

# **Enceladus Below**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

In *Enceladus Below*, objects and performers come together on stage to shape and reshape a blurry view of home and memory. By drawing on fiction, faint views of history, and fragments of personal memory, three performers helped to flesh out a fragmentary script about objects and afterlife. Nine devised rituals, drawn from everyday acts of touch and gesture, were imposed on top of textual fragments of dialogue and action, and the resulting scenes were built on unresolved collisions between these two separate structures. The two-hour performance was paralleled by acousmatic sound and layered moving image projections. The sound was drawn from close recordings of metal and ceramic objects. The projections were assembled from layered footage devised throughout the process. The underlying creative method touched on the opaque concepts of history and archeology rendered in relationship to objects and to notions of touch, gesture, and spectrality.

**Keywords:** devised performance; improvisation; memory; object-agentivity; history; music composition and sound art

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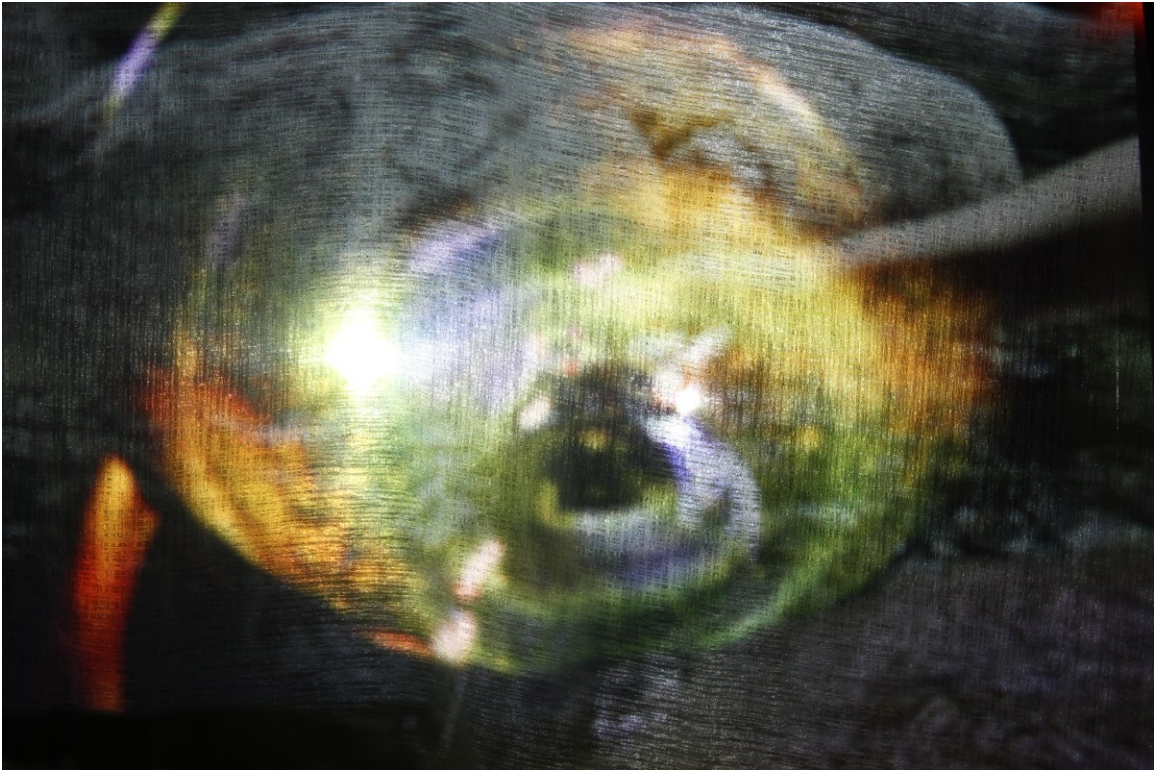
The cast and crew and I together would like to acknowledge the tremendous support given by Gillian Hanemayer, Ben Rogalsky, and Andrew Curtis, who through their efforts saw that our vision, in all its oddness, reached the stage.

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## *Defense Statement*

*Enceladus Below* is a performance work about history, ritual, and home. It was created between 2021 and 2022, and was first staged on November 25th and 26th of 2022. The performance was led by Lauren Han, Zoë Braithwaite, and Rosemary Morrison. The set was designed in collaboration with Brianna Bernard, the projections were designed in collaboration with Jela Ahn and Nicole Huang, and the lighting was designed by Gabriella Hu. The stage manager was Joy Wu, the technical director was Suzie Zhong, and the production manager was Claudia Chan.

Explorations of major themes and of the interlayered images of the projection design began in the fall of 2021. The script for the text, which evolved a great deal throughout the process, was written mainly in the winter of 2021-2022. Explorations and rehearsals with designers and performers started in the summer of 2022 and continued up to the performance.

*Enceladus* deals with rituals of homemaking and their relationship to temporal recurrence and interconnection. It approaches the question of how to make a home with nothing but memory, carried in and with objects, history, and personal memory. Its thematic vocabulary is dominated by unexpected eruptions of the past through objects, gestures, acts, words, eruptions by which the work derives its name. The following appeared in accompanying literature for the work:

Enceladus is the sixth-largest moon of Saturn. It is known for the more than 100 geysers near its South pole that launch vaporized water as much as 500 kilometers from the surface. These emissions originate in the moon's vast subsurface ocean and penetrate layers of sedimentation covering the body's uncertain history. It is also considered to be the most likely location in the Solar System outside Earth to harbor life.

Enceladus is also the name of a giant of Greek antiquity, mothered by Gaia, the Earth, in collision with Ouranos, the sky. Enceladus was said to have battled the goddess Athena, and in defeat was buried beneath a mountain, spewing fire through its layers for all time thereafter.

These two figures—moon and giant—form the title for a work about the sedimentation of time, about a world beneath our own, and about the moments and acts of memory and return that erupt through these geotemporal separations. Thus, *Enceladus Below* imagines the collections and compactions of time and memory in life beneath its own layers. Through a series of rituals, gestures, musings, memories, arguments, meals,



and recreations, the fragments, incidents, and dreams that make up life come slowly and briefly into one conjoined view.

As the didactic text suggests, much of the performative vocabulary of the piece is built of a series of everyday acts, either presented in ordinary fashion or through the lens of ritual. The three performers staged their story within a boundless home, assembled of household objects and furniture. They constantly remade the configuration, composing shapes, rooms, stories, memories out of these ruins and articulating spaces through rituals of the ordinary. The set itself became a complex storytelling collaborator, spatially, visually, and sonically, with visuality and space interfacing with sound to emphasize shift, disappearance, and lingering. The central ritual hinges on this constant reshaping of the space and its contents (objects, furniture), informed by relationship to those contents.

In addition, the performers moved and sounded alongside projections and loudspeaker diffusion. These acts of ritual engagement were doubled in projected image and sound, always slightly different. Together these elements turned towards the separations and repetitions that underlie our own lives with things, with constant, slippery parallel worlds jutting from the captured image and sound into the live space. The experimentation process began in this realm, exploring iterations of recorded gestures, and the rest of the work built on these results.

Memory (both personal and fictional) played key roles in the work, both as a motif of the narrative and a tool of our devising. However, a more central concern is history, brought by relationships to texts and the presence of objects: what forms of contact with a real past are rendered in our performance with objects, texts, names, and stories? The work was informed by concepts of pastiche, nostalgia, and enjoined (in)animacy as drawn from Frederic Jameson, Rodney Harrison and John Schofield, Claire Colebrook, Rebecca Schneider, and Elizabeth Povinelli.<sup>1</sup> The project in its relationship to many objects as collaborators is particularly interested in Tim Ingold's criticism of the dichotomy of object and material often present in studies of material

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<sup>1</sup> See Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July–August 1984): 64–71 for a discussion of pastiche and related concepts; see especially Schneider, "Intra-animation," in *Animism in Art and Performance*, ed. Christopher Braddock (Cham, Switz.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 154; see Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem for Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); see Harrison and John Schofield, *After Modernity: Archeological Approaches to the Contemporary Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

culture.<sup>2</sup> Our performance was in many ways informed by questions around the objects: what their presence connects us to in the slippery space of memory, fiction, and history (and differently, fictions of history).

*Enceladus* was also compositionally and thematically concerned with modes of counterpoint, or simultaneity more broadly. The work builds on previous experiments in counterpoint and cooccurrence in the form of both live acts and residual assemblages (of objects). In devising each scene, we often started with counterpoint, imposing multiple ideas, paradigms, or rhythms atop one another. In some cases, this took the form of separate acts with independent internal rhythms given to each performer. In other cases, the counterpoint built on coexisting elements within a single part, requiring the performer to balance two or more simultaneous rhythms.

The notion of counterpoint operates alongside what we understood as shifting pressures: the simultaneous inhabitation of multiple dimensions, often including multiple rhythms or pulses (as above), or the evocation (often strictly internal) of multiple memories at once. The disruptions and resultants of these collisions, marked by interruption and divergence, shaped the rituals and moments that defined the work.

Most centrally, *Enceladus* approaches the pressure between history (as in archeological history) and touch (as in memory, especially the memory of objects, or otherwise spectral memories without clear impression). These moments and rituals articulated in the afterimage of home search for the various threads—legible or opaque—assembled in the objects and stories that we collaborated with.

The function and form of counterpoint in *Enceladus* is variously articulated in the first scene of the work. The scene (see Figure 1) featured a complex duet point mainly between two parts: Meliai (speaking; moving limbs; stuck in place) and Circe (moving objects and the inevitable noise this causes; shifting through the stage). Mel's text shifts between a series of memories. Each of these blocks sounds alongside small, transient porcelain and metal clanging sounds as Circe collects and deposits collections of objects from one surface to another: colorful teapots, metal cups, ceramic bowls, wooden boxes, a loaf of bread. The noise of these actions from Circe is enough to render the text

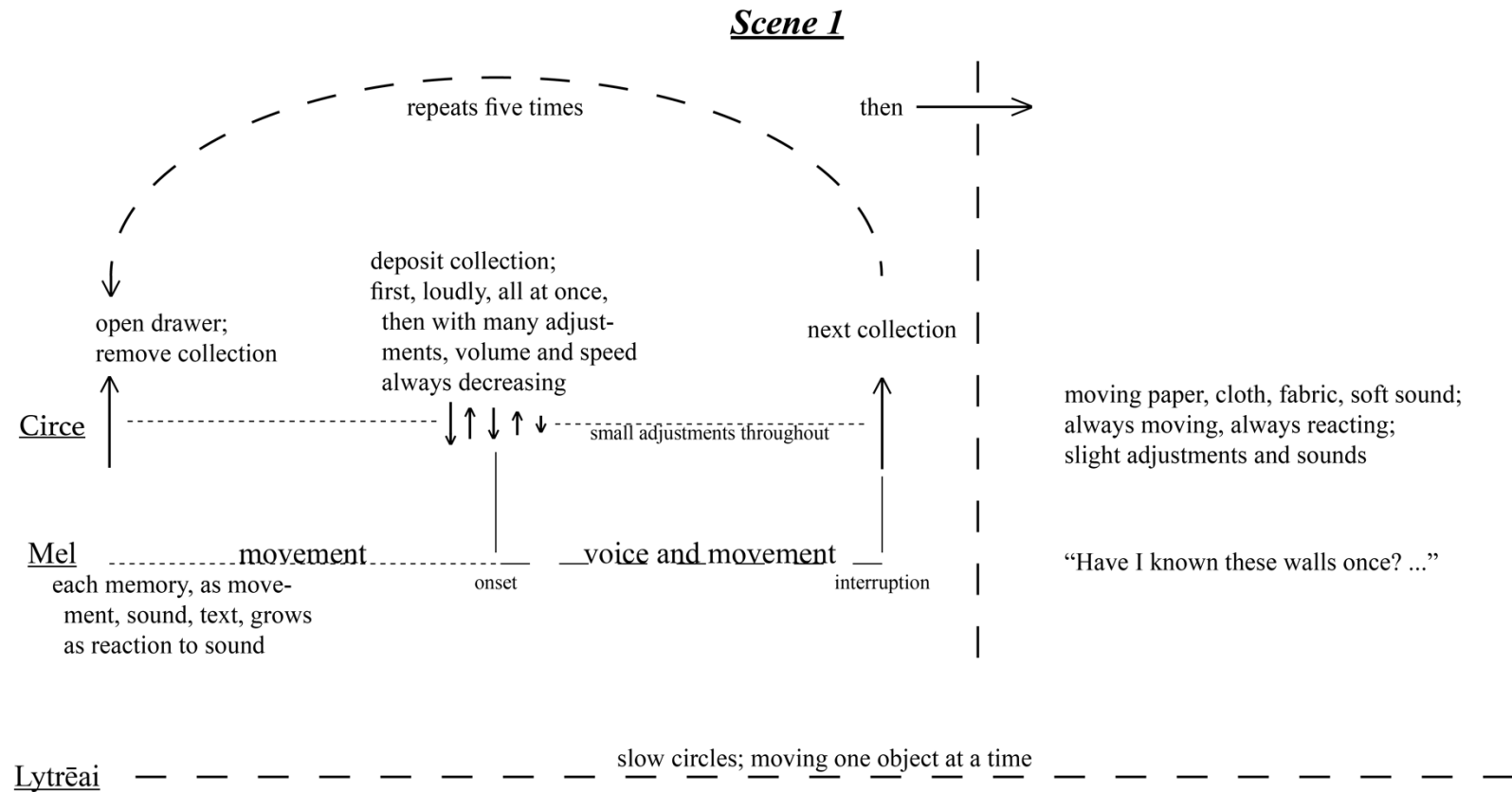
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<sup>2</sup> See Ingold, "Materials Against Materiality," *Archeological Dialogues* 14, no. 1 (2007).

(unamplified) indistinct to the audience; the two parts thus trade figures, always dovetailing (as in Bach's counterpoint). Circe leads each block of memory with two gestures: first, a gesture of gathering various objects together; then, a subsequent gesture of dropping everything onto a given surface, which is loud, chaotic; she continues to manipulate each object into place, the gestures becoming steadily softer and more dispersed. Mel's voice is added as the sound softens, and we are moved through a stanza of memory and imagery, cut off by Circe's next gathering-together (which often starts with the grinding sound of opening a drawer). This pattern repeats several times as the text develops; the end of the scene accelerates the relationship between gestures at the same time that Circe moves from loud vessels to softer objects (softer in the sense of materially, but more crucially sonically: fabric, paper, vegetables, etc.).

Within these segments, Mel is in constant motion, discovering tiny articulations of her body as if entering a foreign anatomy: hands and fingers distend in search of their limits, and of the meanings of their shapes; the head continues to revolve as if unsure of gravity and light. Circe throughout makes tiny interjections of small sounds, both in response to and in anticipation of the blur of memories from which Mel recites (a teapot comes in anticipation of her memory of tea; a slow rustle of paper follows memory of the wind). These introductions of sound to the stillness prompt jolting shifts to the otherwise glacial tempo that defines Mel's limbs. These trading figures create numerous small relationships between the details of Mel's memory and movement and the gesture and sound of Circe in reshaping the stage. A word or phrase evoking the smell and height of a kitchen is echoed by Circe repositioning a cup with a faint jolt of porcelain on wood. The slow, soft shifting of a fragment of paper over the surface of a table evokes new memories in Mel, who responds with the slow, explorational movement of their hand against the side of their face.

At the same time, the scene is built of many shifting assemblages of objects. The arrangement of the scene, for one, all together articulates the entire stage, but always through the overlapping of several spaces. The objects within this are likewise the assembled result of spaces, memories, moments gathered independently. As Circe shifts the objects throughout the space, the moments evolve and dissolve in cross-time with Mel's stream of memories (fragments of speech).



**Figure 1. Illustration of the first scene**

The scene notably unfolds from a set of predetermined elements but with little knowledge of how the specifics may unfold. A lot might have been learned from a dozen or more performances of the same manifestation: perhaps everything would have become fixed, or perhaps every detail would continuously evolve.

The assemblages of objects described above were part of an investigation of what we understood as mysterious relations. The presence of live acts undertaken by performers always coexisted with the presence of these assembled objects, described as *stories*. The collections of objects were the result of movement scores repeated in rehearsals. These scores were developed from collections of everyday objects and gestures assembling the interior of memory into a shared ritual grounded in a collection of performance objects. Some usually minimal version of this collection of objects became the assemblage on stage, surrounded by ghosts of gestures not present on the stage but instead manifesting in evocations. The scene in Figure 2 (with text in Figure 3) features one such assemblage in the upper right of the image. Throughout our explorations, this table and two of the objects on it were part of a recurring gesture score. It was unseen in the performance, but its residue was assembled on both nights, then gradually disassembled piece by piece. The original objects that defined this scene have been replaced by the bowl and amphora seen on the table's surface. This assemblage renders an impression of that shared act that previously surrounded it, but there is little clear impression of this given to the audience; the interior of memory (the inside of a home, often) that shaped it is rendered in only this afterimage.

In the same way (to touch only briefly on a central theoretical concern of the research), the objects of our story came to us without any documentation of their histories—the touch, movement, and refraction that previously shaped their presence beside other lives. One goal in working with these objects is to ask after their capacity to deliver connections to their own memories of touch: do the ghosts of these relations leave traces accessible to us? Do these histories inform our performance with them, or are we always only seeing those other histories, accessible to archeology? Is a teapot merely a teapot; does it evoke history; or does it carry memory?

Amid this theme is likewise the idea of time touching, the convergence of temporalities. In understanding modes of time gestured by the so-called inanimate,

performance theorist Rebecca Schneider articulates ideas of inter- and intra-inanimation:

I recycled the word interinanimation for its cross-weave of animate and inanimate to suggest that the live and the non-live become themselves through each other, not in juxtaposition, and I read such interinanimacy as a basic aspect of theatre as an art form that often plays the dead and the live across each other on stage.<sup>3</sup>

The convergence of three characters on the stage was shaped by three distinct mythical relationships to objects and time. Circe eats all the food; Lytrēai moves slowly as water, is often with water; Mel begins in slow motion and ends in hyper-speed. These mythical paradigms embody relationships to these entanglements mentioned by Schneider. For Circe, memory is evoked by smell, taste; for Lytrēai, time flows together as water. Mel learns to navigate this world from them. In any case, time folds back on itself as Mel learns the new, uncanny flow of duration that defines her new otherworldly home. Time is often operating in multiple ways at once: different speeds, different memories, different glimpses of the previous world. As an inquiry into these themes, the work is often composed with many cooccurring operations on the stage. These operate on two levels: two performers in two separate speeds, moments, time scales; or one performer juggling two moments, speeds, or time scales at once.

