


• *Doofelis*
Moe Janssens



Chloe Tanssens

Keywords: soil, underground, mediation, role play, rehearsal, semi-fiction, collectivity

I combine cravings and knowledge from climate activism and graphic design in an artistic practice that investigates the soil as a basis of place and futuremaking.

To dig my hands deep into the earth and listen

“The sandy soils of my birthplace ‘de Kempen’, Belgium form the dry landscape of my research. I observe my ancestors preparing the earth for agriculture by obsessively moving cow-shit from the stalls to the fields. I can smell the cattle’s breath, the farmer’s spit, my grandmother’s sweat and the excrements in the soil. After the famine we begin to enrich our lands with chemical

fertilisers and radio-active uranium ore. When I stick my fingers in the earth here and tune in I can hear metals nagging, minerals singing, and bones twisting and turning in the underground. My imagination is haunted by this vibrating mass of elements holding stories from elsewhere. What to do with this pulsing scoop of dirt in my hand? I hold it with disgust, I peak into it, twirl my fingers around. I try stamping on it to free its story.”

The research proposes that a collective reading of this scoopful of earth becomes a basis for an urgent reflection on our entanglements with the places that we inhabit. I invite the audience as a co-researcher in need of a tool for reading the soil. As a tool, I use literal and metaphorical sieves to better understand our positionality and implications in the soils condition. How do these polluted soils that we create and inhabit inform, shape and guide us?



Toolkit of the research

As a real Virgo and desperate prepper I 'm looking for tools to assist me in my artistic practice. In this portfolio, I share with you the tools and skills I am discovering, developing or temporarily forgetting in my artistic research. I talk about my work through these tools to share with you my current methods and approach to research and art-making.

- Sieves
- Facilitation
- Semi-fiction
- Sensuous strategies
- Graphic Design



SIEVES

I understand a sieve to be a dividing tool. A tool to temporarily separate certain bits to form meaning. The meaning can be read on the surface of the sieve as well as in the remaining mass. The sieves themselves determine what will be caught, and what is able to `escape`. Because the materiality of the device is in the thread as well as in

the holes. Julian Barnes describes a net as “A collection of holes, tied together with string”. When I replace ‘string’ with ‘material’, this could be the definition of the sieves I have been using in this research. In that sense, the material is connecting the holes, keeping together what temporarily escapes. As a designer, I’m interested how the design of the sieve holds it’s outcome, or is it possible to design open-endedly? To not define what we want to catch or capture?

Metaphorically, as an artist and Pisces moon, I think of what is flowing through the holes. Marilia Librandi wonders if we can spy the world through the hole, and which different perspectives this will bring for us. She is a scholar who thinks the net as a territory of activist, ecological and artistic interactions in relation to Amerindian and riverside cosmogonies. About her writing she says: “The pressure of linear story

writing is very strong. More than the net, it 's the hole that I want to weave."

It 's an ongoing practice of letting the different holes in the narrative of my research exist and refuse weaving the thread combining them. Weaving the holes also means letting complexity be, and not forcing direct connections.



Photos of a presentation in the a.pass programme where I shared the process of sifting, and introduced different sieves. February 2022



Interpretation, meaning-making

I got this image and urge to put my hands into the soil and filter out meaning and guidance. To let the soil guide us, as we do with the stars. To add the gesture of looking down for guidance, to the gesture of looking up. By using my own hands as sieves, it isn't only the remnants that speak, but also the experience of touching and feeling the mass. I will elaborate on 'touching' in the 'Sensuous Strategies' item in this toolkit.

When you'd search for options on 'how to read the soil', different search engines will give you a multitude on tactics. There's pH strips or, when the soil is still in place, we

can observe what grows out of the surface of the ground. Rather than the current vegetation, I 'm interested in the seeds the soil holds for emerging futures. These seeds I don 't only see as literal seeds for plants, but also as a metaphor for materials in the soil holding questions and responsibilities for the future, which f.e. uranium is doing. Reading the soil for me became, among others things, both a historical as an intuitive practice.



