialogue between old and new forms of media (website, paper, book, video, etc.). Given the specific genre of autoethnography where the self of the author is accentuated, this dialogue between author and reader might at times feature as an unequal task; it may be balanced through gestures and points of entrance to the mediating artefact through the physical and intellectual

acts of reading and surfing the initial text.

An example of such gestures, besides the ones incorporated within the texts and insinuations, may include a forthcoming call, which would invite interested readers to record their voice reading out the poems, or their thoughts and feelings during the act, allowing us to digitally weave them back into the open, diverse and malleable body of symbols that the initial text bears. Along similar lines, oral descriptions of all visual material may be invited, so as to incorporate captions for readers with low vision or blindness, crafted by volunteering readers without the intervention of the writer. Another example is the choice to print parts of the text, allowing readers to haptically interact with it. Or a link that would lead the reader to a request to fill in their postal address and receive a tangible 'part' of the text—these are some ideas for how a born-digital artefact might take the form(s) of analogue materiality. This form of dialogue is therefore facilitated through the other two forms (i.e., means of representation and new forms of nodes, allowing for a methodological terrain between reader and text to emerge in the absence of the writer). The concept of linguistic bodies is useful as a mediator of meaning. As Ezequiel Di Paolo, Elena Clare Cuffari, and Hanne De Jaegher (2018) offer,

linguistic bodies by definition work on making sense of contradictions and tensions. Embracing the mess, we find adults realizing themselves as linguistic bodies, incorporating specific sensitivities and powers, and incarnating the styles, perspectives, and attitudes of other linguistic agents—that is, learning with others, learning to be themselves with others—in all of their 'adulthood' endeavors (Di Paolo, Cuffari & Jaegher, 2018, p. 251).

In this trans-sensual experience of reading, I also try to take into account the various literacy skills of the book's and artefact's intended audiences. Technology is not separated from the social (as representation or device) (Papailias, 2016, p. 216), and therefore digital literacy does not refer to an isolated act of reading, but rather to a process that starts with access, eagerness,

minimising stereotypes and fear, promoting connectivity and collaborations, participation in audiovisual production, and deconstructing preconceptions by active and perpetual experimentation. Recently, new reading rituals have emerged as strategies required to mitigate unequal access and to bridge the gap between print and online literature (Sanz & Goicoechea, 2012). The principle of entropy pushes digital texts to move at their own speed or time and the reader to exercise a rotation or reading around the space that the work occupies, making obsolete the reader's habit of presupposing a linear structure for texts. Even on the level of academic discourse, distraction is acknowledged not as a problem for scholarly reading in the humanities but as a mechanism that facilitates knowledge creation in conversation with and between sources,

bringing together disparate times and places, authors and forms of source material, frames of reference and layers of insight, harnessing peripheral vision as much as central focus to create the conditions for serendipitous discovery (Edmond, 2018).

In this vein, Lanham's digital rhetoric (1989), which demolished the distinctions between high and popular culture, commercial and pure reviews, talented or contingent creation, visual or acoustic stimulus, virtual or alphabetical information, offers an important foundation for the present investigation. On the part of the writer, the stakes are high in forging a successful combination between theory and narration (Joyce, 1995) and aiming for temporal and emotional immersion and interactivity as the two main virtues of narrative as virtual reality (Ryan, 2001). There is also the issue of popularity of media when forecasting the engagement of users in academic/autoethnographic findings. Alyssa Arbuckle (2014) notes the tensions between popularity and precision, ethics and economics when discussing the generation of new genres (as is the case of digital ethnography). The realm of public digital editions of literary works have indicated that well received texts have not always met the strict academic criteria of editing, annotation and production

and vice versa: well-documented works have gone unnoticed by the general public. However, I am not convinced that academic reception or popularity ought to be the principal criteria for evaluating the anthropological merit of experimental writing tropes. Being embedded in a rigid and habitually slow-moving institutional nexus, the academia is—paradoxically—often the less equipped party for noticing and acknowledging disciplinary and epistemological change. More often than not, these shifts take place outside—or in the margins of—conventional academia and are incorporated as legitimate knowledge practices with considerable delay. As David Westbrook (2008) remarks:

[i]nstead of somehow ‘updating’ a model it no longer seriously espouses, ethnography for present situations operationalizes, makes practical and internal, what was once offered as a critical (meta-, external) insight: ethnography is a form of writing. As such, the difficulty of communicating something significant about the world provides more than enough discipline to make the enterprise rigorous, intellectually respectable, and to hold an institutional space within the university, that is, to constitute a discipline (2008, p. 116).