A later section we called the rock-flower scene is built of two separate but simultaneous gesture scores, the vague, poetic instructions for which are shown alongside the dialogue (see Figure 3). Mel's score involves a slow exploration of a collection of objects and a pattern of evolving touch, which is interrupted three times by the sudden impulse to look for something that is lost, and presumed to be hidden nearby. Circe's score is built of two parts: a simple underlying score made from very ordinary components (she sits at a table; she walks to a counter, pours tea; she carries the tea to another table; she touches another teacup) and a few stanzas of dialogue. The result in Circe's case is a surreal score built on repeated attempts to 'correctly' align the dialogue with sets of gestures (placing the teapot; standing up; pouring tea). Circe repeats the words and gestures over and over again, moving through the pieces and places of the

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<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Schneider, "Intra-inanimation," in *Animism in Art and Performance*, edited by Christopher Braddock (Cham, Switz.: Springer International, 2017): 157-8.



**Figure 2. Image of the rock-flower scene**

Photo by Claudia Chan. While Mel (Lauren Han) is in the foreground, in the upper right, an empty scene sits. The repetitions outlined in Figure 3 are performed here, with Circe (Zoë Braithwaite) seen in the upper left corner. The scene performed by Lytrēai (Rosemary Morrison; shown top center) is essentially separate here. Mel's instructions are shown on the left and Circe's are shown on the right. The italic text is dialogue, and the roman text is stage directions (or more accurately, prompts to help improvise alongside devised gesture scores).

simpler gesture score only very gradually (at the end of one stanza, repeated in fragments, she ‘breaks’ through to the next step in the score). The outstanding sounds of Circe’s score (usually, the loud clang of a teapot or teacup as it reaches the table) breaks through the hazy veil between her world and Mel’s. The sound pushes through Mel’s obsessive play with objects and reminds her that she is looking for something; she stands, crosses the room, and checks inside another cupboard. The performance is created in attempts (perhaps constantly unsuccessful) to resolve the tension of colliding speeds and memories. In this underworld of memory, time is squeezed together in uncanny ways, and the characters are linked to memory, reality, history by objects coinhabiting the home. The performance involves a constant shifting pressure, one that can never quite land and which constantly (and perhaps invisibly) guides the cycles of decision-making by which the work generated itself each night.

These exercises of shifting weight were essential to a work built around the many collisions of things (objects, memories, stories; text, movement, sound) whose connections were often opaque. The metaphor of shifting pressure pervaded the devising processes by which the original script (its scene divisions, monologues, dialogues, characters, and perhaps little else) was transferred to the stage in newfound (after the fact of writing) relation to objects: furniture, teapots, cloth, sounds.

One of the recurring exercises involved the creation of rooms. These rooms often had literal manifestations (the arrangement of our collaborating objects into a particular space) but were largely based on memory, fiction, film, and other fragments. Performers conjured rooms to their minds from their own memory, from texts we shared or texts they brought themselves (without sharing, usually), from films buried in our brains or viewed together in excerpts. The sets of things that surrounded us in the stage were assembled into versions of these rooms, with imitations emphasizing a particular aspect: the ability to recreate a specific and iconic gesture (e.g., the proper height from which to cut vegetables, the relative relationship of table and floor to simulate the first gesture on waking up); the simulation of the feeling, emotion, color, etc. of the conjured room; the proper framing of a central object (e.g., the teapot is in the center of the room; it is surrounded on all sides; it is not alone). Most often, the source, either personal or otherwise, was not disclosed.



MELIAI	CIRCE
With pieces each movement a recovery and it returns to your hands. It remains. With pieces. and each movement There was something you had wanted to take with you, but did not.	Perhaps you lived in such a room once. Was this thing with you? How did your hand fall against? One word at a time. You would walk from one edge to another, your feet gliding, your heart beating. One word at a time: <i>You were a dove when I knew you. Then a worm, then a gull, then a strip of phosphorous. I used to catch you in my garden—I would tend to you like the plants.</i>
With pieces each movement a recovery and it returns to your hands. It remains. With pieces. and each movement There was something you had wanted to take with you, but did not. And it remains where it was left to wait.	Somewhere, a threshold: <i>I knew you better than you thought I did.</i> In one time or another, you lived among them, and these shapes have endured within you and all around you: <i>Your dove I fed a worm, your worm I fed the soil, your gull I fed fire.</i>
With pieces each movement a recovery and it returns to your hands. It remains. With pieces. and each movement There was something you had wanted to take with you, but did not. And it remains where it was left to wait. Here: Fire grew in my garden and I have saved many such spores. Listen now as I return this piece to you.	And you shall know them again: <i>Fire grew in my garden and I have saved many such spores. Do you know what I use them for?</i> <i>Delicate pieces of dust crystallized by the weight of rock and water. It's how I see the way of things, the path. It has a history—something old.</i> <i>The motion is a sort of nod or wave, wrist and hand and head. There's a sort of touch to it. You pass each other from a distance. Feel your way through the thing.</i> <i>What, then? Tell me everything.</i>

**Figure 3. Rock-flower scene with Circe and Mel**

Mel's instructions are shown on the left and Circe's are shown on the right. The italic text is dialogue, and the roman text is stage directions (or more accurately, prompts to help improvise alongside devised gesture scores).

In these rooms there is a convergence. The imagined space (or sometimes multiple spaces) collides with the real objects that simulate it. And often, the gesture score devised for one room would be imported into another, and thus the attempt to follow through with iconic details collided with the unexpected presences and absences found in the new space.

The rooms are part of a template for shifting between personal and impersonal, useful in part because long meditations on bygone personal spaces can be exhausting (for many reasons), and likewise useful in foregrounding the similar dual footing of performer and character, present in all theatre, but of special interest for us. The fictional fragments were brought into the space as a counterpoint to personal memory. I asked the performers, in walking from one room to the next, to step from their memory to the fictional memory we had carried in to surround their character. These two figures (self and fiction) thus share footing in creation and performance.

In a similar way, *Enceladus* works with the collision of fiction and history with memory (and the collision of different fictions and histories, i.e., the many Circes who come together on the stage<sup>4</sup>). In building these moments and shaping many rooms, we often drew on fictional works; some were strongly related to the work at hand (*Odyssey*, *Circe*), others less so (*Unknown Language*, *Bend It Like Beckham*). Some were fragments introduced by the performers whose sources I never learned. Attempts to enter the fictional were in part ways of stepping out of the personal, drawing scenes from other works as respite from one's own heavily borne memory. But fiction is inevitably wrapped in unexpected tendrils of the personal, just as history comes to meet us mainly in our hands and feet. The shifting pressure in the dual work of an actor is best summarized in these terms. But this understanding finds relevance in another respect here as well.

In a work from 2018 for cello and percussion ensemble, I drew in many ways on the stylistic relationships present in Carl Orff's late opera *Prometheus*. Most interesting

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<sup>4</sup> And I am indebted in part to details from Madeline Miller's novel *Circe*, which delicately amalgamates a range of sources on the lesser goddess, constructing a narrative of bitterness, loneliness, the search for power, family, and home—her thoughtful kinship with herb, flower, wolf. I also think of Anne Carson's *Antigonick*, in which she very particularly spins Antigone against her slanderers (Hegel and Freud, most especially) to “forbid that [she] should ever lose [her] screams.” Anne Carson, trans., *Antigonick*, by Sophocles (New York: New Directions Books, 2015), 6.

for me is the way Orff's work drew on classical Athenian theatre, as the libretto is the unaltered and untranslated *Prometheus Bound* (Προμηθεύς Δεσμώτης) from fifth century playwright Aeschylus. While early opera in its late-Renaissance Venetian origin was built on an evocation of ancient Greek theatre (without much concern for its accurate reconstruction), Orff's play (while not definitively accurate, as certainly no reconstruction could be given the ultimate limited knowledge of such a distant history) is concerned at length with the specifics of Athenian drama and performance practices. The opera shifts between repetitive but strongly projected vocalizations with limited presence of harmony and partly rhythmic chant, in many ways more ordinary than the strangeness of opera's sung dialogue (recitativo). Whether any of this succeeds in evoking Orff's historical curiosities or not, I find the work fascinating given its lack of attempt to translate either text or emotionality into a contemporary context. In my own work, which drew on Orff in its suggestion of voice and declamation, the 'vocalizations' are performed by a cello, becoming wordless, the meaning or contents of the underlying impulse to vocalize lost somewhere in the mix.<sup>5</sup> There is an inescapable absence best described not as *silence* but as *stillness*, a quality that Anne Carson points to in a poem of Sappho:

The center of the poem is a catalogue of suspended animation, its stillness framed by a single act. In its first word the poem sets out an adverb meaning "here, hither, to this place," an adverb usually followed by some imperative verb like come or go. But here the imperative doesn't arrive till the last word: "pour." By implication Aphrodite arrives at the same moment; until then the sacred grove and the poem reverberate with the lack of her.<sup>6</sup>

This same quality is abundant in the old materials we drew on in *Enceladus*—an irrevocable stillness (the goddess never arrives), yet translators like Carson (and Seamus Heaney, and Robert Fagles, whose translations we drew on) chip away at the possibility

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<sup>5</sup> I first was drawn to the poetic potential of this gesture after watching a jaded trombone master's student perform a Baroque Italian art song on sackbut and accompanied by harpsichord for the obligatory period music performance requirement, much dreaded by graduate students more interested in their well-made modern instruments. The clear impression of a vocal style beneath the wordless leaps and swells of the music seemed to be pushing to escape the confines it had been placed in; this seemed to better capture the potential relationship that exists in performing works from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Carson, "Stillness," *Critical Inquiry* 48, no. 1 (2021): 16. The poem in question is Fragment 2, copied on page 17 of Carson's essay in her own translation.

of reconstructing their natural movements, perhaps not removing stillness but imagining what preceded it. By contrast, Orff's impression of the myth and of Aeschylus' play seems content to render stillness and ask questions of it directly, regardless of response. This stillness was at the heart of this vocal music for cello, and also at the core of many aspects of *Enceladus*.

The split pressure here (rather than memory and history) is between modes of history, in each case seeking something different. Archeological history on one hand wants to reanimate; on the other hand, another kind of history—one content with stillness—hopes to touch. Every endeavor in this context to connect with history (through texts, stories, names, objects, evocation) finds itself navigating the desire to touch, the way things are always beyond reach, the question of real history in study of text and artifact. (“The motion is a sort of nod or wave, wrist and hand and head,” Circe tells Mel. “There’s a sort of touch to it. You pass each other from a distance. Feel your way through the thing.”)<sup>7</sup>

Many of the *things* we brought with us into the space (books, teapots, scraps of paper, clothes, bread) were part of an ongoing attempt to connect with experiences of the past, either a personal one (our memories, for instance) or a historical one. I had a certain fondness for bringing scores into rehearsals (“score” used here more in the sense of music: a textual document containing instructions, however vague, for performance, or sometimes something more abstract). While this aspect of the research fell somewhat to the side in the process, eclipsed by other inquiries, it continues to be a subject of interest for me, and one I feel is relevant to the questions asked in our devising process.

One of the central themes of *Enceladus* is absence—in particular, the absences that tend to accompany memory (the incompleteness of our encounter with the past).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This dichotomy of *touch* and *nod* is drawn from a text of Joan Didion. For further discussion, see Appendix A.

<sup>8</sup> And see here further commentary from Schneider: “Time, engaged *in* time, is always a matter of crossing, or passing, or touching, and perhaps always (at least) double. In the two examples above (the body accessing material in an archive and the body as an archive of material that might be accessed), the past is given to remain, but in each case that remaining is incomplete, fractured, partial—in the sense both of fragmentary and ongoing. Such remaining also presumes a threat, a site of contestation, a fight. In the archive, the fight is a battle to preserve the past in its material traces against the “archiviolithic” threat that it might disappear.” *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York:

The score is an attempt to both engage in this fragmentary memory, and to press memory through and with the object<sup>9</sup> (paper, but also other things). Some scores are created with the explicit intent of being interpreted in performance as scores; others are brought into the space with this intent, but have their origins in other landscapes. Some are old letters, received or unsent. Some are journal entries, or pages of homework, received through our own long-held carrying. Others are less easily categorized.

This play with fragments of the past borrows aesthetically from practices of translation, especially visible in translations of Sappho's fragments. These poems come to us through partly disintegrated papyrus, if not in the quotations of other ancient and classical authors who may have only included a stanza or two. Much has been lost of the original words, which is indicated via the Leiden conventions for manuscript typesetting. Translations inevitably are forced to render absence:

καὶ στρώμ[αν ἐ]πὶ μολθάκαν	and on a soft bed
ἀπάλαν παρ[ ]οῦγων	delicate
ἐξίης πόθ[ο]ν [ ] νίδων	you would let loose your longing
κωῦτε τις[ ] οὔ[ ]τε τι	and neither any[ ] nor any
ἱρον οὐδ' ὕ[ ]	holy place nor
ἔπλετ' ὅπ[ο]θεν ἄμ[ ]μες ἀπέσκομεν,	was there from which we were absent
οὐκ ἄλσος [ ] [ ] ρος	no grove[ ] no dance
[ ] ψοφος	[ ] no sound
[ ] οἰδαι	[ <sup>10</sup>

These translations and their inevitable absences, for me, offer a mode of performing (with) temporal relationships through awareness of omission, disintegration, loss.

Our relationship to similar absences in our scores (which, again, are both intentional omissions and those induced by these salvaged objects of collaborated memory) involves just such a working practice of marking absence, often by surrounding

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Routledge, 2011), 37. The phrase “archiviolithic” is a reference to Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 10.

<sup>9</sup> This “through and with” again attempts to conjure the same “amongnesses, besidenesses, withnesses and againnesses” captured by Schneider’s term “intrainanimation,” in a further attempt to avoid “an essentialized ‘betweenness.’” See Schneider, “Intrainanimation,” 154.

<sup>10</sup> Anne Carson, trans., *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), Fragment 94, 186-187.

it, or otherwise enumerating the empty spaces which *are* known despite their missing material or marking. As an example, note the following instructional score used in many rehearsals:

Find a memory:  
from your life  
from a *myth* (like *The Odyssey*,  
or *Unknown Language*,  
or *Bend It Like Beckham*)

What space do you need to recreate it?  
What things do you need?  
Draw from your surroundings—build the memory by room, arrangement,  
position yourself within it

What thing external to you (at least partly, in the sense of *enjoined*  
with other entities)  
is at the heart of this moment?  
Consider an omission: thing, gesture, word, barrier.  
Consider what forms around this absence,  
and the consequences of drawing attention to a missing piece.

What is the story now?

Use this ghostly presence to connect your constructed room  
with the elements of the stage that extend beyond its bound.

The score asks performers to find a memory, often prompted by an object or by the sharing of stories or sensations. The objects of the set are assembled into a room (a practice described above) which can with some adequacy (and of course also with considerable inadequacy) serve as the site for a recreation or performance of said memory, or of a detail of it. But performers are asked to omit something. Sometimes, this means taking away a crucial object, or skipping a step in a process (making tea with no tea leaves). But the arrangement, the gesture, the pattern of sound must surround what is missing, drawing attention to its absence.

Likewise, this notion draws back to the practice of guided scores and their spectral appearances on stage. These iterative processes saw performers developing movement scores in connection with objects, then assembling some faint fragment of this collection during performance. Left to rest, the objects continue their performance

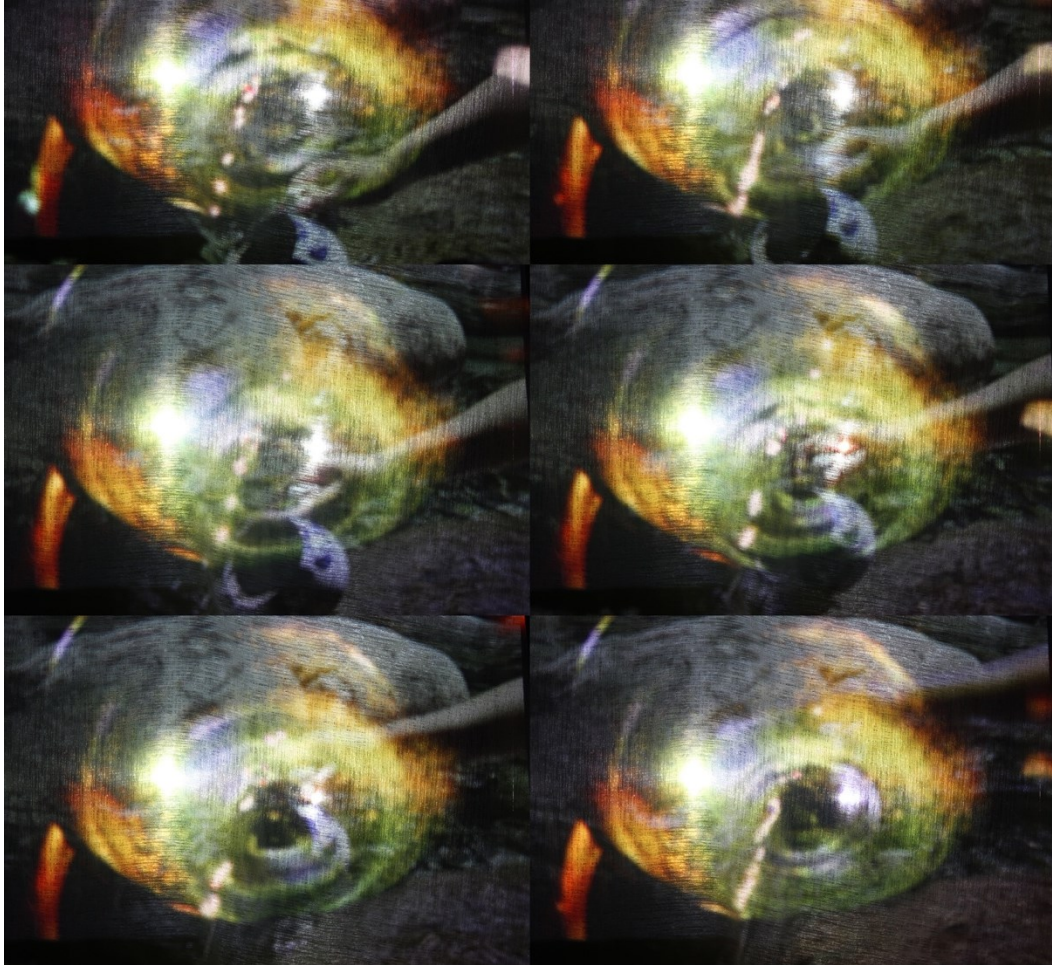
independent of their prior collaborators. What emerges is a ghost<sup>11</sup>—the bracketed/encircled fragments of a once-happening, remaining in partial view. And *ghost* here refers both to the suspended afterlife of the gestures made by humans (mainly hands) and the paths and relations among and between objects (as it is not only human movements, sounds, relations which can linger in spectral afterlife), some of which remain, while other objects and other relations have shifted out of presence. What I described above as a *mysterious relation* here finds itself dubbed *absence*. With textual scores (as guides to performance) and performed residuals, we return to a question of objects and their memory: Can we connect with the histories they carry? Does the absent and imperceptible come through in relation? Scores evoke the capacity of objects to carry, but also emphasize what is absent. Our performance alongside incomplete moments, evoked through assemblages of objects (co-inhabitants and co-carriers of memory), draws out the enduring relationships to these absences that surround us as we move through life, both present in our own lost toys and the things we find that once belonged to strangers.