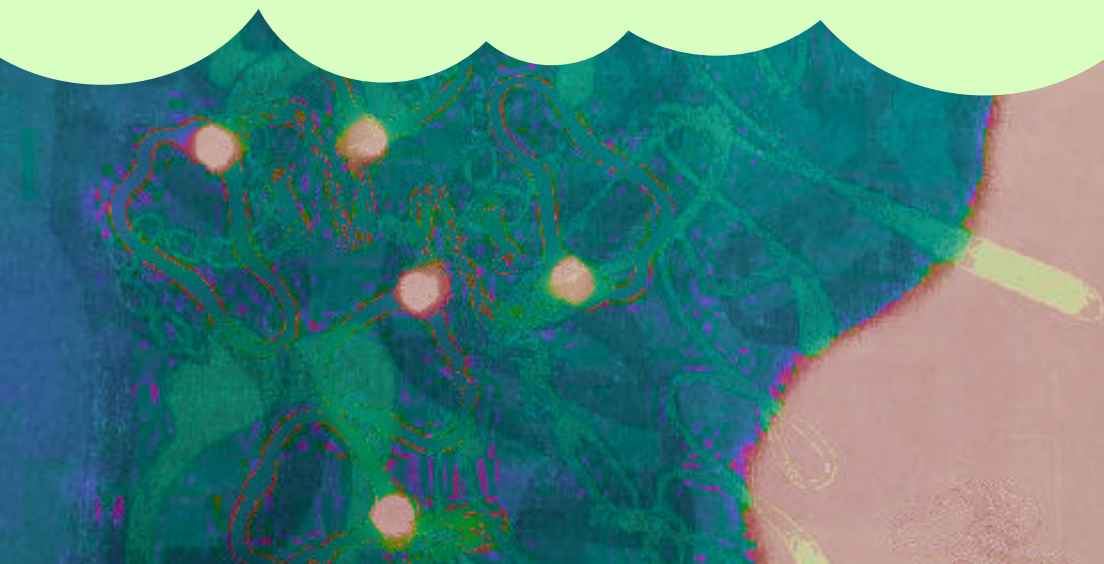
Under: photo of a fence by the security brand HERAS taken in Verviers, Belgium two weeks after the town flooded. The fence worked as a sieve where the water moved through and left behind different materials from elsewhere. July 2021

Sifting paper

In a.pass (2021-2022) I engaged in a paper making practice. Making paper is done by using a sieve. First old paper is mixed with water until the paper completely falls apart. Then, this mixture is sifted and pressed on a cloth mostly in a rectangular shape. This process of working with old paper with texts we had been reading, or material I had been working with, helped me compost different entry-points and interests in my research. By going through the printed texts again, I selected bits of my research that were important, and other bits that could go. The latter were mixed to pulp, and made into new paper. The images or pieces of texts that I considered important were mounted on top of the new paper. Holding it as a new material to work with into a new stage of the research.



Picture of the first paper making workshop I co-organised in a.pass together with Federico Protto. On this picture you can see how the pulp is sifted out of the bucket of the water x pulp mixture. June 2021





FACILITATION

I'm interested in negotiating collective conditions. During my time at extinction rebellion I grew an interest in collective conditions that are 'doable'. No ideal situations, but pragmatic ways of being together with an openness to be 'contaminated' by the beliefs of others. Being on the intersection of the arts, activism and design, I feel there's a lot to discover for me about the practicalities of collective conditions during polarisation.

In these collective conditions, I'm interested in the figure of the facilitator, a position that is in constant negotiation. Facilitators try to keep openings for things to emerge, and at the same time manipulate conditions to actually produce something; a decision, a conversation, new ideas,... This friction I find exciting.

Chelsea Meijer



Chelsea Meijer leading a council on the geological disposal of highly radioactive waste, as a presentation of my research at PAF, St-Erme FR. March 2022

To deepen and further explore different perspectives, I started to work with role play. For myself, I created an alter ego called Chelsea Meier, that embodies my slightly militant and sexual fantasies.

Chelsea is less of a people pleaser than I am, she dares to manipulate the conversation more and isn't afraid to share her own thoughts, beliefs and knowledge with the group. Through Chelsea I'm curious to learn and question the role of the facilitator as a 'neutral' position. I'm trying to discover and play with manipulation from the 'trusted' figure of the facilitator. Chelsea, for me, talks to authority, control, guidance, leadership amidst emergency.