In this context, the new position of the reader today is placed between the traditional roles of author and reader (Bolter, 2006, p. 239), while at the same time pushing the cogs of disciplinary reshuffle.

On the structure of this thing

The autoethnographic study at hand records a period of eleven years, in the course of which the author has undergone various transitions in regard to her academic and private being. The types of material used for the poetic argumentation include a series of writing events which include academic texts, personal notes, photographs and hand-crafted artwork, digital spaces and sites, audio testimonies and songs as well as dreams, literary excerpts and other data accumulated in the process of autoethnographic observation. If placed side by side to my academic ‘CV’

the key themes that arise in poetry may also be found in titles of research projects and publications. Tempting as this juxtaposition may be, I find that this chronological ‘explanation’ is, in this context, made redundant. As already noted, the artefact adopts a phenomenological approach to the research and writing of ethnography and employs design anthropology, remix and fiction writing as extra-textual tropes of ethnographic narration. In doing so, it suggests that, in certain cases, when the collected stories are central to the ethnographic narration, digital multimodal poetry is preferable and indeed quite distinct to standard written text. The overall orientation of this experimental book aims at new audiences and the unconventional online readership of ethnography, facilitated by multilinearity, multivocality and multimodality. The hidden elements of theory that lie behind selected words of the poetic form are in accordance with the rapid transformations currently taking place in the digital humanities, where more and more ethnographers use digital media in planning, designing, analyzing, and presenting ethnographic work.

The succession of the chapters has been designed to serve the complementarity of the experiential realms that each chapter portrays, yet they remain somewhat distinct in their thematic focus. The first chapter, ‘At the beginning there was chaos. Then desire’, is a Foucauldian-inspired chapter that illustrates desire as integral to ethnographic scrutiny and the constitution of anthropological authorship (Foucault, 1998). It details “the shadow sides of fieldwork” (McLean & Leibing, 2008) and seeks to manifest how sexual and erotic energy often inform our relationships with subject matters and field interlocutors.

Chapter two, ‘Daddyland’, stems from the work of psychotherapists Irvin Yalom and Vangelis Pappas, as they have guided me through the belated knowledge of my father. It documents what it means—and feels like—to forge surrogate parents who come from the realm of theory and not from kinship.

The following chapter, ‘Take it like a woman’, is a marker of how one’s work is always and inescapably affected by the social construction and experience of gender. It

draws on Judith Butler (1993) and other post-structuralist feminist theorists to document the variations of womanhoods as inextricably mediating all forms of text.

The fourth chapter, 'Of daughters and other paradoxes' comments on motherhood as a learning modality that is intertwined in ethnographic work, from the initial urge to 'do research', down to the methodologies and articulation mechanisms that deliver research findings. It places itself in dialogue with various daughters' and mothers' accounts, both literary and ethnographic, in order to illuminate the varied experiences of motherhood.

Chapter five, 'Soft-edged fairytales', delivers a more fictional take on relatedness and memory. It builds on anthropological work introduced by Janet Carsten (2000), Sara Ahmed (2013) and Amanda Coffey (1999) and subtly comments upon the fabricated character of self-narration, past appreciation and imagination.

The chapter entitled 'Subvert me up' is about subversive and subconscious experience as indicators of how fieldwork progresses. It could be classified as primordially Freudian (Thomas, 1990) with a touch of Malinowski (1989). Key texts and audiovisual data tie together its psychoanalytic and ethnographic stances; while chapter seven, '*Mi útero es tu útero*', draws on recent autoethnographic accounts by Eric Teman (2019), John Freeman (2015), Carolyn Ellis (1999), and others. It springs from my recent work on surrogate motherhood and it details how research problematics become embodied, internalized, entirely personal before they end up being portrayed as anything else.