One last set of questions comes through in this concern for recovery, the irrecoverable, and all those things that are held tight despite their (alleged) inaccessibility to humans. One of the products of the years I spent writing chamber music is an interest in time scales. This refers both to the relationship of different time scales at once (a group of musicians, all following their own pulse) and to the interest in methods of drawing out the presence or impact of different rhythmic entities already in our worlds and bodies (as in the time scales used in the scene in Figure 4, where memory and the heartbeat guide a gesture score with a teapot and a table). As I've suggested, these rhythms and harmonies offer a mode of connecting agents in performance, creating a conjoined mess of movement, pulse, at once static<sup>12</sup> and always shifting. But this theme also allows one final way of connecting with objects and their temporal relationships. I think again of the fragments of Sappho—not only the words variously encountered but also the scraps of

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<sup>11</sup> I draw the phrasing “ghost” as well as the initial inspiration for this exercise from Leslie Hill and Helen Paris. See Hill and Paris, *Devising Theatre and Performance: Curious Methods* (Intellect Books, 2021), 59-60.

<sup>12</sup> Static insofar as it lacks the coordinated emphasis of homophonous movement, especially on the metric or gestural level. Varèse referred to this as “clouds” of sound.



**Figure 4. A teapot is washed in a river; water and light in a plastic-ceramic bowl**

With Lauren Han and Nicole Huang.



papyrus that have in a few instances been uncovered. The texts (ink on a thin sheet of plant fiber) are timekeepers themselves, staged in their moment in the sixth or seventh century and in increments carrying out the millennia-long performance of transformation, a performance that envelops the text it carries, but perhaps has no thematic relationship to it. It is a work with multiple concerns—decay *and* longing.

In this ghostly way, the words once sung by Sappho (or written by Sappho for a singer) have a presence with us in this moment. The song inscribed in that supposedly distant past coarticulates through its endurance the layers of time it uses in its continued performance of transformation. Time is not traveled in leaps of abandon; its layers are constantly in touch.

This is part of the sense of relating to things that is present in *Enceladus*: a sense of things carrying time with them. While we are not concerned with a practice of accessing what it is these things carry, if such access is even possible—and in fact the original script is mainly concerned with the maddening illegibility of any such connection—we *are* concerned with these objects with awareness of their carrying *something*. The rituals that evoke, but perhaps do not ever encounter, a lost past (often instead taking its place, as ritual and ordinary) become a way of sitting with our collections with awareness that they contain more than we can conjure, that they connect us to something, however multiple and mysterious the connections are.

These themes found their expression through the collaborations of light and objects as compounded by photography. In constant display through the work was a series of projections made alongside the devising of the performance itself and using some of the same objects, movements, spaces. Each original layer was then reprojected onto one of the surfaces available, often an object or furniture piece from our set. In some cases, multiple images (still or moving) were layered together via this process, but in some cases, the layering was between light and object alone.

In many such cases, the results of these entanglements were surprising and strange. The image in Figure 5 (one still from a set of videos) is the result of the underlying images being projected onto two surfaces of slightly different color and at different distances from both light source (projector) and point of capture (camera). On one side, the bright colors of the feast were stronger, resulting in a saturation of yellows



**Figure 5.      Scene with forest and feast (still)**

This image was the product of a feast scene (curated with Zoë Braithwaite) overlaid on a still of the forest canopy. The split in coloration of the two halves resulted from the two surfaces used (table and chest).

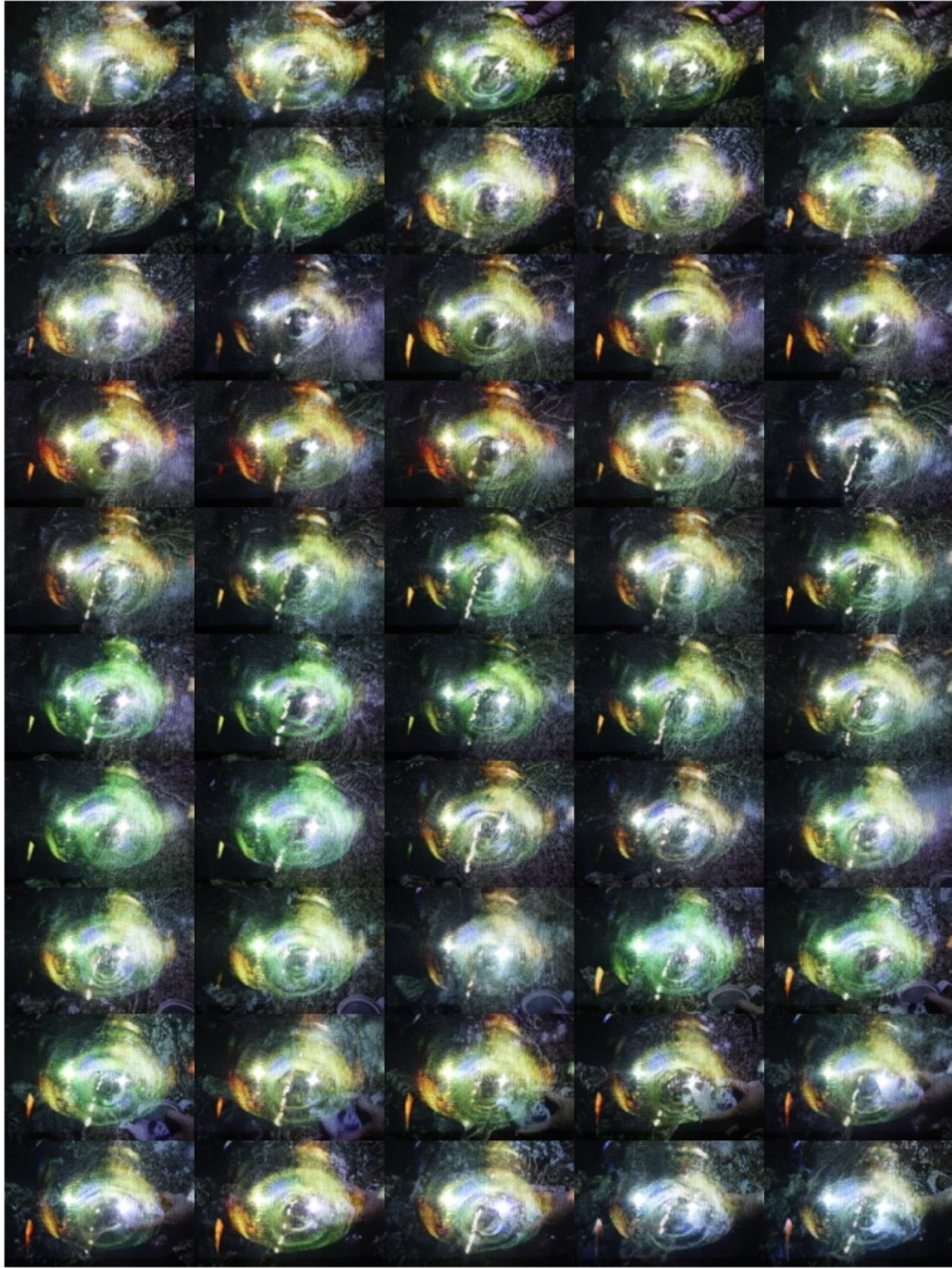
and reds with forest visible in only the dimmest parts. On the other side, the bright colors were lost, and the dark tones of the forest and its windows to the sky cover the underlying fruit and bread almost entirely. While this approach was returned to many times over, none of us could have anticipated this dramatic contrast or the resulting impression of a split realm that the moving body in the original video thus walked across.

Another result of these entanglings was the product of the camera itself. Most of the earliest experiments with light for this project involved various attempts to capture light sources, ranging from lightbulbs to fires to the reflection of the sun on the floor (and at one point the sun itself, passing through clouds). Slight variations in the angle of light or in the focal length, optical magnification, or shutter speed of the camera resulted in changes to camera's perception of the color of light. The results were colorful artifacts layered over the originals, and many videos were created by dialing one of the above features slowly during capture.

Some of these were done using video capture, but various photographic aberrations limited this method's usefulness. The substitute involved the automatic high speed image capture of the camera, whose limited speed (8 frames per second) required adjustment to the final compounded video sequence to give a sufficient impression of movement. Nonetheless, many of the resulting videos had noticeably low frame rates and reproduced the original movement (especially of gestures) in surreal ways owing to the strange tempo and the apart jumps in motion from frame to frame.

The emphasis in this practice was on the unexpected results of these methods, both the curious colorations and the strange impact of the capture and display of motion. The stills in Figure 4 show footage from our journey to a forest and river on what are mainly the traditional territories of Tsleil-Waututh, near BC's hydroelectric dam. We brought a teapot and washed it in the river; the resulting footage was layered with footage captured in the studio using water and a bowl. The same sets of images are used for the footage in Figure 6. The latter shows the drastic changes in color that resulted from the re-filming.

The projectors entered the performance space in much the same way as the other elements. They introduced their own distinct temporalities through looping video, the result of the compositing process (i.e., the number of images we were able to capture



**Figure 6. 50 successive stills from stop motion with teapot and overlaid with water and light in a plastic-ceramic bowl**

Featuring the gesture work, however obscure, of Lauren Han; with Nicole Huang. The underlying footage featuring bowl and water was a composite of still images, which we referred to as *stop motion*. The color changes occur while filming the light as it falls into the bowl.

from certain footage; the length of each still in the final compositing and the resulting frame rate of the output video, which defined the total length). Against the movements of bodies and objects together on the stage, these flickering loops of light offered yet further rhythms that defined the activity of the space. Whether the projections or the live acts were the focus from moment to moment in the work for each member of the audience was not something we cared to control.

A challenging question remains, even at the end of this process, of how these things come together in performance. One of themes of the work might in fact be *hoarding*, which captures the individuality of each obsession that brought these fragments together. While similar methods pervade the sound design, projection design, devising of scenes, and creation of the text, there is an opposing and significant role of an impulse towards accumulation and inclusion. *Enceladus* as a process was an exercise in working out their relationships, and it has added questions to its own pile as much as it might have answered any of its original concerns.

As I mentioned briefly above, my work as an artist began in the realm of music. As a composer, I worked in the confines of acoustic chamber music crafted through detailed notation. Starting in 2019, I expanded my practice significantly through an interest in loose notation and improvisation scores, the use of microphones and composition with sound in electroacoustic modes, and finally the inclusion of the voice in sonic terms but also crucially as a window into narrative and a relationship to text in more expanded terms (I had previously worked a lot with poem settings and the oratorio style as a deliberately antique mode). But even before this transition, I find that various impulses towards external objects of study were fighting their way into musical contexts and musical relationships. Text was a central dimension of this; its use often took on fairly confined modes, with a resistance to anything too distinctly narrative. But one work from 2018 took as its title a fragment of prose from a loosely science fictional novella I had worked on in the same year, with themes of ecology, fragility, and the dizziness of modes of time. I had relegated this literary practice to the realm of hobby, laboring under the inclination to be a composer in holistic terms. A work from 2017, unfinished, took as its premise an encyclopedia of local flora, with the independent musical lines (entirely instrumental) based on the names for said plants in the range of languages that encounter

them in that region. My advisor at the time criticized my approach for the lack of clear musical connection between the separate voices. With insufficient tools to approach this schism between compositional demands and conceptual intrigue, I abandoned the work.

There are many other examples, each of which might suggest the intrusion of one or another obsession deemed too external to music to allow inclusion. In this light, *Enceladus* does not represent an attempt to jump ship into a domain more suited to these elements, and this transition does not represent an absolute abandoning of music, even heavily notated acoustic chamber music (though I don't envision this approach being effective for any projects in the near future). Instead, the goal of this project at its outset was to explore objects of inquiry and seek to uncover a format that illustrates or dramatizes their crucial qualities. Designations like *theatre* and *performance* were certainly present early in the process, but if there is anything to highlight it is the confluence of many relationships within these confines. But while a designation like *theatre* speaks from a confined and particular space, defined more by context than by methodology, the ever-opening field of performance is an inevitable point of arrival given the themes and modes of inquiry that defined the project.

But while this arrival is fitting, and not one of constraint (in fact, connecting to resources from performance studies and devising practices was crucially helpful), there is inevitably an uncomfortable and frustrating navigation that takes place in launching into a technically complex and logistically demanding process armed mainly with training intended for a very different context and set of approaches. In the course of this project, I found myself straddling roles as collaborating designer, director (at times in the traditional sense), writer, and composer, alongside the miscellaneous roles otherwise demanded of artists. For me, the devising methods described above are a vital takeaway from this process. These methods were worked out in relation to the themes of memory and history, and with focus on objects as collaborators as much as sources of material and creative impulse. While I don't anticipate these themes leaving my work, the approach broadly construed (one that does not begin with an idea of its product, but only of its relations) is one that defined how every part of the process came together: the sound (scraping of teapots), the projection (imposing objects and moments on top of each other through video and projection), the scene design, as much as our revisions of furniture and

choice of costume. As a product of this research, a working practice involving these methods serves as a template for later projects. A rigorous and attentive method of relating is the only method I can envision to more thoroughly compose the elements of a work in relationship to each other, in which respect I can summarize my impression of *Enceladus*' shortcomings: the presence of intentional sound from objects was not coordinated in relationship to the rest of the piece, and doing so would have required additional hands present to make sound (i.e., musicians performing with teapots alongside the actors); the costumes and composition of the space were not sufficiently present in devising, a logistical challenge inevitable in such work but which should be foregrounded in planning; the presence of voice-over and projection did not take a sufficiently active role in shaping the scenes in specific ways.

While I'm not sure I would make any decisions regarding the work differently, these reflections on the challenges of coordinating such a large pile of elements will inform future work in creative and logistical ways. I don't know if this work specifically has a future, or if its various themes and methods will be cannibalized under a different name. *Enceladus* is about small things and small relationships, and about long relationships with small things, spaces where scale becomes dizzying. But it's also about pile and accumulations, which makes it a logistical hazard (however interesting). Even the attempt to claw through history is more interested in the intimate and particular histories of each thing, and it's unclear how this straddles a relationship history as such, and what place these different fascinations might find alongside each other.

So as a last thought, sitting with notions of the unknown, I would simply offer the long last lines of the work itself, in words that I will forever hear in the articulate voice of Lauren Han who carried them through the stage:

We have such a long history of selves. It becomes blurry to see. You watch pieces of yourself escape your fuzzy boundaries and soak up the passing light and water and little puffs of lint. A life takes hold without you. You see a thing, a form, a shape, a curve of your hand in a particular order—you can't fit it into your palm. Yesterday I climbed out of the bathtub and knocked my head against the shelf. A hundred dozen angles of my body have spotted out from that shape, built around the narrow path from the spent, cooling water to the sunny patch beneath the window, and now suddenly it seems my



movements have outgrown that path. I no longer fit in my own orbit, too tall to squeeze through, too short to reach the ledge.

“Yesterday”—it’s such an ordinary word. It spins out—*yesterday*. No one would know the difference if we meant *tomorrow*. And yet, Spring comes in *yesterdays* and *tomorrows*, never in plots or lines.

Do you think this is a form of that translation? I have learned from *yesterday* and *tomorrow* to make little nods, little inquisitions against the order and bind of my shoulder and thumb. Where will they settle? If I roll my whole arm down the page, I might touch that inclination, long forgotten, to distend my fingers just so, a motion which when executed with discrete perfection will induce my locker’s dial to split open. There are so many things stacked inside:

- a chemistry textbook;
- three hundred apples;
- seven pairs of shoes;
- a little red hoodie;
- the path along the river, marks in the sand;
- a jar of eraser dust;
- dried ink;
- eleven lost pencils;
- a swift gesture of longing scattered to the left at 28 degrees, which contains by extension the disfragmented pieces of a face, expressions, a voice I could recite myself, the time she threw a shoe at me;
- and lastly, another heap of pages polluted with words and scratches.

That anything might have endured in such a space so long comes as a surprise, given its limited volume. But it’s the smallest spaces that keep the pieces of our disentangled forms from blighting in the sunlight, that keep the slips and shakes of thumb and shoulder from melting with each approaching doorway.

In gestures just as slight, that flock of persons we have passed through forms a ring around us, and bouncing by the corners I can find the last few pieces of my storming bones and fit them into place. And so these dungeons know us as they know a diagram of sleeping—as turns and folds impressed against an unknown surface with a self-effacing vessel made of iron and water. That we try to carry this around in life is perhaps more interesting than the rest of the story.



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## *Appendix A*

# *Dilation, or, The Way Time Happens with Things (again): Memories, Materials, and the Recovered Past*

### *Memory in Things*

The sun is out, barely, but it is not reaching me, as only a small set of glass panels opens to the light. Glass lets the cold in, and in winter the cold is everywhere. Instead, despite high day, I am holding a small flashlight; it illuminates the things, the spaces around me.

I am digging through a box. I say ‘digging’ because at each stage I must remove piles of things, mostly paper, to reach the lower stage. The curious thing about this *unearthing* is that it has been done before, so there is nothing reliable about the temporality of accumulation: I remove one layer of things to reveal the next below, but the times embedded in that one layer, now removed and stacked to the side, are not all cohesive. Some pages are three years old, others twelve, some five or six, few more than fourteen or fifteen. But in many cases—especially the handwritten things<sup>13</sup>—the time is lost. I wish I knew—did I get this letter when I was in Melbourne, but which visit? was this from before or after Oregon? how soon after did I write this? But the interlayering of objects that might offer some suggestions—this letter was pulled from between my notes on Sonata form and extended harmony, so it’s from 2016—have been disturbed.

A few years ago (I won’t say when) I had some teeth removed, and in my long hours of dull roaring pain I decided I wanted to find an old letter, and ended up finding a different letter, one I had forgotten entirely, and I couldn’t figure out when it was from since it was buried between pages of clearly unrelated dates—a chemistry test from the

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<sup>13</sup> Many things are paper with ink scrawled on them. Some begin with things like “Dear Matthew, Matt, matthew.” Some begin with other names, most not my own. Some of these are encased in plastic or thicker paper, a form of temporal resistance. There are also thicker cardstock paper sheets, smaller, with colorful, digital designs, mainly depicting balloons, cakes, small cones with paper flakes hanging from their ends. They usually, but not always, have a note in pen, below the often-humorous typeset text centered on the inside face. Some pages are strange, with layers of writing, scrawled or nearly organized, depicting things like stars and flowers and seasons. Other things are made of plastic, with typeset information on them like EYES: brown, and strange photos in one corner of someone with vaguely brown eyes. Some of these things are encased within additional layers of enclosure, often cigar boxes or tea tins, whose paper contents are generally folded. Along the creases, it becomes challenging to read individual letters, whether from smeared graphite or infolded ink.

tenth grade and unfinished Mandarin character lines from fourth year of university. I was crouched in a wood-floored corner in the summer darkness under yellow incandescent light digging through a box, trying to decipher the layers. I couldn't remember. As life moves, I feel this act of digging through old boxes—which recurs from time to time—becomes a re-creation of itself, a redoing of this old digging. Why am I digging? To unearth the past, of course, but what exactly am I unearthing? What will I really find? Will I find anything except the memories already in my mind? Why have I dragged this box around with me all these years?