Role play

Together with me, also the audience is invited to shapeshift. I wonder if changing body, can also influence your thoughts and behaviour. During my design education at the Bauhaus Universität in Weimar, I was taught the 'form follows function' principle which states that the shape of a building or object should primarily relate to its intended function or purpose. I am inter-

ested in the opposite. Being a shapeshifter myself I wonder, could changing `form` change your `function`, or transgress the borders of `identity` and negotiate new thoughts and new ways of inhabiting your form or body? Can embodying another point of view in a semi-fictional reality soften our beliefs in our everyday reality, and create openings for contamination?



Picture of an attribute used during the presentation of my research at PAF, St-Erme FR. Every character got a necklace stating their position. Participants wore them during the presentation around their necks. March 2022

On Coloniality

4-day event, 10-13/11/2021, KBK, Brussels

An actual setting where I've worked with collective conditions was the event 'On Coloniality' that Amy Pickles, Tulio Rosa and myself organised in the frame of a.pass. 'On Coloniality' was a proposition for a temporary context for collective study. Through different artistic and theoretical speculations we studied coloniality and its manifold dimensions.

Our understanding of coloniality departed from ideas developed first by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, and later expanded by many others, such as the semiotician Walter Mignolo and feminist philosopher Maria Lugones. Coloniality is an idea that points to the modes of organisation of power in so-called colonized territories, and how this extends out into sup-

posedly postcolonial states. It differentiates colonialism, as a historical process, from its legacies. We have been thinking about ways to describe how the colonial rationale is at the very basis of our modes of social and political organisation, how those supposed histories have collapsed into, resonate with, and form our present.

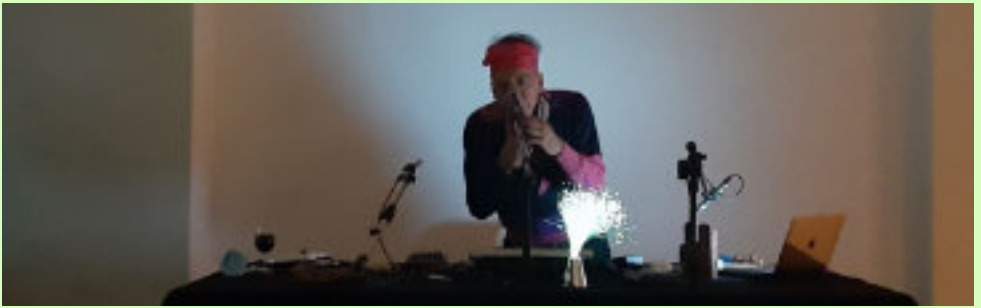


Conversation between Daniela Ortiz, Sadie Choua and the audience on 13/11/2021 at KBK, Brussels.

There is a shared desire between the three of us to learn how to articulate coloniality through artistic practices. Our collaboration has grown out of our individual motivations to discuss and re-narrate the colonial practices of the countries where we were born - UK, Brazil and Belgium- and challenge the dominant narratives that compose these histories. We are drawing connections between different times and locations by following closely methods of appropriation and extraction of land, resources, labour and data. Through different artistic practices we want to draw parallels, observe symmetries and find correlations across colonialism as it exists across all aspects of our lives; institutionally, economically, in corporations, governance, everyday structures of living and our bodies.

‘ On Coloniality ’ was hosted in KBK, an alternative space near Saint Cathrine, in Brussels. It was a porous programme open to the

public. An exhibition hosted the programme that consisted of reading and listening sessions, screenings, a performance, workshops, public conversations and discussions.



Performance by Satch Hoyt on 13/11/2021 at KBK, Brussels.

For On Coloniality we learnt from and with: Jeyanthi Siva, EZLN Delegation (Gira por la Vida,) WORKNOT! X Sarmad (Alireza Abbasy, Golnar Abbasi, Arvand Pourabbasi) Daniela Ortiz, Saddie Choua, Satch Hoyt, Sami Hammana, Glicéria Tupinambá, Vermeir & Heiremans, Line Algoed, Juan Pablo Pacheco Bejarano, Elodie Mugrefya, Nontsikelelo Mutiti, Helena Vieira and the Institute of Colonial Culture (initiated by Philippe Mikobi and Maarten Vanden Eynde) .



SEMI

FICTION

I often find reality stranger than fiction. I like to work on the verge of the almost believable. To keep a space open for a naivety that is willing not to learn. The semi-fiction interests me as a space in which many things are possible, and the

actual is reconsidered. I like to look for the absurdity in every-day situations, and use that as gateways into a collective imaginary. Semi-fiction offers me a method to freely combine different times and places. Just like relativity theory in physics I try to access the complexity of everyday life by bending time and space .