The works in the chapter 'Foucault got it wrong (this is in fact a pipe)' seek to engage the reader in a dialogue with the ontological and aesthetic questioning raised by Foucault and Magritte (Shapiro, 1997; Foucault, 2020) about the object and its simulacrum, advocating that the words are actually the very sign they symbolise, thus bearing similar effects on intellect and body (if the binary is to be at all sustained). In doing so, it expands the discussion/exhibition to more contemporary concerns in anthropological representation and fictional writing.

'Hormonal panic attacks' revisits the 'problem' of age

as pivotal in (auto)ethnography. This chapter sheds light on the consecutive and notably gendered ‘rites of passage’ that the anthropologist goes through and which go hand-in-hand with reflexive work on the research topics, hypotheses and methods. It builds on anthropological work on aging by Philip Kao (2020), Jason Danely (2017), Didier Fassin (2014), and Annette Leibing and Lawrence Cohen (Leibing & Cohen, 2006), among other thinkers.

The concluding chapter, ‘Death comes knocking’, lingers on the common denominator of anthropological and human experience, introspection and work. It offers examples of personal liminal points of physical and symbolic death as they have greatly informed the depth and breadth of social research (Engelke, 2019; Bille, Hastrup & Soerensen, 2010).

Last but not least, a note on the muttering bodies in the title. This is the one point at which I wish to exert my authorship privilege; I have decided to leave the title unexplained. Just a tip: observe yourself while immersed in the artefact and its constitutive fragments and look for your own mutterings as they surface. Writing it felt like manually typesetting a queer palpitating text. Thanks for taking this leap with me.

NOTES

¹ As Athanasiou notes, late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century Western biopolitics is performed primarily through the production of human subjectivities and the sciences/epistemes of life, through self-surveillance and self-normalization; it is valorized in terms of care for propitious sexual and reproductive health and for the future of human life; it is experienced in terms of individual responsibility, self-determination, technological enablement, free choice, and free flow of information (Athanasiou, 2003, p. 150).

² See also Strathern (2004) on the epistemological interdisciplinary construction of knowledge and the ownership of academic knowledge.

³ As noted, art practices in the digital culture have also been transformed; in this context, even “hard science”, positivist research such as medicine and physics, has been acknowledged as collapsing the separation between scientific experimentation and artistic innovation, where experimenting is both an integral strategy of art-making and a legitimate form of expression (Gere, 2016).

⁴ Margaret Somerville’s ethnography *Water in a Dry Land* (Somerville, 2013), developed in collaboration with U’Alayi artist/researcher Chrissiejoy Marshall and employing images from landscapes and waterways, is a compelling example of how to write an alternative to traditional academic narrative so as to articulate meanings otherwise unsayable.

⁵ New media art and criticism connect literary art and digital performance (Ricardo ed., 2009), dueling on new genres such as geopoetics (Kwastek, in Ricardo, 2009), transmodally (Ricardo, in Ricardo, 2009) and screen writing (Cayley, in Ricardo, 2009) as practice-based modalities for digital literature and poetics. In some cases, as in the example of the Middle East, digital literature has a notably political tone, more so than in other cases (Lenze, 2019).

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Anna Apostolidou is an anthropologist, mother of two, and author of five books, including *Re/producing Fictional Ethnographies: Surrogacy and Digitally Performed Anthropological Knowledge* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022); *Anthropological Approaches to Digital Education* (Kallipos, 2022); and *Queering the Motherland: Male Same-sex Desire and the Greek Nation* (LAP, 2018).

Bodies That Mutter is her first book of poetry.



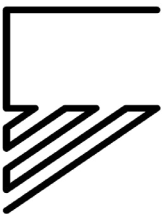
Scanning the QR code above (or pointing your browser to feministresearch.org/bodies-that-mutter) will take you to the virtual version of *Bodies That Mutter*, which, as explained in the Outro, contains hyperlinked text that leads to insinuations: audio-, visual, and textual objects and locations that unfold a multitude of meanings, references, inspirations, and interpretations beyond the first layer that you encounter in the poems in the book that you hold in your hands.

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