I am echoing here the words of Joan Didion who asked similar questions of her notebook entries: “Why did I write it down? In order to remember, of course, but exactly what was it I wanted to remember? How much of it actually happened? Did any of it? Why do I keep a notebook at all?”<sup>14</sup> I, like Didion, keep notebooks. And like her, I feel that, no matter the contents—notes on a lecture I wandered into by mistake, the thing someone said to me late at night, a description of a voice I heard that surprised me—they are ultimately not about other people:

I sometimes delude myself about why I keep a notebook, imagine that some thrifty virtue derives from preserving everything observed. See enough and write it down, I tell myself, and then some morning when the world seems drained of wonder, some day when I am only going through the motions of doing what I am supposed to do, which is write—on that bankrupt morning I will simply open my notebook and there it will all be, a forgotten account with accumulated interest, paid passage back to the world out there...

I imagine, in other words, that the notebook is about other people. But of course it is not... My stake is always, of course, in the unmentioned girl in the plaid silk dress. *Remember what it was to be me*: that is always the point.<sup>15</sup>

For Didion, the notebook is ultimately about “keeping in touch” with what it has meant at one time or another to be our *selves*, with the accumulated reel of selves that otherwise would spin by in unexpected and, it seems, destructive ways:

I think we are well advised to keep on nodding terms with the people we used to be, whether we find them attractive company or not. Otherwise they turn up unannounced and surprise us, come hammering on the mind's door

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<sup>14</sup> Joan Didion, “On Keeping a Notebook,” in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2017), 78.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

at 4 a.m. of a bad night and demand to know who deserted them, who betrayed them, who is going to make amends. We forget all too soon the things we thought we could never forget. We forget the loves and the betrayals alike, forget what we whispered and what we screamed, forget who we were.<sup>16</sup>

There is an interesting space that opens up in Didion's essay between two modes of revisiting the self: a space between 'touch' and 'nod.' In one instance (*touch*), the past brushes against us. Our hands are in its hands. The past is *here*. In the other instance (*nod*), the past is beyond reach, out a window, across an expanse, however visible. The intriguing question is not whether we encounter the past in a *touch* or in a *nod*, but instead what it means that we encounter the past. And part of the answer lies in this space between *touch* and *nod*.

Rebecca Schneider has engaged with this space in writing about the temporal slips that happen in performance. In her writings on American Civil War reenactment societies, she wonders about the idea of "remains," providing navigation between the document (the letter unearthed from a box) and the gesture (of once again digging through a box for a letter):

Can a trace take the form of a *living* foot—or only the form of a footprint? Can a gesture, such as a pointing index finger, itself be a remain in the form of an indexical action that haunts (or remains) via live repetition? This is to ask: what is the time of a live act when a live act is reiterative? To what degree is a live act *then* as well as *now*?<sup>17</sup>

She has wondered how these theatrical (re-)iterations offer a curious double, counter the way performatives (with reference to J.L. Austin) offer an instance where "the reiterative saying is fully accomplished." She suggests that the strange irregularity of how theatre reenacts (always incorrectly) the past "is generative of a relationship to history that partakes of the double negative" where performance both *is* and *isn't* the past that it iterates.<sup>18</sup> Insofar as our lives, outside of the performative, are composed of (conscious) repetitions of the past, we can feel that everything she offers holds true as we iterate and

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<sup>16</sup> Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook," 82.

<sup>17</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), 37. Italics original.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 43.

reiterate gestures, acts, words in moving through life. “Time,” she says, “engaged *in* time, is always a matter of crossing, or passing, or touching, and perhaps always (at least) double.” The moments of encounter with artifacts of the past seem to carry something: “the past is given to remain,” she says, “but in each case that remaining is incomplete, fractured, partial—in the sense both of fragmentary and ongoing.”<sup>19</sup> Something of the past as I dig it up (in this case, my own past) slips out into the present, flying around the room with and in the act of unearthing that has already been done—and this is at least in part an incompleteness of that person I am nodding at our touching again who is still going on. But I will continue in trying to explore the slipping of both *contact* and *gesture*, and whether there is something in this difference to learn from.

## ***Dilation***

To help think about this mode of contact with the past—whether past selves, or something else, as we shall see—I want to offer the concept of *dilation*. Most typically, this is a term meant to describe circular objects that have the uncanny capacity to expand while retaining their composition: pupils, veins, stars. And in this, there is a part of the meaning which involves *widening*, and *outwardness*. Its origin, the Latin *dīlātō*, has at its root the word *lātus*, which meant ‘wide.’ I might add to this Haraway’s use: “dilates, expands, adds both ontological and epistemological possibilities, proposes and enacts what was not there before.”<sup>20</sup> With this in mind, consider expansion (ontological, epistemological) in contact with our linear metaphor of time. We might think here with the metaphorical spatiality of another phrase: *time dilation*. This refers to the main tenant of the theory of relativity that time is relative to velocity (special relativity) and gravitation (general relativity), moving more slowly when experienced from positions of higher velocity or high gravity.

This phenomenon of time dilation comes to life, famously in the 2014 Oscar-winning space adventure movie *Interstellar* when Matthew McConaughey and his team of space explorers land on an oceanic planet that is within the gravitational field of a

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<sup>19</sup> Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 37.

<sup>20</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 126-7.

black hole. Though they spend only about an hour walking around, nearly getting swallowed by a wave the size of a mountain, the time experienced on Earth and by their crew in orbit is closer to 23 years. McConaughey returns to his ship to a video message from his daughter who is fully grown, to videos from his son who has grown, married, had a son and lost that son to illness. While he watches it, the camera is on his face, which shifts from joy to intense sadness and overwhelming tears.<sup>21</sup> In this notion of dilation, the widening of *dīlātō* is pushed through and alongside the linear imagination of time, the dimensions of space and time stretching to accommodate these mind-boggling interconnections of reality and its shift. This is the dilation of relativity.

Central to how we understand this phenomenon of the physical world (in our literature and cinema) is that gesture of *going down* (into the planet, out of the everything of contact, into a fold of locality, down to a space from which there is a distinctive *up*) and returning to find things different. I compare it to another observation of Didion's:

I stopped riding the Lexington Avenue IRT because I noticed for the first time that all the strangers I had seen for years—the man with the seeing-eye dog, the spinster who read the classified pages every day, the girl who always got off with me at Grand Central—looked older than they once had.<sup>22</sup>

However, this is not itself the dilation I speak to, but part of how we wrap ourselves around its strange impacts. Instead, dilation is that strange way things change without changing, shift without appearing to shift, the constant ghost of transformation that only seems to peak out to us when we suddenly encounter what we have forgotten about (and in this the idea of time as loss).

While we seem to understand this change always in moments of discontinuities, the concept I want to highlight instead attempts to render visible the ways in which these drifts of time have spaces of interaction. Kurt Vonnegut has explored concepts of dilation in life and history. In *The Sirens of Titan*, he animates his galaxy-trotting elephant-hunting overlord of human life (Winston Niles Rumfoord) as a being living as a wave, a result of his sailing (with his dog, Kazak) into a “chrono-synclastic infundibulum.” As is

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher Nolan, director, *Interstellar* (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2014), Criterion On Demand: <https://www.criterionondemand.com>.

<sup>22</sup> Didion, “On Keeping a Notebook,” 83.

typical with Vonnegut, there is a slide between the metaconceptual and the literal, where what is strange and descriptive about a metaphoric entity is also simply a thing out there you can float into:

These places are where all the different kinds of truths fit together as nicely as the parts in your Daddy's solar watch. We call these places chrono-synclastic infundibula.

The Solar System seems to be full of chrono-synclastic infundibula. There is one great big one we are sure of that likes to stay between Earth and Mars. We know about that one because an Earth man and his Earth dog ran right into it.

You might think it would be nice to go to a chrono-synclastic infundibulum and see all the different ways to be absolutely right, but it is a very dangerous thing to do. The poor man and his poor dog are scattered far and wide, not just through space, but through time, too.<sup>23</sup>

Vonnegut tells us that, as a result of this entangling, Rumfoord can “see the past and the future clearly.”<sup>24</sup> Time is, as Rumfoord is, a long line stretched out through the cosmos, singular and continuous, yet experienced (by those not themselves chrono-synclastically *funneled*) as individual instances of touching. But something slips through this telling:

For a moment, Constant forgot that the man whose hand he shook was simply one aspect, one node of a wave phenomenon extending all the way from the Sun to Betelgeuse. The handshake reminded Constant what it was that he was touching—for his hand tingled with a small but unmistakable electrical flow.<sup>25</sup>

For Vonnegut, in perception, there is always this double—the tendency to see time as only here and now, that slips its way into seeing it as many and distributed. In Vonnegut's metascience, this is ‘electrical flow.’

And yet, though we experience it often on these terms, with dilation, I am not concerned with emphasizing loss, death, disappearance, the abandon of history or entropy. Rather, dilation is a way of thinking about time as infolded *by* and *with*, to think with the slippage between the time-autonomy of materials in decay, shift, and palimpsest and the togetherness of decay, shift, and compounding suggested by sedimentation.

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<sup>23</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, *The Sirens of Titan* (1959; repr., New York: Delacorte Press, 1973), 14-15. Citations refer to the 1973 printing.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



Joining Schneider, the concept resists the tendency to view performance (and to view moments) as “essentially a medium of loss linked with death in an approach to time that is so stalwartly linear, without porous passage or fold.” With dilation, these acts (whether performative or not) become “a mode of remaining, in distinction to loss or disappearance—at least as persistent as any statue or canvas, script or celluloid print.”<sup>26</sup> I will come back to these things and their materials.

In another and more telling exploration that compounds the discontinuity in an effort to decouple temporality from the overwhelming presence of loss, Vonnegut tells the story of Billy Pilgrim. “Listen,” he says. “Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time.” The WWII veteran experiences his life—including life in a German POW camp and life in a human zoo on the planet Tralfamadore—in discontinuities. “Billy has gone to sleep a senile widower and awakened on his wedding day. He has walked through the door in 1955 and come out another one in 1941.”<sup>27</sup> We are dilations (our lives are dilations), and this is poetic emphasis of *Slaughterhouse-Five*—Billy Pilgrim moves casually from Dresden in 1945 to Vermont in 1968. Dilation compels these things to be viewed together because it knows that they are a collaboration. At the same time, while the narrative surrounds loss at so many angles (the most well-known line might be the oft-repeated “so it goes,” which always follows death), it does so in a peculiar attempt to frame time away from this loss. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, things are not lost because time has moved passed them (if Billy ever thinks the war is gone, he will soon wake up in Dresden again) but because the merciless violence of war has imprinted itself in time.

But of course, to effectively conceive of his temporal reality and the poetics of these dully interconnected moments, Vonnegut must “unstick” Billy in time and trace his fingers along the steps. Even more so, he explains throughout the novel the temporo-cultural worldview of the Tralfamadorians. In one scene, a Tralfamadorian explains how their books work:

Each clump of symbols is a brief, urgent message—describing a situation, a scene. We Tralfamadorians read them all at once, not one after the other. There isn’t any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they

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<sup>26</sup> Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 144.

<sup>27</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell, 1969), 23.

produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time.<sup>28</sup>

What Vonnegut wants as a poetics of time is this *seeing all at once*, even though, to translate this story from Tralfamadorian terms to Earthling terms, he has to cut it up into pieces, to use doorways and jumps, leaps and travel. Despite the enfolding of time that Vonnegut proposes, the pieces are always composed of discrete moments. I call this sedimentation. In one part, this speaks to the individuated layers that are built continuously. For Vonnegut, time is always differentiated into one side of the doorway and the other. But there is also this strange layering of things over each other, again and again.

If we think about layers of Earth piling over each other, it's easy to see an order, a sequence, a line that we can draw through them. It's easy to see that they are all standing atop one another. And at the same time, we can see that there is not a discrete sense of cause and effect, no particular teleology building them into history—they are simply stacked layers.

Think of this like a ghost haunting a house: David Lowery's *A Ghost Story* tells the story of ghost-Casey Affleck who lives on under a white sheet after being killed in a car crash.<sup>29</sup> He returns to the house he shared with his girlfriend, Rooney Mara, transfixed by the memories that endure in the space. Time filters passed in layers: Mara lives in sadness for a little while, then packs up and moves. A new family moves in, then out. Some young people take over and throw a party. The house is torn down. In a blink, it is a construction site—first a vast foundation dig, then rising concrete walls—then in another instant a fully inhabited office building. At once, what was moments ago a small Texas town is a sprawling city of bright skyscrapers. Ghost-Affleck leaps from its heights in search of escape. At the bottom of his fall, there is a field—the landscape has transformed, reanimated into grass and frontiersmen and a covered wagon by either post-apocalyptic imagining or a theory of repeating universes. At the end of the sequence,

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<sup>28</sup> Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 88.

<sup>29</sup> David Lowery, director, *A Ghost Story* (Toronto, ON: Mongrel Media, 2017), Criterion On Demand: <https://www.criterionondemand.com>.

Rooney Mara and Casey Affleck are young, contemplating buying a house off a gravel road, unaware of ghost-Casey Affleck watching them from across the room. By the time Affleck has died in a car crash (again), the new ghostly dweller (the new, perhaps, *iteration* of ghost-Affleck) is unaware of the ghostly dweller he is joining, who has lived (*jumped*, ghost-like) back to this moment. Mara and Affleck's life in this house is stacked on top of itself. The ghost that haunts them as they live in the house—knocking things over in the middle of the night and flashing the lights and opening windows—is, or used to be, Casey Affleck. To say he's forgotten this was him demands this story be wound in a simple thread. Time is stacked on itself.

For ghost-Casey Affleck, too, time is often, if not always, composed of jumps. In a moment of rage while watching Mara explore a new lover, Affleck dislodges a fistful of books from a shelf. It seems, by the time they land, the seasons have changed, the day is high, Mara is even beginning to pack to move to a new home. At its simplest, the whole film is a kind of timelapse, a jump-cut montage, an exploration of the ghostly relationship to time inherent to cinematic narrative construction. But buried in it is also the elaboration of how these times are always touching through how they sprawl over one another. The ghost who died in the house in the country is still walking, seen only by the camera, through the elevated hallways of a corporate skyscraper office. They are with each other, discontinuous in between their continuities. There is space between their touching and their nodding, carved in the interlaced potential of creation and reiteration. Schneider offers the same iterative linkage between author and performance, carried in text, or of a footpath, which is “both composed of footprints (traces of past event) and also an index *to the future* with the sedimented (or, perhaps more properly, eroded) suggestion: ‘walk this way.’”<sup>30</sup>

Lastly, we turn back to *Interstellar*. Christopher Nolan's film is interested in animating time and space. Although in this instance, *space* refers to *outer space*, humankind's final frontier (the movie ends a colony ship of Earthlings preparing to jump through a wormhole—opened by future humans capable of manipulating the fifth dimensions—to their new home, being prepared by Anne Hathaway in another galaxy).

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<sup>30</sup> Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 45.

After his initial expedition through the wormhole, McConaughey learns that he has no way to return—they have run out of fuel and, given their continued proximity to the black hole, they have run out of time. Instead, he plunges into the black hole. The drama here is about figuring out how to touch across this time, to recover this interval.<sup>31</sup> In this climactic sequence, discovers that a place has been laid out for them in the fifth dimensional world such that they, three-dimensional beings, can understand this other realm—where space and time fold into one another. He can simply reach out and touch the past. He musters his gestural capacity, reaching into his daughter’s bedroom at so many points in time, becoming her “ghost.” Discovered in the depths of space is the key to restaging time, to reaccessing what was, what is always being “lost.” And of course he gets to save humanity, sending morse code messages, creating gravity “anomalies” in binary code, and ultimately transmitting the “quantum data” taken from inside the black hole so that his daughter—now grown and a NASA scientist—can rectify relativity with quantum physics. To share all this, he needs objects: he knocks books off her shelf in long-short patterns, topples over her model moon lander, writes the quantum data in morse on the second hand of her watch, and draws lines in light and dust using gravity.

This scene illustrates just that one more curious thing about how we reach across time: we are always connected to objects, to things, to the stuff around us, and to the spaces that swallow us. Time is in the bedroom and on the floor and in a childhood toy. It’s in the ghost that whispers in the wall, the creaking floor boards, the swaying wind. And when we touch time, touched with, through, in, of these materials, we are compelled to respect the dilation that they have undergone alongside our own. Time is dilated for everything—Matthew McConaughey dilates with the books and the dust and the watch.

## ***Touching With***

We are not alone when we reach back. There are always things with us, and these things are not simply co-inhabitants of sedimented time, but are like us part of the layers. Schneider gives her interpretation of a particular encounter with a thing of the past.

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<sup>31</sup> To borrow from Rebecca Schneider’s concept of ‘interval.’ See Rebecca Schneider, “That the Past May Yet Have Another Future: Gesture in the Times of Hands Up,” *Theatre Journal* 70 (2018): 293.

Describing an interaction with cave paintings from ancient humans, she suggests the capacity for gesture to be transmitted, or “opened,” with and in the stone as she holds her hand up to the rock imprint:

Held up in and as stone, the hands are gesturing greeting, hailing, beckoning. They are arresting.

The barefaced rock that takes on the shape of the hand is “negative space” surrounded by the paint, and so negative hand stencils are not paintings of hands so much as they are the painting of the space around, among, or between parts of hands that appear thus as rock/hands. Some of the negative hands appear to have lifelines that are the veins of rock, others with the literal curve of a palm. The rock may be anthropomorphized in this way, but the human is similarly turned to stone as the two are intrainimated.<sup>32</sup>

For Schneider, the gesture across time is a gesture of/in rock as much as it is of/between human figures, the rock enlivened<sup>33</sup> and the human petrified. And like her, McConaughy needs a wrist watch, a bookshelf, a toy, light, dust, the imprints of his daughter’s notebook to reach back, not because those objects can break the disappearances of time but because those objects are part of layers of dilation that fold back. The sedimented layers of time flipped or folded back over itself in moments of punctuate is composed of beings and rocks and models of the moon lander.

In this way, to fully consider our relationship to time we might first need to consider our relationship to objects.

Notably, our relationship to objects is more often one of fixing their time than of engaging with their timefulness. Our notion of objects is so often skewed by an idea of the ‘original,’ a thing fixed to a time and place of making. In this, we ignore the layers of history embedded in materials, crossings, reiterations. Take for instance Svetlana Boym’s considerations of the restoration of the Sistine Chapel in the 1980s:

With the help of advanced computer technology, most of the cracks in the background and even the loincloths on the male figures in the foreground were removed to get back to the original ‘nakedness’ and freshness of color. The restorers left no seams, no signs of the process of restoration that is so

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<sup>32</sup> Rebecca Schneider, “That the Past May Yet Have Another Future,” 290.