Through the paper making practice I started to work on objects out of that matter. I made a table to facilitate the council on the depository of nuclear waste. April 2022

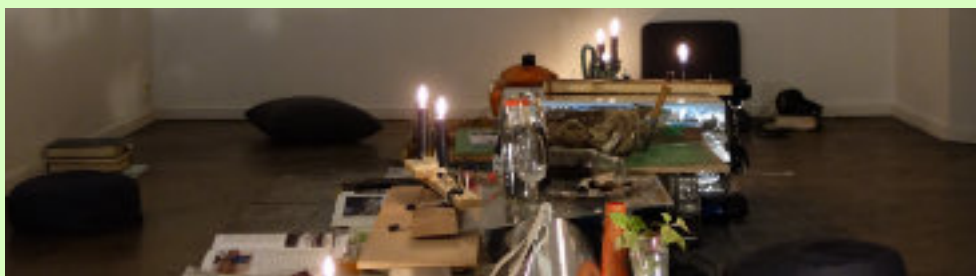
Brochure Hades

In the frame of my research on the geological disposal of nuclear waste in Belgium I worked with the HADES laboratory, an underground lab where every single test refers to a Greek mythological figure. The place itself was already loaded with such mythology, that it gave me a great entry point towards a fictional reading of this space.

Chelsea researched the specific site of the HADES project and discovered another very important inhabitant of the infrastructure, a young child locked up in one of the tubes, meant for radioactive disposal. The happiness of the inhabitants of the area turns out to be directly linked to the suffering of the child. This case is strangely close to another story that was reported by writer Ursula Le Guin "The ones who walk away from Omelas". Chelsea reported the situation in the area of the HADES project to be

extremely urgent both for the child and for its overhead neighbours.

But also HADES itself understand its tricky situation. Recently they opened up a call for a 'social project' that wants to include 'stakeholders' in the decision making on how to deal with nuclear waste on the long run. Chelsea saw this as an opportunity to apply for the job to facilitate this process and has been organising councils on the geological disposal of highly radioactive waste since.