<sup>33</sup> To use a phrase from Andreas Weber through which he suggests a Biopoetics that sees meaning as embodied, though for him the capacity for this embodiment privileges the living, or at least a concept of life. See Andreas Weber, *Enlivenment: Towards a Fundamental Shift in the Concepts of Nature, Culture and Politics* (Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2013).

common for restoration work in the other Italian museums. They had no patience for the patina of time made of candle smoke, soot, cheap Greek wine and bread used by ingenious seventeenth-century restorers and a few hairs from the artist's brush that were stuck in the painting. Actual material traces of the past might disturb the total recreation of the original, which was to look old and brand-new at the same time.<sup>34</sup>

The image in question is the “intimate and forever suspended touch between God and Adam,” the one with a crack above Adam’s fingers.<sup>35</sup> The restorers were concerned with getting at Michelangelo, at the thing that this fresco was when it came into being. Their labor was defiantly against the durational performance of paint, stone, and air that the painter set in motion.

Part of this erasure, too, is what Tim Ingold has identified as a “slippage from materials to materiality.”<sup>36</sup> He has suggested a tendency to think about “a world of objects that has, as it were, already crystallized out from the fluxes of materials and their transformations.” He continues:

At this point materials appear to vanish, swallowed up by the very objects to which they have given birth. That is why we commonly describe materials as ‘raw’ but never ‘cooked’—for by the time they have congealed into objects they have already disappeared.<sup>37</sup>

In our thinking about the time of the objects, the things we live with (we dilate in time with), we think more of what was built than what continues to shift, and in this we lose how time is an interanimate (*interinanimate*, per Schneider) part of all the stuff around, in, with us. Ingold offers the observations of architect Alvaro Siza, who “admits that while he can build and design houses, he has never been able to build a *real* house.” The house is the thing that lives, critically, by shifting, or as I would say, by dilating (and doing so with other things):

[T]he real heroes of house building, according to Siza, are the people who live in them who, through unremitting effort, shore them up and maintain their integrity in the face of sunshine, wind and rain, the wear and tear

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<sup>34</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 46.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Tim Ingold, “Materials Against Materiality,” *Archeological Dialogues* 14, no. 1 (2007): 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

inflicted by human occupancy, and the invasions of birds, rodents, insects, arachnids and fungi.<sup>38</sup>

Of course, one of the basic things that this idea of dilation emphasizes is the tendency for things to change. And this ‘things’ is wide-reaching, but it particularly subsumes the stuff of material culture that is often collapsed into a binary of functioning and non-function. A wineglass is a wineglass until it breaks, and then it’s glass (again). A page of journal entry is a page of journal entry—carrying writing and knowledge and memory—until it gets soaked in coffee or lost in the rain or until it disintegrates over a thousand years. The will to fall apart was always there. By considering dilation with the materials we are dilated with, the possibility that things change in and of themselves is created. Ingold describes at length:

Plaster can crumble and ink can fade. Experienced as degradation, corrosion or wear and tear, however, these changes—which objects undergo after they are ‘finished’—are typically attributed to the phase of use rather than of manufacture. As the underbelly of things, materials may lie low but are never entirely subdued. Despite the best efforts of curators and conservationists, no object lasts forever. Materials always and inevitably win out over materiality in the long term.<sup>39</sup>

A clear example of this faltering relation to material time is the nature of modern electronics. Compare, for instance, a vinyl record with a CD: the vinyl record can be scratched, warped, flattened, or otherwise altered from its originally printed form, and the result is an alteration of the wave printed it—the sound incorporates the wear and weather of time against (or simply ‘with’ and ‘in’) vinyl. On the other hand, scratch a CD and the data that was at that point becomes utterly unreadable, manifesting as simply a jump-discontinuity in playback or computer reading. Perhaps without intending, the technology of vinyl manages to take time with it, while for the computer, the disc simply halts time in its tracks. Much like its makers, it sees time (or dilation, which is how we/things enact time) as only loss.

Here, we can come back in great detail to Schneider’s concept of ‘intra-animation,’ hinted at already. She describes the concept at length in an essay that

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<sup>38</sup> Tim Ingold, “The Textility of Making,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34 (2010): 94.

<sup>39</sup> Ingold, “Materials Against Materiality,” 9-10.

rearticulates ‘inter-inanimacy’ (a previous term of hers) as ‘intra-inanimacy,’ referring in part to Karen Barad’s ‘intra-action.’<sup>40</sup> She suggests that “intra-inanimacy might better touch the slip and slide of our amongnesses, besidenesses, withnesses and againnesses, and resist delimiting us, as the prefix ‘inter-’ might be said to do, to an essentialized ‘betweenness.’”<sup>41</sup> If I think back to the unearthed pages from my box of memories, alongside the unanswerable question of ‘touch’ and ‘nod,’ there is what Schneider might call a problematic of the separation *between* me and paper. To understand myself in time—and especially, across time—I have to be with the paper, as much in it as it is in me.

Armed with a better understanding of this relationship, we can start to think about this contact with the past. For Schneider, key to our contact with time is our interaction with it, our “response” to its manifestations in the present. As we gesture with the products of time, we are gesturing back, answering a call as much as we are opening it:

If the past is reiterative, given to reappearance like the reverberation of a hail, it is also always and again open to response. The past is a relation. The antiphonic back and forth among bodies across different times and different spaces disturbs a mythic linear flow of time with the possibility that the past may yet have another future.<sup>42</sup>

When I run my hand over the page, (re-)reading it and pondering its temporo-locality, the past and I (past me, present me, but of course also the past and present of paper, pen, author, dust, light, etc.) are touching/nodding in layers of selves and substances.

## ***History***

When Schneider stands in a cave and puts her hand to the wall, she is thinking about history, and notably about the ‘pre-history’ of so-called ‘un-recorded’ time. This of course prompts her question of whether the living, gesturing body itself can be a ‘trace,’ a

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<sup>40</sup> For one instance, see Karen Barad, “What is the Measure of Nothingness? : Infinity, Virtuality, Justice,” in *100 Notes – 100 Thoughts* (Zeppelinstrasse, Ger.: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012), 14.

<sup>41</sup> Rebecca Schneider, “Intra-animation,” in *Animism in Art and Performance*, edited by Christopher Braddock (Cham, Switz.: Springer International, 2017): 154.

<sup>42</sup> Schneider, “That the Past May Yet Have Another Future,” 288.



‘record.’<sup>43</sup> She adds,

When we approach performance not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the *act* of remaining and a means of re-appearance and “reparticipation” (though not a metaphysic of presence) we are almost immediately forced to admit that remains do not have to be isolated to the document, to the object, to bone versus flesh. Here the body—Hodge’s bloated one—becomes a kind of archive and host to a collective memory.<sup>44</sup>

When I am crouched in a corner with a lamp, engaged in another iteration (or *itineration*)<sup>45</sup> of my cross-temporal ponderings, I am both clutching at a record and myself a record of clutching, reading, wondering.

One mode of this engagement is in *Antigonick*, Anne Carson’s translation of Ἀντιγόνη (*Antigónē*), a play by Sophocles whose main character is Antigone. She (Antigone)<sup>46</sup> begins by speaking of Hegel, who had implicated her in the banal evil of her gender: “and let’s footnote here,” she says, “Hegel calling Woman ‘the eternal irony of the community.’”<sup>47</sup> Carson has been criticized for failing to represent Antigone (that is, the Antigone of Sophocles and Athens, rather than the Antigone who has had criticism buried over her by Hegel).<sup>48</sup> She reaffirms her commitments as a translator to the Antigone who has been pulled through the layers: “I take it as the task of translator / to forbid that you should ever lose your screams.”<sup>49</sup> Among the cast is also Nick: Nick measures things but does not speak.<sup>50</sup> He measures these layers as they are (un)buried, among other things. This form of dilation, composed of sedimented layers, recognizes the push and pull of things that come with the past. It touches the past with its itinerations. It brings this record (gesture, word, language, performance, text) up into (re-)occurrence

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<sup>43</sup> Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>45</sup> To make further use of how Tim Ingold pulls this distinction from Deleuze and Guattari. Ingold, “The Textility of Making,” 97-98.

<sup>46</sup> But we can only exclude Carson from this *she* to a certain extent, only as much as we can exclude Hegel and Brecht from what is translated in *Antigónē*.

<sup>47</sup> Anne Carson, translator, *Antigonick*, by Sophocles (New York: New Directions Books, 2015), 4.

<sup>48</sup> Ben Hjorth, “‘We’re Standing in/the Nick of Time’: The Temporality of Translation in Anne Carson’s *Antigonick*,” *Performance Research* 19, no. 3 (2014): 136-7.

<sup>49</sup> Carson, *Antigonick*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 7.

with, in, through all the past moments of its being. Or for yet further example of this, see Carson's essay "Stillness," in which she discusses the history around the modern 'discoverer' of Sappho's fragments, Bernard Pyne Grenfell. Mainly, she discusses the images he carried around with him in conjunction with time spent on ancient parchment.<sup>51</sup> The slides of record (of Grenfell) go with in the process of recovering the record (of Sappho).

I mention this because it curiously brings to the surface a question of *whom* we might be recreating in gestures, in moments. I hope it is clear with everything above that the way time happens double is a part of our own individual timelines as much as it is a part of what we call 'history.' Our gestures repeat themselves, repeat the gestures of others, repeat the gestures with/in stone, wind, light.

Mircea Eliade has written extensively on the nature of ritual in what she calls "archaic man." She emphasizes how ritual is always about recreation, about *becoming* originary time: "A sacrifice, for example, not only exactly reproduces the initial sacrifice revealed by a god *ab origine*, at the beginning of time, it also takes place at that same primordial mythical moment; in other words, every sacrifice repeats the initial sacrifice and coincides with it."<sup>52</sup> Moreover, these acts are always at the expense of any concept of self, enacting a "refusal to preserve the memory of the past, even of the immediate past." She says, "[c]ollective or individual, periodic or spontaneous, regeneration rites always comprise, in their structure and meaning, an element of regeneration through repetition of an archetypal act, usually of the cosmogonic act."<sup>53</sup> For Eliade, the capacity to see these acts as engaged in repetitions is limited to the willingness of this 'archaic' human to collapse all things into cosmogonic originality. She further argues that for these communities, time was always divided into the sacred (reiterative, cosmogonic, the *becoming* of the original of archetypes) and the vulgar (insignificant, unaccounted). But it is precisely these "ordinary" and "vulgar" moments that repeat, recur, and recreate themselves with such consequence, and in ways that reveal the slipping and sliding of

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<sup>51</sup> Anne Carson, "Stillness," *Critical Inquiry* 48, no. 1 (Autumn 2021): 5-7.

<sup>52</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, translated by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 35.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

time back in/onto itself.

Eliade furthermore divides history and repetitive acts into the ‘personal’ and the ‘impersonal,’ arguing that the survival of individuals beyond death (exclusively, she says, mythic heroes) is an impersonal one of becoming archetypes. There are for her curious holes between these two categories, and yet she argues that these fundamentally different modes of being (personal, impersonal) are delimited by how much they can be significantly said to recur. I reproduce her argument at length:

Leaving aside the conceptions of the transformation of the dead into ‘ancestors,’ and regarding the fact of death as a concluding of the ‘history’ of the individual, it still seems very natural that the post-mortem memory of that history should be limited or, in other words, that the memory of passions, of events, of all that is connected with the individual strictly speaking, comes to an end at a certain moment of his existence after death. As for the objection that an impersonal survival is equivalent to a real death (inasmuch as only the personality and the memory that are connected with duration and history can be called survival), it is valid only from the point of view of a ‘historical consciousness,’ in other words, from the point of view of modern man, for archaic consciousness accords no importance to personal memories. It is not easy to define what such a ‘survival of impersonal consciousness’ might mean, although certain spiritual experiences afford a glimpse. What is personal and historical in the emotion we feel when we listen to the music of Bach, in the attention necessary for the solution of a mathematical problem, in the concentrated lucidity presupposed by the examination of any philosophical question? Insofar as he allows himself to be influenced by history, modern man feels himself diminished by the possibility of this impersonal survival. But interest in the “irreversible” and the “new” in history is a recent discovery in the life of humanity. On the contrary, archaic humanity, as we shall presently see, defended itself, to the utmost of its powers, against all the novelty and irreversibility which history entails.<sup>54</sup>

What I am concerned with here is precisely how this portal of “what is personal *and* historical,” in the gesture and material that marks its record, its trace, its amber fossil,<sup>55</sup> offers us the ghosts (both Affleck and McConaughey) that manage to jab their fingers into everyday moments, noticed or not.

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<sup>54</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 47-48.

<sup>55</sup> On the amber fossil that reanimates a prehistoric past in the American imagination, as told through *Jurassic Park*, see Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 34-35.

## *Living With*

When I dig through the box and find my old notebook, like Didion, I find a sudden rush of memories, of many unexpected kinds. Many visitors, if you will. But of course it's strange to place the knowing in the object. Or at least, *only* in the object. As equally as it is hard to place it in my neurons, hands, hips, feet, fingers, skin. Like my nerve endings, which live in a long line between my fingertips and the cavities of my brain, in charges firing along their lengths, these gestures live in touching. When I hold a page of some old letter—*Dear Matthew*, it reads—I get to receive it again. Between my fingers and the graphite and paper, its folds, the folds of what I remember between now and then, of what I remember about then, or of *when this was, even*—between all these layers, something is remembered, which remembering knows all the layers of shifting and changing and piling on that has happened between now and then, even if I can't dig it up in order. The ability to breathe life through a moment, to bring breath (*anima*) into the 'past' of 'memory' lives in our intra-inanimated beings—this fold, this grip, this moment, this ink, that perhaps once was on my fingers, smeared as I write or read.

I'll end with another story. As I've lived along the Puget sound over a year now, I am further from familiar landscapes than I have ever been (temporo-spatially speaking). I have never seen the Earth spin a full direction from any other place than the great muddy Gulf—everything feels oddly different (why should it be *odd* that things are different?). But one curious thing among all these pieces is that I've been almost completely incapable of writing by hand. I can take pen and paper and what have you and write, but something is missing—some spark or prayer.<sup>56</sup> Instead, I write everything on the computer—one word processor after another—which is a wholly inadequate way of being creative, but it has worked enough to squeeze out a few things. Many would call this *writer's block*, but I wonder if the block is in the *writer*, and not in the engaging of writing with surfaces. Here is the telling thing: the only things I can write (and when I say *write*, I really mean to feel that prayer or spark of loving and communicating, the thing at the core of artmaking) are those things I intend to send *back*. Mostly, this means letters,

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<sup>56</sup> By *prayer*, I intend, more than any other meaning of the word, that recreation of the sacred originary act that Eliade identifies in ritual.

most of which I haven't sent, but it has also meant stories and poems intended for the journey *back*.<sup>57</sup> And this *back* is more than just a delivering to Texas—in fact, *back* often means *to a friend*, which most of the time does not mean Texas, let alone Houston. *Back into their hands. Back into their fingers. Back into their arms.* My own hands, fingers remember, in those moments and acts, what it means to pray with, think with, burn with paper (and it's all easier with the paper I brought with me). Against the very idea of *surfaces*, against the common object correlate for writer's block, the blank page, against the idea that creativity opens outwards—I find instead that creation folds backwards (if not also forwards). In our lives there is always a touch of re-creation. Every doing is always somehow a form of re-doing, a remembering (or re-remembering) into practice, into life, into relationship of everything that sustains, maintains, contains us.

Lastly, and at risk of opening up something I cannot finish, I would mention the complicated relationships—to land, place, histories—this opens up. There is not for that here, or perhaps anywhere else, navigating at best a cramped understanding of where I live or how it is that I live there.<sup>58</sup> But something in these layers demands to know how memory might be portable, or how it might be stone still and stone heavy. And to know what it might mean to drag it over so many places.

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<sup>57</sup> Using the mail service to send *back* is a bit like the ending of *Interstellar*, described above, in which Matthew McConaughey pokes and prods his way *back* in gravity disturbances. Somewhere in this magic is the thing that explains my relationship to paper—to a tree.

<sup>58</sup> This expression of *cramped space* comes to me from Elizabeth Povinelli, who uses it to describe the landscape in which her “Indigenous colleagues,” the Karrabing Collective, “are forced to maneuver.” This refers both to narrow political and narrow onto-epistemological grounds, which landscape she hopes to subvert through her theorizing of *geontopower*. For my purposes, I mean this faint allusion (an allusion to another Settler in North America who is attempting to open up new ways of thinking *against* those of Neoliberal Humanism) to make visible the limitations of the potential novelty of any of this thought. Is it perhaps restorative? What are we restoring? why? and for whom? For someone in my position, there is very little that is cramped about crossing a continent in socio-political terms. The path is open. *Where should you live? Take this online quiz to see which North American city you really vibe with!* To conceive of this process as *cramped*, are we able to move delicately, to think of whom and what we might be stepping on? See Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem for Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 5-6.

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## *Appendix B*

## *Enceladus Below: A Play*

### *Forward*

The original script for *Enceladus Below* included an introduction and twelve scenes. It featured detailed notes on the projections and sound throughout the body, and the generally expected elements of a script for stage: dialogue, stage directions, staging. This served as a starting place for the work that was created, but significant omissions and diversions were necessary to follow through with the intended creative work—in fact, omission as a practice was core to the entire creative method.

The script included below includes only the dialogue and scenes that were part of the script, but also features stage directions from the original text of those scenes. As described in the defense statement, the actual performance was worked out through the opposition of the original materials (dialogue and stage directions) with separate fragments drawn from various external sources. Given this working process, the materials here constitute a loose form of documentation as they include aspects of these two dimensions. Images appear throughout to give an impression of what was done on stage in contrast with what the script suggests. In some cases, hanging references to projection or sound remain, with details removed from the documentation.

### *Cast of Characters*

Meliai (Mel)	<p>The traveler. Has departed from their world and from all familiar conventions and found themselves wandering in the home of two deities, Circe and Lytrēai.</p> <p>In the first production, Mel was played by Lauren Han.</p>
Circe	<p>A Witch. A being of substance, Circe is constantly consuming: tea, wine, biscuits, figs, apples, peanut butter from the jar, bread, coffee. Their home is full of food, tucked away for needed moments, but also herbs and rarities collected for conjurations and divinations. Circe keeps extensive notes—of recipes and prophecies and memories—on discarded scraps of cloth and paper—tucked away in cigar boxes, cookie tins, amphoras.</p>

*Costume and Props:* Circe's clothes are polychronic and carelessly combined—elegant medieval garb, covered by a bathrobe, with warm socks and Birkenstocks.

In the first production, Circe was played by Zoë Braithwaite.

Lytrēai

The Seeing. Insightful, distant, a daydreamer. They are often far from the present, sometimes humming or whispering along to their visions of time and place far afield. Lytrēai drinks a fair amount of water, usually by submerging their face in a large bowl.

*Costume and Props:* Lytrēai wears something clean and calculated, as polychronic as Circe, but more subtly so. They are probably barefoot, but not in a way that feels incomplete.

In the first production, Lytrēai was played by Rosemary Morrison.

## ***introduction***

*Projectors are oriented towards a single surface, perhaps a central fabric panel that allows view of the following from multiple angles.*

*Circe and Lytrēai's rearrangement continues with the creation of two small altars: one beside sleeping Mel, and one opposite on the outside edge of the space.*

*Circe and Lytrēai begin to perform a ritual of transfiguration, with Circe applying elements to Mel and Lytrēai performing from the outer altar. This might involve sounding objects, vocalization, etc.*

## ***1. loss***

*Lytrēai is still at the outer station.*

*Circe has finished her portion of the Ritual as applied to Mel, and moves to the outer edge of the space. Circe produces another mixing bowl and a curious arrangement of plants and small containers. She begins cutting, grinding, stirring, and pounding quite intensely.*

*At the knocking, Mel sits up and begins to look around.*

*Mel stands up, walks through the space looking about, inspecting different elements. She changes from one inspection to another always a few seconds after Circe's knocking.*

*Eventually, Mel walks to the edge of the Second Ring, opposite Circe and Lytrēai, then:*





FIGURE B1. Beginning of show. Lytrēai (Rosemary Morrison; left) removes coat and sleeping bag from Mel (Lauren Han; center); Circe (Zoë Braithwaite; right) waits to smear flour on Mel's face. Above them is a collection of artifacts made from post-consumer paper, paint, ink, and blackberry. The scene marks transition into the home, currently marked by attempts (using fabric) to obscure the center of the room from the entering audience. Image by Aydan Hasanova.

*Circe hits one final blow, and everything freezes.*

MELIAI

I can recreate it if I try.

*(she walks in a line, showing us the  
following...)*

It was a clearing. The river ran here, its embankment an obstacle, an impression. Three steps, the cedar, which was my windchime during that night. Those nights. *(Pause.)* By ground, the faint half-trail, grass cleared, a stump, and...

*(This last thing is important; she pushes a  
low table out of the way to make space for  
her imaginary path.)*

... the long, wooden rod etched with the name—

*She pauses. She can't remember.*

*Circe and Lytrēai stand.*

MELIAI

*(to herself)*

What was the name?

*She walks the path again, whispering/mumbling the steps to  
herself, rhythmically, then freezes where she had before, at  
the moving of the table.*

*She feels her hand along the surface of the table, feeling for an  
etched name, spilling papers and books to the floor as she  
slips carelessly for a piece of another reality.*

*After a moment, she stops, looks around, stands up, and gives  
the space a good look over, now looking up beyond the ring  
for the first time.*

MELIAI

*(pointing to the edges of the space)*

There was the swan, there the wolf, there the hunter and the angel, there  
the melancholic moon.

*(reaching her bed)*

Here I was.

*She pauses, looking around.*

MELIAI

A bed, here, how I grew up.

*She piles blankets from her bed onto the coffee table, delicate  
in her placement, but disregarding everything she knocks on  
the floor.*

MELIAI

The window here, I used to put tea on the windowsill...

*(She moves a shelf.)*

...and when she... *(trailing off)*

*Pause.*

*She walks through the motion again, mouthing to herself.*

MELIAI

She would put her hand just so.

*Mel forms a pattern with her hand.*

MELIAI

Then it stopped, Summer ended, something like that. The sky flipped on  
and her hand stopped taking that shape. Or something like that...

*(trailing off)*

*She stops for a moment, thinking.*

MELIAI

We had a kitchen together. Or I had a kitchen. Long hours standing, a  
room at chest-height, cutting, boiling, mashing, rinsing. Heat, warmth,  
spice, wine.

*She has moved to the high table, arranging things into her  
kitchen space.*

*She goes into the jars, tins, bottles, boxes, bowls of Circe's  
table collection, but does not find what she expected: rolls of  
paper, leaves, grass, flowers, more paper, ink, pens.*

*She unrolls a small piece of paper, reads it.*

MELIAI

*(reading)*

"In those days, we lived like bricks, and the crisp sound of Winter was  
never far away, and you only opened one window at a time for fear of  
what the wind might bring. And on one morning..."

*She speeds through the next part, whispering a few words, but  
not enough to follow.*

*She thinks for a moment about what she has read, then returns  
to the 'kitchen.' She slowly inspects each piece, then:*

MELIAI

It's as if it's rested here a long time. Not rested. Waited, torn by constant  
disruptions, agitations, every inch shifted, every piece... *(trailing off)*  
But I can feel there is a thread of old light; only, things have rested.



FIGURE B2. As in Figure B1. The hanging elements are shown above the performers.  
Image by Aydan Hasanova. With Brianna Bernard (set) and Gabriella Hu (lighting).

*She puts down the bread and walks away from the 'kitchen.' As she speaks, she is still focused on the objects and furniture of the house.*

MELIAI

Have I known these walls once, in this life or another? This place is strange to me, haunted. Where I should see rolling blue beyond clouds, I see only shadows dancing around darkness. Where I should move with crowds through landscapes with purpose, carrying purpose, I am as a dot of light against a vast night. I move always in successions, shifting not as a body, as the child of Ursula and Attin, but as the tendril of a crab—and only just so. If there is anyone concerned with my light, gazing at me, making me into shape, perhaps they will encounter me as the horn of a bull, and the next as the beak of a crow or the handle of a plow. But no matter who watches, I spin, returning, not moving but gliding in the inalterate orbit of bodies beyond their own make.

*(She gestures around.)*

Here were the walls of my cradle. These were the bars I pressed myself against, my hands closed around them. I know the shapes I make against it—my shoulders just so.

But the pattern vanishes, the light rolls in. Not as the dim blue and yellow of first morning—this light I cannot make, a pattern between glass and tattered silk obscures the shifting of the heavens that is known to me.

By impressions, I am still on that trail, the one meticulously shaped and reshaped by caretakers over generations. If I were to think, I can feel my hand tucked just in the walls of my tent, the lantern hangs above, I could relight it with a swift... *(trailing off)*

*(She looks to the stage lights.)*

The lights were just so, scattered into so many pieces above me. This one shimmered, this one dim, this one, for those hours I lay unsleeping, moved as the wind against a dim white orb.

These lights hum and buzz, they blink, not shimmer, they blink faster than my eyes can follow, the hue of blue is tinted with a too-consistent sheen, marred by hurried hands contented by approximation or by impression of reality.

*(Beat.)*

Or I will wake up soon, my hands might feel metal as cold and bracing, not as a repeated whisper too short to be a voice.

*(Beat.)*

If I roll over, will I feel a hand other than my own? Will I touch other than the cold air?

Or will I only feel the Winter blowing through the open window?

*Mel turns to Circe and Lytrēai.*

MELIAI

Can you remember their names? Ursula and Attin... are these really their names? And their faces, I cannot remember them. In their place, I see only an empty heaven, or I see your faces. But you are... unknown to me.

I see how you move, you are not from my world. You live as the light: weightless and translucent as the sky, that blue beyond. But strange, old. And there is no such blue here.

Tell me about this place.

Why am I here,

and

who am I?

I feel I must be a constellation, or a stone.

*Pause.*

*Lytrēai begins to move, slowly, in a circle around the space.*

*Circe follows, moving opposite the circle but diverges quickly to cross through the middle of the space. She picks up many of the things Mel has knocked over, returning them haphazardly to tables and shelves. She picks up a **Box of Raisins** along the way. It is modern, with logos and a brand name in big letters. Someone (Circe) has made extensive customizations to the appearance with a sharpy (smiley faces, a mustache, etc.).*

*Lytrēai continues her slow walk, shifting and replacing objects in preparation for what follows.*

*Circe probably eats some raisins during the following:*

CIRCE

Think of yourself like a box of raisins: everyone likes you. Mostly. Some people don't. But it doesn't matter because everyone knows you and everyone has tasted you and felt that weird texture like dried skin. But no one really knows where you come from, or where you go. You just come from the box, wrinkled and red—*what even are you?* people think to themselves as they shove you in their mouths by the fistful. Whole fists. The entire hand in one bite. Even with that much flavor, no one can say what you are or where you came from. And they don't know where you're going to end up. They just know if they don't eat you now, in two years' time, something else will. Usually a form of fungus, I find.

*(Pause.)*

Or, if you don't like that:

*(dramatically now)*

Think of yourself as thunder: you are there, alive, one long, loud moment, bright and strong and pure, *boom!* as loud as creation!

*(She throws a raisin at Mel.)*

Then you are gone, no color or sound remains. But, how were you made? Everything that you were, that has made you, is there in the sky and in

the Earth. The rain goes on. Thunder, just like you, comes again. Are you quiet, or are you still shaking? And when the sun comes over again, then where are you? The sky is always full of voices, but not always so loud as you.

*Lytrēai walks slowly towards Mel, entering the chaotic ring directly to get to her. Her steps are confident, her gaze up, despite the obstacles. She looks at Mel's face, touches it, feels it as if to see it really. Takes her hands away, then:*

LYTRĒAI

You are hardly a stranger, and yet...

*She takes Mel's hand and returns it to the shown in the projection.*

LYTRĒAI

An echo, a stain. You are a resonance. These walls know you well. We have told your story here to every surface and every shard.

*(pause.)*

Come, this will not do.

*Circe approaches. Circe and Lytrēai remove Mel's heavy jacket. Circe carries it away, depositing it.  
Circe begins gathering ingredients and returns to mix, grind, etc.  
Lytrēai once again offers a slow, tactile exploration of Mel's face.*

LYTRĒAI

What is your name?

*No answer.*

CIRCE

*(while gathering her mixture)*

She has forgotten.

LYTRĒAI

Not so, she knows who she is. She can simply not say it yet.

*Lytrēai turns away from Mel, her hand extended, her palm open and flat. It closes and shifts, as if reconstructing Mel's face opposite the original inspection.  
She then walks to each of the scenes around the room, making slight alterations or new images, perhaps turning on lights.  
Then, she shifts the projectors again as a new image blinks to life.*

*Circe has gathered three plates and her mixture in a large wooden bowl. She carries them to a low table, brushing the scene aside and setting the table for a meal: plates, cups, she produces a pot of tea.*

*Then again from her mixing station, she produces a cup and collection of herbs and passes them to Mel.*

*Lytrēai repairs the scene(s) that Circe has disrupted at the low table, though allowing Circe's breakfast to coexist. Circe notices this gesture.*

*Circe moves to the table, pouring tea and serving food for herself and the second plate. Lytrēai, at the third plate, is not served food or tea and does not seem bothered.*

*Once the food is served, the ritual of offering tea and salad complete, Circe immediately rises, taking the food with her, placing it on some other location after a mid-motion bite or two.*

*Lytrēai rises as well (perhaps before Circe), and they begin to shift the scene around Mel's ongoing ritual, creating a new set of surfaces for the following:*

*Lytrēai begins to dismantle the ritual assembled in front of Mel, leaving them sitting in displaced silence.*

*Circe brings the cup of tea to Mel.*

CIRCE

Drink.

*No response.*

*Circe produces a sheet of paper, dipping her hand into the tea and producing the tea leaves scattered to the bottom.*

*She lays them out on the page.*

## **2. water**

*As Lytrēai finishes her circle through the space, Circe has moved outside the ring so that they are opposite each other.*

*Mel is still as Circe and Lytrēai move the stage, placing a low table in an open space and clearing obstructions to form a line extending from it.*

*Circe produces a flower and a few small jars, as Lytrēai produces a clear bowl full of water (not her drinking bowl—bigger). Circe places a few drops of colored liquid on a glass panel.*

LYTRĒAI

(to Mel)

Come here.



*After a pause, Mel steps forward.*

CIRCE  
Slowly.

*Mel gives slow footsteps, Lytrēai waits patiently.  
The entire process seems to reflect learning to walk, a ritual  
recreation of upright steps, as Mel seems to walk as if not  
sure she can hold her weight, but is emboldened slowly each  
step as she finds her feet and legs are sturdy.  
Lytrēai stands as Mel approaches, moving around, almost  
catching Mel as she reaches the altar, holding her shoulders  
as she kneels.  
Lytrēai returns to her position opposite Mel. She kneels, takes  
Mel's hands and submerges them in water.*

LYTRĒAI  
Tell me about the river.

MELIAI  
Cold.

LYTRĒAI  
Did you swim?

MELIAI  
We floated, walked, danced on rocks. Sometimes the water was deep, but  
mostly it was smooth pebbles and jagged islands to watch the arthropods  
swim around from.

LYTRĒAI  
Who taught you to swim?

MELIAI  
The Nereids.

*Pause. Circe places a flower petal on the glass panel.*

LYTRĒAI  
Your name rhymes with dust.

*Circe drops more color.*

LYTRĒAI  
Does it rain often?

MELIAI  
Yes.

LYTRĒAI

What do you do?

MELIAI

I like to run in the rain. Cool water in the hot sky.

LYTRĒAI

The age?

MELIAI

Teenager.

LYTRĒAI

The Age of Giants?

MELIAI

After that.

LYTRĒAI

*(a question)*

The rhythm of your feet on the mud.

MELIAI

I ran barefoot as long as I could.

LYTRĒAI

Painful?

MELIAI

On hot days, makes you run faster.

LYTRĒAI

Your name is like sunlight.

MELIAI

Hot and bright, long slow fire.

LYTRĒAI

Can you smell the ocean?

MELIAI

No. Not anymore.

*Circe drops another color into the mixture.*

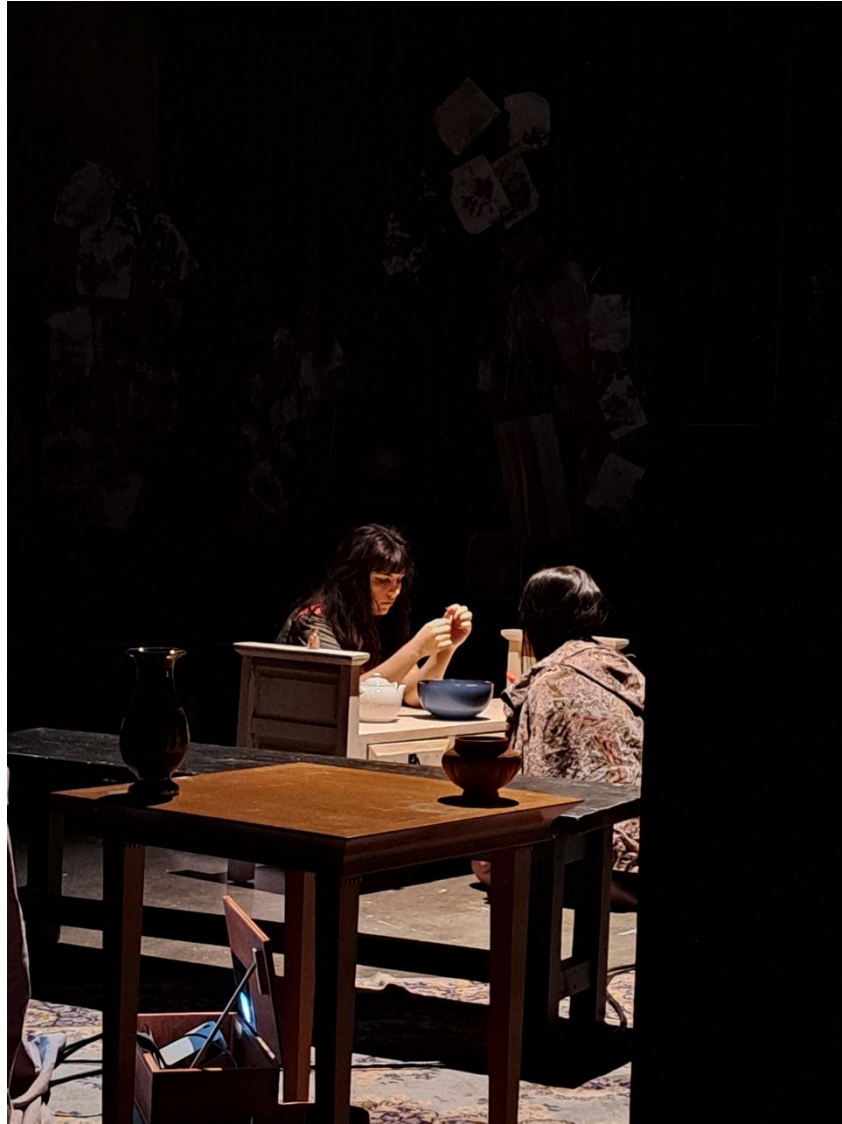


FIGURE B3. End of 2. water, Circe counts flowers into the remains of the ritual. Lytrēai stands opposite (see Figure B4). With Lauren Han and Zoë Braithwaite.

LYTRĒAI

I think I remember you, no? There was something in my river before the waters were taken away. There was something small, something lost, mixed with the stones, it stayed there a long time.

*There is a brief pause before each response:*

MELIAI

No.

LYTRĒAI

A cup.

MELIAI

No.

LYTRĒAI

A scarf.

MELIAI

No.

*Long pause.*

MELIAI

It was me.

LYTRĒAI

Strange.

MELIAI

The water broke against my hair. My eyes stung. I always felt lost in the water. I couldn't see like I wanted to. Like trying to find the doorknob at night—your body knows something, but you don't trust anything when you trust your eyes. Your eyes don't adjust, but your skin does. I was there, swirling in the dark, trying to find why everyone liked this so much.

LYTRĒAI

Then you found it.

*Pause. Mel is still confounded.*

*Circe stands.*



FIGURE B4. End of 2. water, Lytrēai describes her memory of many old objects that flowed through the river. With Rosemary Morrison.

*Circe digs around in a box, removes something strange, old, and important<sup>59</sup> and places it in Mel's wet, unexpected hands.*

LYTRĒAI

It was not always so smooth, but the rush of my waters ground its edges for so many long years. *(pause)* You were old when you left it there. Young when you found it. You didn't know why but your hands took to its surface instantly. It carried you as you carried it; you lived with it for years until it left you again, and like so many things, it slipped into my waters again, and there it remained until the waters were taken away.

*(Pause. Lytrēai stands up.)*

It was part of the world for so long. Part of the stones, it moved with them. At every touch it would tell me this story: about you, and about me. It spoke in such a soft way, drawing me in, until I could not distinguish myself from its core, its rhythmic recollection, its ancient landscape.

*(Circe begins to move.)*

This was the thing that lived in your hands for so long. The very shape of your fingers was made by this surface. You don't have a name for it, but your skin does, your bones do, and every time you touch, grip, hold tight a friend, ghost, hold your skin, your arms... you feel its story surge through you.

*Circe has moved to her station, brought the flower. Now, she breaks each petal and lets it fall into the bowl.  
Mel stares into the bowl.*

MELIAI

My name is Meliai. Everyone calls me Mel.