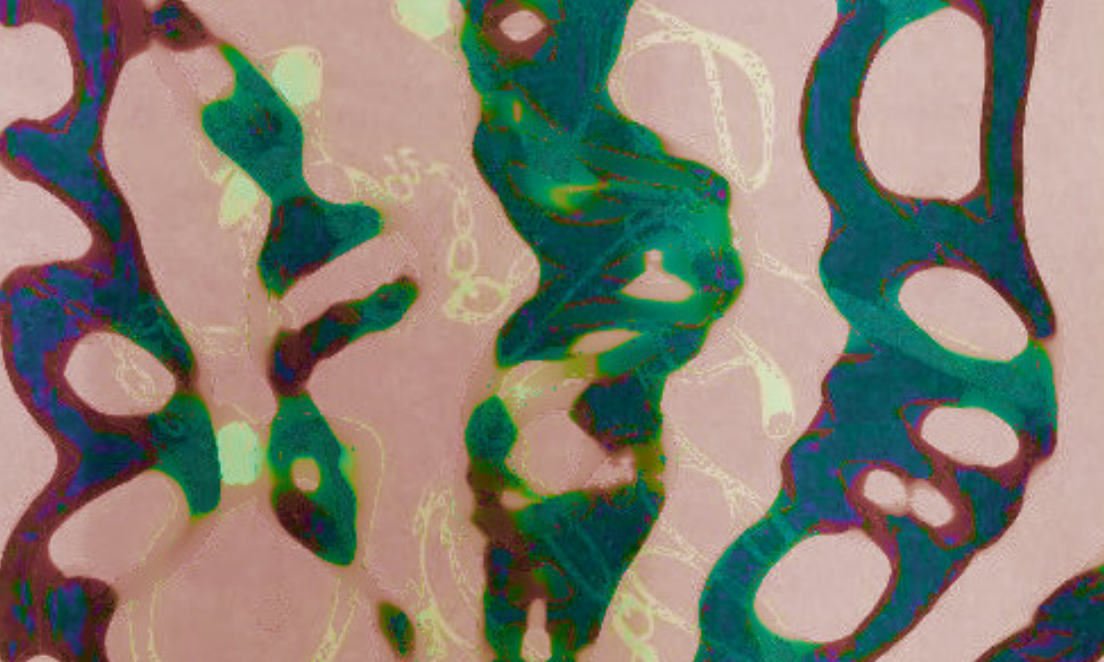


During the event 'On Coloniality' Amy, Tulio and I shared our work in an exhibition. I decided to make Chelsea's salon. This salon was inspired and made in close collaboration with artist Saddle Choua. Saddle's PhD research at RITCS is titled: 'The personal is (not) political'. In her salons, she introduces the political in the familiar setting of the 'salon'. In this intimate space, I tried to get closer to Chelsea as a friend. In the salon, people were invited to listen to an audio track where the soil speaks to them. November 2021

Semi-fictional surroundings

I am growing an interest in how surroundings and materials can support a semi-fictional narrative. While researching I like to 'make things'. Being in touch with the materials of my research, offers me a dynamic place to interact with 'what's there'.

During the trajectory in a.pass, I experimented with paper making. Starting from the paper making workshops, I went to build little sculptures from the same material. I enjoy the 'habitation' of the research, to inhabit the materials, texts and places of the research quite literally.



SENSUOUS STRATEGIES

In the risky spaces which Chelsea proposes, I try to enter a semi-fiction through sensuous strategies. I'm a great fan of touching and listening. Some of my favourite materials to work with are: fonts by womxn, handmade, recycled papers, ropes and chains, sexy and furry fabrics, audioguides and soundscapes.

Proximity is important in my work. Through the senses, I like to get close to things I don't understand.

Paper making



Picture from sheets of paper drying after a workshop I hosted at a.pass as part of the post-master programme. May 2021

During my stay at a.pass I picked up a practice of paper making. I learned to make recycled paper when I was a child and had been practicing every now and then over the years. In a.pass it became a recurring practice that I revisited regularly over the span of the programme.

In the paper making process I re-use paper from the bin and combine them with bread-bags that my family collected during Sunday breakfasts. I like to think of the pulp mixture as a colliding of places. The paper bags have longer fibers, and they are able to hold together the short-fibered recycled paper from the bin.



Picture of a piece of cardboard that I tried as an experiment of using the paper mixture as a capturing surface for other materials. This canvas contains (next to pulp) a plastic spool, rocks and moss. May 2022

Lately, I often leave the sieves for sifting the paper out of the pulp mixture aside, and use the pulp as a material for making cardboard, a table, a shelter. All kinds of substances can be added to the pulp such as soil, spinach, blue berries, coffee grind, stones, moss and ink.

Intoxication



Picture of a drink participants were offered after a presentation at a.pass during the post-master programme. February 2021

To shapeshift, I 'm experimenting with drinking a transformation poison. I 've been thinking about this idea of intoxication or contamination as an alternative for polarisation. Could I allow myself to willingly let myself be intoxicated or contaminated by some-

thing other than myself. This openness seems so daring and naïve that it scares me.

As a concept it 's huge, maybe touching or swallowing `otherness` can make it more concrete and `doable`. I try and think about contamination through swallowing or touching that which is considered dirty. Dirtyness often calls for refusal, but could we also be with the dirt and let it shape us?

*Audioguide
Down Dwar's Dela*



Participants to the worksession of Constant experiencing our audio guide near the Eben Ezer tower. July 2021

Down Dwars Delà, Constant vzw, 2021, EbenEzer. Together with Olivia Joret and Amy Pickles. This work is an audio tour that we shared at the end of the Constant Down/Dwars/Delà worksession, close to the Eben Ezer tower in Bassegne, BE.

(Text by Constant vzw) Down Dwars Delà is a trio of words from English, Dutch and French. These aren't translations but instead position(ing) that we see as talking back to the places and postures we took, experimented with and visited during these two sessions. We look at these words as forming a vector between the beyond, the out-of-reach and the experienceable world.