*Lytrēai and Circe begin to shift the scene again, starting by producing a chest of drawers for Mel to work at, placed near the altar. The surface is empty, but the drawers, we will see, hold many objects.*

*The scene shift continues, preparing surfaces for the following:*

### **3. memory**

*Mel sits/stands/kneels at the chest of drawers, and throughout the following produces a collection of items, forming a scene around the object given by Circe before this.*

*Circe walks slowly around Mel, inspecting. Then she moves to Mel's backpack, which is on the floor still. She digs through it, producing various things that might almost fit in a modern*

---

<sup>59</sup> The object in question was brought by Mel, a small wooden duck which had a twin elsewhere in the set.

*backpacker's repertoire:*

*a tin drinking cup*

*extra clothes*

*water bottle (she opens it; it's empty)*

*containers that might have held food*

*a flashlight*

*climbing cable/rope*

*Winter hat, gloves*

*From one or another food packaging box she removes some  
form of white garment and a rolled-up bundle of paper.*

*Circe moves to a spot on a high table where she unrolls the  
pages.*

*(There is probably a half-finished goblet of wine or cup of beer  
or glass of tea sitting there and she takes a drink. Maybe  
food is sitting nearby, which she munches, but does not finish  
the portion.)*

*We wait as Circe reads, perhaps whispering things to herself,  
reading faintly aloud at parts.*

*Circe takes the garment and lays it over the edge of a chair,  
then repositions the projector to encompass its surface. She  
makes a gesture, and the screens flick to life with a scene,  
sound accompanying:*

*Mel and another Figure [A] lie on the ground, perhaps in  
sand, dirt, or in a parking lot.*

*Their voices are gentle, proximal, despite the wide angle,  
and line up with the moving images only approximately.*

MELIAI

Show me your hands.

FIGURE<sup>60</sup>

See, they're bigger.

MELIAI

I've never seen your fingers.

FIGURE

Really?

MELIAI

They're / like—

FIGURE

Can you do this?

---

<sup>60</sup> The voice and gestures of the figure were done by Clare Noble.

*They point or make a referential gesture, seemingly skyward; Mel imitates.*

MELIAI  
I love that one.

FIGURE  
Surprised you didn't forget it.

MELIAI  
I see it every day.

FIGURE  
Too much.

MELIAI  
Maybe. Show me another.

*The Figure holds their hand up to Mel; their hands form a shape against each other.*

MELIAI  
What's this one?

FIGURE  
Can't you tell? Do it like this.

*They gesture skyward.*

MELIAI  
(imitating)  
Like this?

*They both look up.*

MELIAI  
What is it?

FIGURE  
I think we'll know someday.

*Circe reads aloud:*

CIRCE  
"There was a moment where I began to understand what that gesture meant, where years (or was it days) of this repeated encounter had taught my muscles, my skin, my ears to shape alongside this knowing





FIGURE B5. Still from projected scene. An angular view of a room, perhaps a kitchen, shows Mel mid-motion, hands extended. A light bleeds through as if from the center of their chest. They are wearing a striped shirt. With Lauren Han, Clare Noble, Jela Ahn, and Nicole Huang.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

movement. Show me how my hand fits, and that tracing force of my life eventually did; until it rooted in me and I knew how to shift about knowing land by skin."

*Lytrēai's reading ends.*

*Circe waits until the final skyward gesture then imitates that movement in time with Mel's (projected) hands, then speaks in time with the now silent projection:*

CIRCE

What is it?

MELIAI

*(faintly)*

I think we'll know someday.

*Circe approaches and passes Mel the pages of text.*

*Mel looks them over, then looks up at Circe.*

MELIAI

Would I know them still?

*Circe looks.*

MELIAI

If I saw them, would I know them still?

CIRCE

Perhaps.

MELIAI

How would I know?

CIRCE

*(pacing closer)*

You won't. That's the thing.

*Lytrēai has risen from the far floor. She now goes about extinguishing lights from every surface.*

MELIAI

*(holding up the page)*

For a moment, I can taste it.

CIRCE

What?



FIGURE B6. The center of the room is staged with cloth, a table, and a chair; the projectors are oriented at this figuration. The residue of 2. water is seen behind, middle left.

MELIAI

The wind. Hair, towering pines. Tea. Nothing compares. But here in these pieces, fragments, flashes, I find an imitation. Fabricated—did you make this?

CIRCE

No.

MELIAI

It's dim, immutable yet worn, washed out, faded, / incomplete, fragmented.

CIRCE

*(slowly)*

So many synonyms.

*Circe produces a light (still off) and passes it to Mel. She picks one up for herself.*

*Lytrēai has reached one last table—the last light still illuminated—beside which a dim projector waits. She positions the projector onto a teapot, then turns off the light.*

CIRCE

Drink.

*Mel holds it out, imitating a gesture of holding a cup or other vessel.*

*Her hands almost shake as she contemplates it.*

*Lytrēai approaches slowly.*

*Circe steps to the side, allowing a direct path between Lytrēai and Mel.*

CIRCE

Tell me about the sky. Everything you remember.

LYTRĒAI

You are still in that place.

*Both of their gestures return to the hand-to-sky gesture, Lytrēai first, then Mel.*

LYTRĒAI

Is this right?

MELIAI

No.

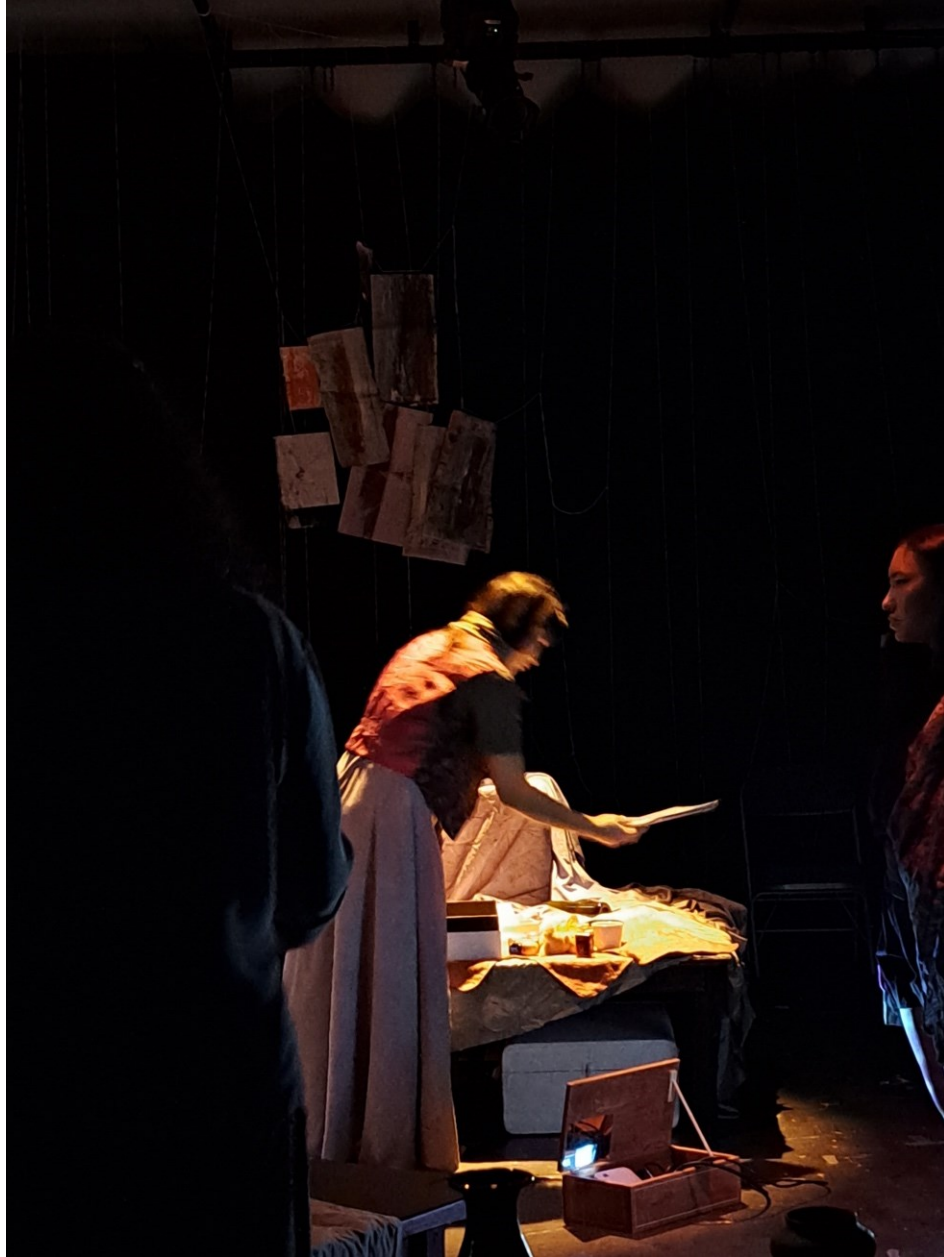


FIGURE B7. Circe counts objects out of an old box. Fragments of a vanished life appear on the table. She reads some of them to Mel. With Zoë Braithwaite and Lauren Han.

LYTRĒAI

Can you get there from here?

MELIAI

I...

*Circe picks something up, or knocks something over. The noise is distracting. She begins moving objects. A large amount of transition of objects takes place, many things going into drawers and tucked away, a new set of objects and many pieces of cloth emerge.*

*Mel approaches Lytrēai, who stares at her calmly. They begin to shift through the movement of the gesture—looks, hands against each other, facing out.*

*As the scene repeats, the gestures change into a slow embrace. Circe pauses in her place, for a moment.*

*Mel steps out of the embrace. Lytrēai watches motionless as Mel procures the rolled pieces of bedsheet, laying them out on the floor into a bed. She drags a table close by.*

*At the same time, Circe begins to rearrange the space again, watching Mel's creations and shifting things in response.*

*Lytrēai follows Mel's shiftings, perhaps offering a hand in assistance, but always following Mel's cue.*

#### **4. tea**

*Mel sits Lytrēai on the floor and then sits opposite her.*

*They begin to walk through the steps of the scene, though the dialogue is detached, with longer-than-natural pauses between each line.*

LYTRĒAI

Show me your hands.

*Mel presents her hands.*

LYTRĒAI

Bigger than I remember.

*She inspects Mel's fingers.*

LYTRĒAI

Can you...?

*(She makes a shape, Mel imitates.)*

I'm surprised you didn't forget it.

*By now, Circe has risen and is watching the scene unfold.*

*Lytrēai corrects Mel's gesture.*

LYTRĒAI  
Too much.

*Mel fixes her hand, and Lytrēai nods in satisfaction.*

MELIAI  
Show me another.

*Lytrēai forms a shape.*

MELIAI  
What's this one?

*Lytrēai moves Mel's hand into the right shape.*

MELIAI  
Like this?

*A pause on the gesture.*

MELIAI  
What is it?

*Circe comes closer.*

*Lytrēai pours tea.*

*Mel stares at the tea, holding it in her hand, unable to drink,  
almost shaking as she does so.*

*She sets it down, rises, turns to the projection.*

*Circe walks through the space, passing close to each of the  
projection surfaces, while Mel and Lytrēai are still. Circe  
ends her loop near Mel, looking her over.*

CIRCE  
You were a dove when I knew you. Then a worm, then a gull, then a strip  
of phosphorous. I used to catch you in my garden—I would tend to you  
like the plants. I knew you better than you thought I did.  
Your dove I fed a worm, your worm I fed the soil, your gull I fed fire. Fire  
grew in my garden and I have saved many such spores. Do you know  
what I use them for?

*She goes to a shelf and from a tea tin produces a small stone—  
phosphorous. She passes it somewhat forcefully into Mel's  
hand, then puts her palm to Mel's forehead. She waits a  
moment, then, impatient, grabs Mel's hand and crunches her  
fist, breaking the stone.*





FIGURE B8. Before the rock/flower scene. In the foreground, Circe waits, teacup in hand. As the scene unfolds, her voice and body fight to accomplish their separate moments: a mundane movement score, and a story of touch, intimacy, and loss.





FIGURE B9. Circe with flower; unedited projection. Four non-sequential frames. The flower shown was used in the scene from B8, passed from Circe to Mel and crushed into small fragments. Throughout the scene, Mel seems to search for something. Circe describes how to read the flower: “The motion is a sort of nod or wave, wrist and hand and head. There’s a sort of touch to it. You pass each other from a distance. Feel your way through the thing.” With Zoë Braithwaite.

CIRCE

Delicate pieces of dust crystallized by the weight of rock and water. It's how I see the way of things, the path. It has a history—something old.

*Circe picks up the white garment from Mel's bag. She looks it over, then puts it back down.*

CIRCE

The motion is a sort of nod or wave, wrist and hand and head. There's a sort of touch to it. You pass each other from a distance. Feel your way through the thing.

*Circe presses Mel's hand closed again.*

CIRCE

What, then? Tell me everything.

*They stand face to face for a moment. Circe is intent, unwavering.*

*Then, as Mel's expression changes, Circe procures a bowl, holds it to Mel who deposits the crushed stone.*

*Circe leaves the bowl aside while Lytrēai approaches. They then slowly remove Mel's second layer. We recognize now the outfit we have seen in the projection, which was waiting under this layer. Mel sits down again beside Lytrēai. They move through the gestures slowly, unexpressive. As it reaches the end:*

*Mel stands, leaving Lytrēai behind. She digs out her tin cup, dips it gently in a bowl, dries it on a towel, then pours tea and drinks it.*

*Everything is still for a moment, while:*

*Circe and Lytrēai rise and begin to rearrange the space to create a more central open area with two chairs on its ends.*

## 5. story

*Lytrēai begins to prepare the bowl and cloth combination, onto which Mel will soon leave a handprint. This process takes perhaps a considerable period of the following.*

*Circe goes to sit on one of the chairs. Mel sits in the other. Throughout, they are digging through boxes and making little arrangements on the surface in front of them. Each object spends a long time in their hands.*

VOICE (speakers)

I think if I tell that story, it won't sound real, it will sound like a legend.

Which—it was cold in those days. That's the kind of thing you say at the

beginning of a legend. “In those days, we lived like bricks.” But it was true—it was cold, and we only opened one window at a time, it was cold. *(pause, a vocal noise)* That was how she told it:

“In those days, we lived like bricks, and the crisp sound of Winter was never far away, and you only opened one window at a time for fear of what the wind might bring. And on one morning, we woke up to the clouds arched like wolves, and we went outside, and we waited. And they came.”

Not unlike how we lived when the mud and the rain came. *(pause, a vocal noise)* I remember it as fire and smoke. We stained the walls each night more, and everything was thick and grey with the memory of our presence.

I remember her in this swirl of color, how she seemed to grow out of the thick of the flame, out of the twist and crumble of the wall. She wove us a story about the ocean, about how that weight and might piled sand and lime and shale and bone, about the raking fire no longer remember except by that sheet of rock. And we felt the waves crashing around us, the flaming mantle spewing over us, the layers compacted, the years endured. Or at least I felt it. She twisted her hand against the stone and the branches grew: we see fire, wind, raging light, the endless ocean—and by inclinations too slight and slow to see the sand and stone shifted, until everything was dim and warm. Our fire burned, her voice range out, the red of sky fell again into the river and the sea.

She told us another story. Again, it sounds like nothing that ever was, but her hand flickered over the decimated gesture emblazoned on the rock, and the circle of ibex drove forward. In a myth of fire, it was fire that danced into the rock, and she showed those old pieces to us with her wrist and the feather-motion of her legs and feet. It was tremendous. In a moment, we watched it happen. Then we went on, drank some as we did of water and sap, slept under little brightness. Time no more. Back then I needed to stretch my limbs five times each to go to sleep, it was a horrible pain, sleeping on the stone, but we were warm.

CIRCE

*(quoting, somewhat bombastic)*

“From the moment I came into this world I / could fly.”

MELIAI

No, no. Like, “From the moment I came into this world...” *(quietly)* / “...I could fly.”

CIRCE

“From that moment... I could / fly.”

MELIAI

Yeah, yeah.

CIRCE

What was / it—

MELIAI

*(perhaps mocking; imitating)*

“It wasn’t flying,” right, right?

CIRCE

“You rattled in the wind, shook like a feather, your stories were— /  
were... were dancing and the ground a fury.”

MELIAI

He told it like... He told it like we hadn’t been there.

CIRCE

He liked language. “He brought you into the world on a flaming chariot, /  
the wheels of fate beaming—”

MELIAI

“A sick, flaming chariot!” He saw fire in me from the moment I was born.  
*(pause)* It wasn’t “wheels of fate.”

CIRCE

No?

MELIAI

*(somewhat less bombastic; losing  
energy)*

“I brought you into this world on a sick, flaming chariot, the winds of  
winter...” *(trailing off)*

*Pause.*

CIRCE

No?

*Beat.*

MELIAI

Let me see.

*Circe unrolls a bundle of paper. Mel traces her fingers along  
it, seeking, measuring.*

MELIAI

This part.

*Mel leaps up, hands flying upward; the pages spill.*

MELIAI

*(dramatic)*

“We knew her so by the trace of dust.”

*Mel pauses, the energy of the gesture dissipating into almost fearful stillness. Circe goes around picking up the pages.*

MELIAI

Does this happen to you?

CIRCE

What?

MELIAI

That you get stuck, feel wrong, feel the tug of gesture is too slight to capture. Feel that ... that thing we seem to know here has become unanswerable?

*After a moment, Circe stops her gathering, looks to Mel. She throws the papers carelessly over a table. She is not done with them. She raises Mel's palm into a flat gesture, tracing her hand against its surface. Then, somewhat roughly, she reforms Mel's fingers into a pattern, fingers spread. Then an open gesture of excitement or exclamation.*

CIRCE

*(gentle, strange)*

“We knew her so by the trace of dust.”

*After a pause, she breaks the touch, stepping away. Mel slowly drops the shape.*

CIRCE

No, I like the mystery.

*Circe goes to one of her cupboards, picking through things, taking a drink of something that is sitting nearby (wine in a goblet).*

MELIAI

You never told me your name.

CIRCE

*(immediately, bombastic)*

I am Prometheus.

*Mel stares.*



FIGURE B10. Projections from a scene with Mel and Circe. Images of food, a feast; Circe pours tea, a finger visible in the fourth panel. Four non-sequential stills. The screen is split into two halves, vertically, the result of color differences in the surfaces (table and chest, respectively). On the stage, Mel and Circe sit, eat, drink. Their voices are heard in the loudspeakers. Mel places and replaces a cup. She asks for Circe's name. In the ensuing scene (Figures B11-B12), time moves at a natural pace, where before it moved in slow motion, each scene extending the time for each gesture, as if learning to do them for the first time. With Zoë Braithwaite.

CIRCE

I did meet him once. Not like all the others, if you know what I mean.

MELIAI

You gave him water?

CIRCE

As is my way. *(drinks)*

MELIAI

And yet—

*She is cut off as Circe turns to her. Then, to Mel's surprise, unnerve, Circe approaches with the goblet of wine. She holds it slowly to Mel's lips until Mel has drunk. The disgust builds slowly on Mel's face, and she holds the liquid in her mouth for as long as she can until the disgust overcomes her. She runs to a bowl,<sup>61</sup> placing her hand inside before she spits it out, as if vomiting. She holds her hand in place for a long moment.*

*Mel holds up her hand as the red liquid drips down it. Then she pulls the cloth from the bowl, holding it open, the imprint of her hand loosely on its surface.*

*Circe brings a cloth, drying her hand.*

MELIAI

Circe.

CIRCE

Should we live by our names? Should we be just small pieces of little, tiny voices?

*She deposits the towel to the side.*

MELIAI

I still... *(trailing off)*

*Pause.*

CIRCE

*(gently)*

Hold out your hands.

*Circe pulls Mel's hands into a conjoined cup shape.*

---

<sup>61</sup> BOWL: simple cloth stretched within it.



FIGURE B11. Circe drinks, tells Mel about time and divination. The stage is widely lit, and Circe moves through it playfully, forcefully, spilling wine. With Zoë Braithwaite and Lauren Han.



CIRCE

You're thinking about... that moonlit night, with the sound of wind. Let me show you.

*Holding a bowl of herbs, Circe throws a haphazard handful into Mel's cupped hands, some getting in her face. Mel coughs, dropping the gesture to clean her face.*

CIRCE

*(vigorous, irreverent, dancing about)*

The elements of human life, so swift and fiery: food and drink, sleep, the sun, but in a very particular order. Bread only when the sun is up, sleep when it rains. Humans praise the gods—my father, Helios—because they bring swift fate daily: the gentle rise and rough, hot summer when the vines grow. Then they fear the gods their jumps and leaps: “Look! I’ve seen how your hands twisted at the birth of your daughter. Look! I have foreseen it: the angularity of your palm when pouring wine. All shall come to pass.”

Oh, but come, come, let me give you prophecy.

*(She throws herbs into the air.)*

Ha! You will wear a green sweater! Count the gods praised!

Come, come, I will make you into a god! I’ve done it before with just a flake of trimming from Oceanus’ pubes! Think what we could do with Theia, Phoebe, Hyperion—you could be radiant and booming, not all watery and barnacled like last time.

But then what would you do if you were a god, eh? Teatime for the low sun, wine for midnight, beer for the North, an olive for the wind, a few leaves of spinach for the horse-flooded East. Here!

*(Throws rosemary.)*

Rosemary. Spring has come! Huzzah! Would you like an acorn? Bah! Time is nothing.

*Circe scoops up a piece of cheese and dips it in wine before shoving it in her mouth.*

LYTRĒAI

*(softly)*

She knew you as a tiny seed. Perhaps she thought differently of you then. Perhaps you were her most delicate child, and she brought rain to nurture you.

I think the world has changed. Different kinds of things come down to us than ever before.

Don’t be mistaken, it’s always been this way. But now she flits about full of fury and appetite. She would tell stories of farmers and the river as if the Songs to Apollo are about ballroom dancing. She eats with one hand because she didn’t live that way.



FIGURE B12. Circe wanders the stage; Mel pursues. Lytrēai moves in slow motion, folding cloth in the late of the projector (red box to the left side of the bench). With Lauren Han, Zoë Braithwaite, and Rosemary Morrison.

LYTRĒAI (CONT'D)

Now look at her, Circe! No, she will not. She has sense for her memories, too. She watched the horizon as you do. She waited, she wept, she dreamed. Don't you think we are afraid of the ocean? The blinding Sea, the vaulting waves, the unprepared leaps of storm, water and thunder, peace and wind—how indistinguishable. What rage that you would come here and wait for something. Pride, memory—leave them off! Humans are made of dirt and sunlight, god gave them water. Now he gives the Sea.

*(to Circe)*

You said there was nothing left. You scream and dance as if words were made of dust and dust were made of love and loss. You raise your hands as if the memory of touch were a wisp of smoke.

You knew her as a seed. Perhaps you thought differently of her then, but you planted her by your fingers' depth.

*Lytrēai takes rosemary, breaks a leaf, smells it. She holds it to Circe's face.*

LYTRĒAI

You do your magic as if you don't smell anything in these bits. Someone grew this. Someone dug a life in its roots. Someone wore this smell. Someone cooked you this smell and lay with you in a field. What else is time than memory remaking itself?

*A pause.*

LYTRĒAI

*(to Circe)*

Come.

*Lytrēai leads Circe by the hand to one end of the circle. She then goes to Mel and leads her by the hand to the opposite end. They are facing each other.*

*Lytrēai stares for a moment, then:*

*As this enters, Lytrēai begins to move furniture out of the way, creating a path between them. She moves things slowly and calmly at first, but grows in speed and fury as time goes by.*

*Once she is done rearranging, ending in a moment of loud, furious shifting of furniture, she is still, panting, watching Circe and Mel.*

*Slowly, the following transition falls over this scene:*

## **6. touch**

*Lytrēai walks slowly, step by step, around the circle.*



FIGURE B13. Projection: tea reading. Amid a table flowing with food, Circe reads tea leaves, etches them onto paper. Food can be seen in the right panel; her hand can be seen in the left panel. Images of forest are layered on top, more visible on the dark surfaces of the left panel. With Zoë Braithwaite and Lauren Han.

*Lytrēai comes to Mel's side, holds her arm at various moments at the shoulder, elbow, and wrist, moves it slowly through the motion of extension and retraction. She does this three times; on the third, she helps Mel's palm to turn forward, her fingers to extend as if to touch another hand in opposing gesture.*

*Circe begins to walk forward through the space. She moves one step at a time, pausing for significant intervals before the next step.*

*Lytrēai moves so that she is facing Mel, interposed between her still extended hand and her torso so that she can reach out and touch her face. She slowly positions Mel's face and head, putting her view on Circe. Then she steps back, to the side, as if to clear a path, though Circe is still quite far off.*

*Mel shakes her head, losing the position Lytrēai had carved for her.*

*This pattern continues as Circe approaches.*

*Lytrēai prepares a gesture of touch between Circe and Mel, but Mel retracts their hand in the final moment.*

*Mel moves away, covering their ears with their hands.*

*Mel is kneeling out of the way.*

*Lytrēai moves to a chest of drawers and one by one produces a set of bells. They ring slightly as she moves them.*

*Circe paces around Mel, giving the following:*

*CIRCE (speakers)*

This view of ours is a kind of exhaustion. That red light is a burning, a burning sworn into life by the incomplete rotations of illumination and obscurity, those spiraling elements that make intentions breathe and falter. But here there is no *when* to think with in our efforts and exertions, though gods need no sleep. We live while breathing. Here—no *when* but pages stacked on top of pages, their orders long decayed, the efforts of their consummations split by longer lived performances of weight, gravity, suspension; retention knows no form here, as the very act of memory becomes a kind of song—witnessed briefly and replaced by later moments of its melody.

*Circe and Lytrēai slowly shift the stage, creating space around Mel's still unmoving posture.*

*Furniture is clustered tightly together.*

*Many objects appear and disappear.*

*Projections are shifted to wide surfaces.*





FIGURE B14. Mel is still, sitting beneath the suspended altar where she began the performance. Behind, Circe and Lytrēai are moving the furniture into four haphazard collections in the corners of the stage. Steam is seen in the projections behind (left side; see Figure B15). Warm and cool light separate two portions of the stage; Mel is lit in red. With Lauren Han, Zoë Braithwaite, and Rosemary Morrison.

## 7. *smoke*

*Each holding glowing objects on long strings, they pace in a small circle around Mel.*

LYTRĒAI

When you were young, you smelled smoke for perhaps the first time, rising, searing, spinning. It illuminates the wind with its tail. You can see his face when you extinguished the flame—a grimace.

You know him as smoke; as in, smoke carries powerful perfume; as in, he is a pillar of smoke; as in, he smokes, furiously; as in, when you stand on the balcony with the smell of smoke, he is there.

He told you a story about time and being. It reminded you that we're all coming back here. It reminded you of your friend, the one you're waiting to see.

It was a flicker—the way his hand landed on the word *time*, shaped like a wolf.

LYTRĒAI

Was that the end of it?

*Mel stands, slowly.*

CIRCE

Things go on.

LYTRĒAI

Things fall.

CIRCE

Everything grinds down.

*Circe passes her light to Mel, then walks away, slowly, while giving the following:*

CIRCE

Nothing could ever be. You have found it here, what was it? No more. No longer. What an end to everything.

Or not an end but collecting, compacting, condensing. The dim, fevered way things go back to sleep.

*She stops at the edge of the circle, looking outward.*

*Lytrēai passes her light to Mel, then moves out as Circe did.*

MELIAI

I want to go home.

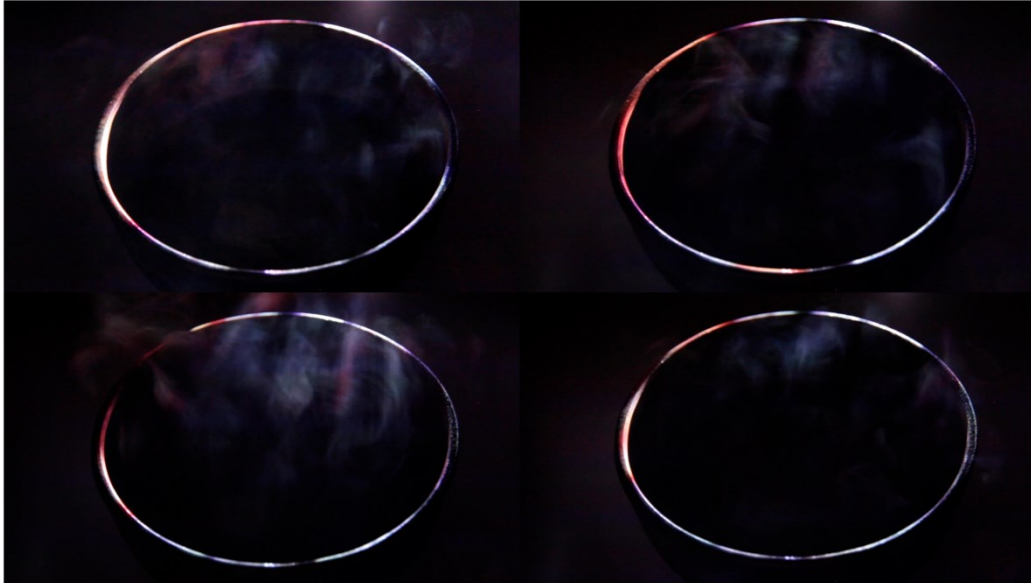


FIGURE B15. Steam rises. The surface is lit by a projection of dilating light. Four non-sequential stills.



## 8. reanimation (bloodletting)

*Circe walks around her in small circles, watching the way she flushes her eyes in at every gesture. When she's had a good look, she takes the old bowl by the hands and wrings the compacted sand, holding the mixture up to Mel as prophecy.*

CIRCE (*speakers*)

Mel, as in Melancholic, as in the strains of darkness that surround the lonely days between the sun and the interstellar membrane, which is to say Melodic—Melodious. Cast aside your doubts, let me feel the shifting of your hands under the stars.

Or can you still see? most travelers have lost their sense of how the sky dips and troubles within less than eighteen hours after the jump—how long have you been falling?

I can see a history in you, and there's a feeling that it will come up again and again.

Now, show me what you know about dust, and I shall show you what I can call 'home.'

*Circe produces another mixture and places it in front of Mel. She kneels opposite Mel and waits until Mel places her hands in the bowl.*

*Circe produces a small piece of sharp obsidian.*

*Her hands are closed as they begin to shake, with the impression of holding something very close within. This is followed by a process of enclosing that continues until the star is visible and until Circe removes the bowl from her grasp, replacing it with cloth like a small field.*

*Circe joins Lytrēai in the furniture-shifting process.*

*Mel stands and gives the following:*

MELIAI

What a place to leave blood behind. Who will drink of it here, who live by its sweet nourishment?

These impressions will become us. You've heard the phrase already:

"Youth met with agony and its end saw fear and hardly a drop of blood."

The story goes on.

*Furniture swirls. As Mel continues to speak, the stage is shuffled and reshuffled into constant new arrangements.*

*The projectors are moved so that they cast through the hanging contraption above Mel's Altar. The following is blurry and impressed over the walls:*



FIGURE B16. Circe leads Mel in a ritual. Here, a grape is mashed with teeth and washed with saliva before entering the mixture. With Zoë Braithwaite and Lauren Han. The projection behind shows water shifting in the light of a dilating light sequence. With Nicole Huang.

MELIAI (*speakers*)

We've seen these things endure, sunlight or not, but they creep and spin  
until their angles and inclinations have vanished.

How might I find the posture of my arm and hand if not in burrows or  
boxes, in the capture and compression of stone and dust?

*Mel begins pulling boxes, jars, containers, and produces a  
bowl. They begin to mix a concoction while continuing:*

MELIAI (*speakers*)

Somewhere within, bound up, entangled, buried, the answers sleep,  
waiting to be spewed up into the vacuum of the sky. Ice, water, wind,  
tiny pieces of sediment. Think about that word—*unearth*. Peel away the  
ground, the body, the being, but also, to send away, beyond, the  
unanswering beneath, caverns and arches, fire and wind.

But with the right word, the right tilt of the palm or curl of the knee, it all  
comes back, we touch, break over, grip, and won't let go of the moment  
we are grasping for, it will remain, return, endure, prolong the vision of  
the stars until...

Detail, recollection, examination. If you remember it, then everything will  
be free and formed. I put my hand against her face and the air was  
warm—there I shall remain, that shape and shadow will always hold me  
in that place, in her eyes.

But dust, wind, mold, rain, light, blood, tears, sweat, the endless smell of  
earth at dawn—they tear at us, at our thoughts, beings, iterations, and  
persuasions. We go—the earth goes, interred are our shadows and our  
breath. Unearthed and you find stone. What are we to the ground? Who  
would dream dig us up, who cares for the longings and fruitions of love  
so heavily carried, so mournfully worn, in days and fits of fingered  
motion and the smell of figs and pine.

## ***9. cloth/morning***

*Mel, Lytrēai, and Circe clear away every bit of furniture from  
one half of the room. They reposition the projectors so that  
they cast on Mel's altar at short distance. A **large piece of  
cloth** is produced, each holding one end. The cloth is  
unrolled in the empty space, then:*

*The surface of the large cloth bares numerous handprints.*

CIRCE

And yet...

LYTRĒAI

It all comes back.



FIGURE B17. The stage is reset; everything is piled behind the small, white altar (Figure B16). Mel, a blur, shifts across the stage while her voice resonates in the loudspeakers. Circe and Lytrēai wait to open the altar. With Lauren Han, Zoë Braithwaite, and Rosemary Morrison.



FIGURE B18. Lamps light the path out of the stage; their light blurs Circe and Lytrēai as they mark their final moments in the space. Mel draws her hand over the surface of the cloth, which bears inky marks of gesturing hands. The warm light over Mel contrasts with the bright, white light of exit path. With Lauren Han, Zoë Braithwaite, and Rosemary Morrison.

*Lytrēai goes and grabs Mel by the hand while Circe carries the concoction to the last altar. They meet in the center, kneeling. Lytrēai presses Mel's hand into the bowl, then onto the surface, aligning perfectly with a print that already exists.*

*After a moment, Lytrēai steps back, and Mel removes her hand. She turns slowly through the space, then gives the following:*

MELIAI

We have such a long history of selves. It becomes blurry to see. You watch pieces of yourself escape your fuzzy boundaries and soak up the passing light and water and little puffs of lint. A life takes hold without you.

You see a thing, a form, a shape, a curve of your hand in a particular order—you can't fit it into your palm.

Yesterday I climbed out of the bathtub and knocked my head against the shelf. A hundred dozen angles of my body have spotted out from that shape, built around the narrow path from the spent, cooling water to the sunny patch beneath the window, and now suddenly it seems my movements have outgrown that path. I no longer fit in my own orbit, too tall to squeeze through, too short to reach the ledge.

"Yesterday"—it's such an ordinary word. It spins out—*yesterday*. No one would know the difference if we meant *tomorrow*. And yet, Spring comes in *yesterdays* and *tomorrows*, never in plots or lines.

*Mel holds up the long roll of paper.*

MELIAI

Do you think this is a form of that translation? I have learned from *yesterday* and *tomorrow* to make little nods, little inquisitions against the order and bind of my shoulder and thumb. Where will they settle? If I roll my whole arm down the page, I might touch that inclination, long forgotten, to distend my fingers just so, a motion which when executed with discrete perfection will induce my locker's dial to split open. There are so many things stacked inside:

a chemistry textbook;

three hundred apples;

seven pairs of shoes;

a little red hoodie;

the path along the river, marks in the sand;

a jar of eraser dust;

dried ink;

eleven lost pencils;

a swift gesture of longing scattered to the left at 28 degrees, which contains by extension the disfragmented pieces of a face, expressions, a

voice I could recite myself, the time she threw a shoe at me;

and lastly, another heap of pages polluted with words and scratches.





FIGURE B19. Mel is alone on the stage seated at a table. She is lit by two lights, one warm, one cold. The center of the space is a messy pile. Mel tells us of the time we might encounter here: “We have such a long history of selves. It becomes blurry to see. You watch pieces of yourself escape your fuzzy boundaries and soak up the passing light and water and little puffs of lint. A life takes hold without you.” Mel exits. With Lauren Han.

MEL (CONT'D)

That anything might have endured in such a space so long comes as a surprise, given its limited volume. But it's the smallest spaces that keep the pieces of our disentangled forms from blighting in the sunlight, that keep the slips and shakes of thumb and shoulder from melting with each approaching doorway.

In gestures just as slight, that flock of persons we have passed through forms a ring around us, and bouncing by the corners I can find the last few pieces of my storming bones and fit them into place. And so these dungeons know us as they know a diagram of sleeping—as turns and folds impressed against an unknown surface with a self-effacing vessel made of iron and water. That we try to carry this around in life is perhaps more interesting than the rest of the story.

*Slowly, Circe and Lytrēai begin gathering objects and placing them on Mel's Altar. Everything goes there, clustered around its base.*

*Mel folds the object into the sheets of paper and with a long careful gesture, as in prayer, she places it on the altar in a wide, central surface that has been empty throughout.*

*She slowly rises from the gesture.*

*Circe and Lytrēai watch as Mel shifts a piece of furniture and a projector encompassing it, then watches as the following blinks to life:*

*Mel turns to Circe and Lytrēai. Then, collectively, they all shift the furniture again, returning everything to its original setup, every object except the paper-wrapped object returned to its place.*

*Mel goes to the teapot, pours tea, sits, and drinks tea.*

END





FIGURE B20. Lauren Han, who played Mel, setting the stage during pre-show. The images throughout, except where noted otherwise, were taken by Brianna Bernard (set designer) and Claudia Chan (production manager).