Down Dwars Delà was the name of two connected sessions that took place one after the other during the summer of 2021, in two different places. One was hosted at the Eben-Ezer tower in Bassenge, Belgium, the other at the Bidston Observatory just

outside Liverpool, UK . Both settings were approached as instruments to reconsider the modes of connection, observation and story-making they foster in relation with their wider historical, geographical, social, ecological, political and economical contexts. (end citation)

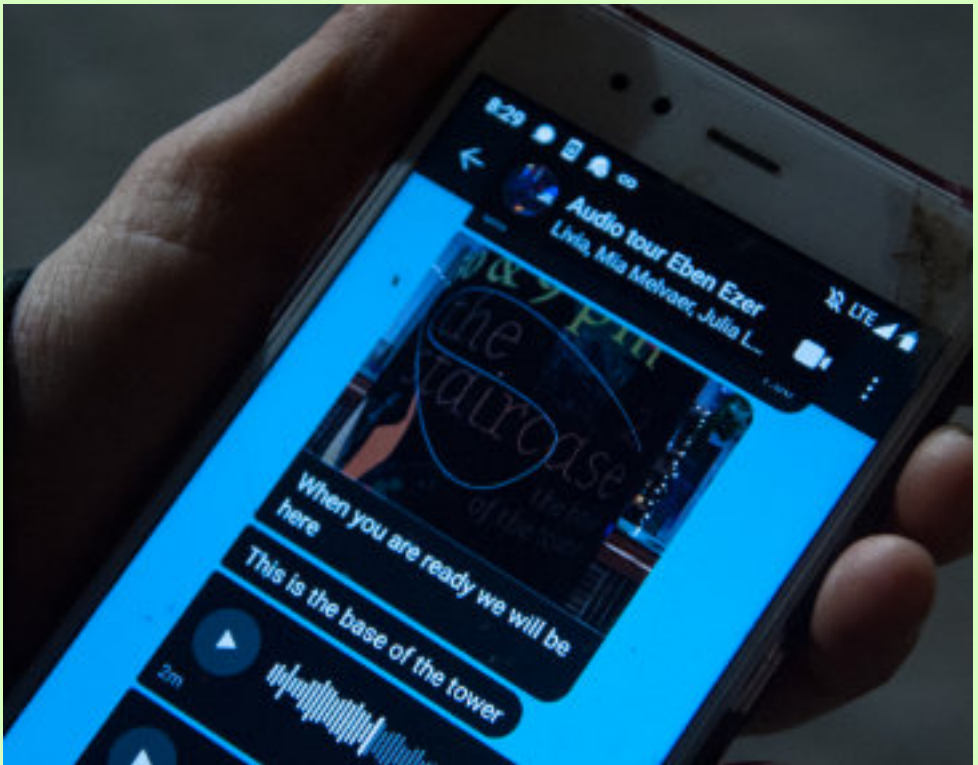


Participants to the worksession of Constant being close to the rocks while listening to the audio guide near the Eben Ezer tower. July 2021

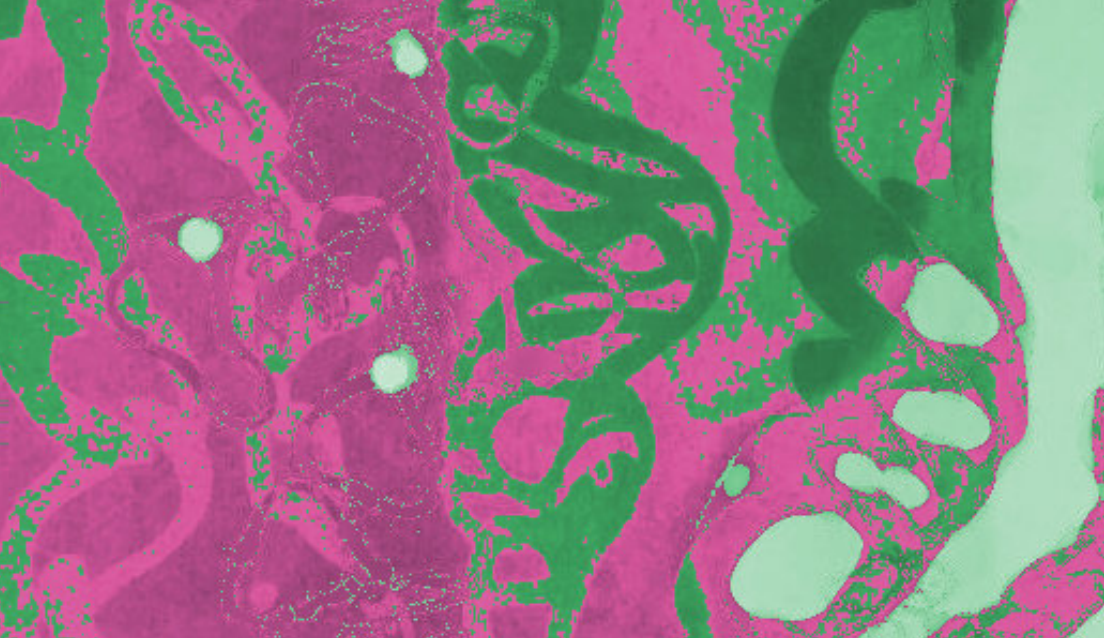
Our three voices, and narratives, are characters with different materialities. Rock is one, in its multiple, porous, breathing, extracted and exploited existences. Another is the gas nitrogen, whose role is shifting as rocks story changes. The third is a matrixial perspective, that brings our attention to borders and transferences between us. The tour began on top of the tower, then moved down to the stairs leading to it, a large pile of rocks and an old mine. The audience was added to a group chat on Signal in which audio fragments of the three characters were shared throughout the walk. The tour ended with a sound meditation by Pauline Oliveros in the mine.

We did an iteration of this performance for the group exhibition 'Unfolding Down Dwars Delà' in the weekend of 16-18th of December 2021 in SeeU, Etterbeek. In this space we shared debris from the live moment of the tour, in the form of props,

sound and our script. Stoney soaps presented here confused senses, and could be carried away by visitors.



Picture of a phone showing the Signal app in which the audio tour was organised. Participants could follow the narrative through a group conversation in the Signal app on their own phones. December 2021. Picture by Loup Gaccia.



GRAPHIC DESIGN

Graphic design and I haven't always been friends, although I can feel we're growing closer again. Working as a freelance designer, I can feel how these skills inform a lot how I work with performance and scenography. When thinking about alter ego's and role play, I often fall back on making moodboards as I would do for clients when designing their branding.

I also think a lot through images and color. Through making images and collages I get visualisations of a cosmology or imaginary in my head. Through methods of visualisation I can see more clearly affinities between different holes in the net that symbolises my research. Through visualising I find it easier to think about stories in the research too.



Design for a.pass end presentations titled ` Burrow ` from Vera Sofia Mota and myself. June 2022



Programme for the event ` On Coloniality ´ .
Participants could stamp their own calendar with the
activities they would attend. November 2021.

*On Coloniality, mentoring
and publication with
Nontsikelele Mutiti*

How to break loose from the grid? How to find
a place to design from, a place of familiarity,
something I know? How to work with what ´ s
around and ´ make ´ from this specific local-
ity? How to relate to graphic design discourse

without being burdened by it? These questions informed me during the process of making the design for our event 'On Coloniality' that took place from November 10-13th, 2021 in Brussels, Belgium.

Design comes with the responsibility of directing people's attention. I find that devastating. It's a source of magic, to guide someones thoughts, and I have difficulties to negotiate that power.

In September I started teaching a Typography 1 course at Paris College of Art. An engagement that sparked my interest in typography and its political potency. Preparing classes, and meanwhile structuring my thoughts about typography, activated a renewed joy and curiosity in the subject. Seeing the mainly white, male graphic design canon made me aware of the importance to speak from a certain position. I started thinking about the position that I work and teach from.

I was inspired by Nontsikelelo Mutiti, who 'm I had the honor to meet for a mentoring in the a.pass programme. Nontsikelelo (among many other things) works with hair braiding as a communication technology to talk with her black community. Her way of working reminded me of the affectivity of communication design. How our communication becomes recognizable by the way it appears to our kin and communities.

As Nontsikelelo says in our conversation: her education was a training in reproduction. Coloniality aims to make people reproduce what the knowledge-holder already knows. Students are not always trained into formulating their own thoughts. Consciously are not, my design education made me believe I had to reproduce a standard I had no understanding of. I feel this design process was a first step to untangle and get loose from those beliefs. To

compost the thoughts I hold on what design is supposed to be, and find a more synced place to work from.

I published a zine that contains a 3 hour conversation I had with Nontsikelelo Mutiti covering different topics around coloniality in graphic design. We talk about books as objects of power, about design education, about reading and about who's still doing minimal design?



Poster designed for the event `On Coloniality`. Mentored by Nontsikelelo Mutiti. November 2021



Brussels, 2022