

True Fiction-working the in-betweens

An overview of research trajectory January 2022 to beginning of June 2023

I often work collaboratively, engaging in dialogue as a form of investment and love of the relational. Tired of having to tick the box to which category my work belongs I recently started calling it crash-disciplinary. The crash-disciplinary approach refers to a voluntary ignorance of disciplinary borders. The process determines the format. Often, I begin by working from a multitude of things; objects, images, texts, questions, concepts and my processes are about finding the inner logic specific to the combination of elements brought together in the first place. This is an attitude that attunes to context and time. One could call it a kind of durational jazz. My background is in dance and choreography but I now work within an expanded notion of performance, where choreography, writing, video, acting, curating and social engagement constantly converse and collide. My work is experimental in nature and my practice consists of walking, asking a lot of questions, experimenting with materials and spending time hanging out with people playing, waiting, improvising, talking, listening. I also regularly collaborate on other artists' projects as a performer and artistic advisor. I'm interested in how art can be a territory of cohabitation between the intimate and the social, sameness and difference, familiarity and strangeness.

I started a pass in January 2022 with a desire to see how my experimental crash-disciplinary artistic practice could merge more with my concerns as a citizen. How could for instance my interest to work within non-artistic contexts feed my artistic language and vice versa. I had a wish to re-find complexity within parameters that often require me to oversimplify what I am doing. Early on in this research I decided to focus on three areas; the Belgian carceral system, the contemporary (performing) arts field I am a part of and educational initiatives that exist on the periphery of the mainstream schooling system in Belgium. I was already implicated in the arts and volunteering as teaching assistant/ all-round helper in two educational initiatives (TADA and SAS) so much of the early stages of the process were spent on fieldwork trying to understand Belgian prisons and the people involved there.

Throughout the research trajectory I had conversations with people involved in the carceral world such as social workers, teachers in prison, ex-prisoners, prisoners from the open prison in Ruiselede in Flanders, activists and criminologists (many times one role overlapped with other roles). In this time, I tried to see where there would be an opportunity to enter a prison as a volunteer worker rather than an artist. The reason for this is that in my years as a voluntary worker I have found this role to be suitable as a first step into a new context. As a volunteer one is brought to engage with people in a way that side steps possible lacks of knowledge about the situation, knowledge that many times can only be acquired by spending time in that context, not something one can read in books. It is an active role that also allows for observation and learning. Plus, being the person who surfs many tasks is one that suits me like a glove. However, in the past year of research I have failed to come up with a good way of engaging further than fieldwork in this context. The reasons for this are multiple. It is partly due to the fact that the prison system itself often only allows artists in through well-defined (and sellable) artistic projects (that sadly often instrumentalise both the artist and the prisoner). It is also partly due to the dynamics of the research process and its shifts. On multiple occasions I was met with suspicion from peers that made me insecure as to why and how I was to approach this work. Surrounded by friends who work in the care sector as social workers, therapists, nurses or counsellors who say it is their calling to take care of others I've oftentimes felt a pinge of jealousy. My intentions in this last year have been so blindly questioned that I've become partly paralyzed. Is it always suspicious for an artist to be driven by an interest, a curiosity and a desire to meet and collaborate with people in contexts other than their own? Must it be a given in the arts, that one cannot attend to other publics without assumingly having some form of misplaced thoughts and exploitative (consciously or not) drives in the back pocket? Over time, in this past year, this ongoing suspicion has exhausted me to a point where I have formed a kind of paranoia towards myself. When caring for others is constantly seen as unnatural it gradually may become so. In the process my initial questions around how to work from/with/on social contexts as an artist have morphed into questions related to how my art could be practiced differently and how my social concerns influence the way I make art. Whilst my questions have been continuously re-articulated to be what they are today the trajectory has affirmed my desire to blur the boundaries of the social, educational and artistic fields.

Underneath I elaborate on some of these findings by chronologically tracing parts of the process and occasionally looking more closely at certain aspects and concepts within it. This overview remains however just that, an overview, made for a specific purpose and does not attempt to dive into the deep guts of all parts of the research, some that I will continue unravelling in years to come, no doubt.

Block 1 a.pass (January-April 2022)/ Identifying my research as a quest to work with uncertainty and developing methods for accessing cracks in systems

This first block circled a lot around trying to articulate how I do research and understanding the methodologies I was using. How do I create methodology? How do I make ideas a practice? Concepts on the foreground in this period were; organised semi-randomness, open conversations as a way to think out loud with others and how to maintain being lost (being driven by a wish to be surprised) without losing momentum. This early period served as a reshuffle of articulations and thoughts on what it was I was doing already and how this could be transposed onto what I wanted to do now. I see this period as a period of learning a new language, the language of artistic research removed from artistic production per se.

The emphasis on methodology in these early days have remained with me and one of the questions I now carry with me is: *Is my desire in fact to transpose my artistic methodologies to other contexts because I think they could serve in opening cracks in systems that I consider unhealthily rigid? Is this, in the end, one of the main things that I wish to contribute to the social and educational contexts I work with/within?*

In this first block I was very inspired by Vladimir Miller's poliset proposal for a.pass. Two of his concepts I have adopted into my own research are linked to spatial politics (direct quotes hereunder).

Poliset is a structure of working that encourages cross-pollination and contamination within a space, a structure that allows one to work together and apart in an organic momentum of process driven questioning and material realization.

Availability: How does a structure condition and enforce its regime of property? An available space is defined here as "available for transformation", akin to resource. Spaces that are available for transformation are the very resource that institutions, ideas and experiments on the periphery offer.

Density: A counter proposal to the territory /border paradigm. A space can be conceptualized as a four-dimensional social (labor) assemblage with varying degrees of density in relationship to crossing practices. Actors/actants compose the space, and densify it in varying localities, with different degrees of permeability. It is a space that starts with a yes and becomes complicated "further in". Densities correspond to rules/support structures/habitual use/exclusions. Densities are often latent and perform "density" in response to crossing practices. Crossing practices can therefore be seen as a form of knowledge production, making densities (and borders in the other paradigm) visible.

I translated these into my inquiries and wrote the following;

A space that is available for transformation in which its instability is its strength and its conventions its prison.

Over the course of my research this has influenced the ways in which I compose "conversational" (in a large sense) spaces, often starting from a rather basic set-up but then trying to twist or pervert it or render it unstable in some ways. As an example, in my *Monthly Research Sessions* (see later) I continuously strive for non-fixity in structure because I honestly believe that once we fall comfortably into a routine we become blind to its hindering aspects. It is only in not taking the structure for granted that we remain fresh to see it, both its good and bad sides. It is not always comfortable, far from it, but it gives great space to learning and unlearning. I have also experimented with this concept in mini-performances (among others during the scores in block 2, see later) where what I am saying, for instance, slightly deviates from what I am doing or showing, creating a kind of (subtle) schizophrenia of content. Here again, what has driven me, is a desire to see what the instability of the "narrative" brings. When we cannot quite recognize or place what we see, hear or experience, how does it open a space within that which we do recognize that potentially allows for a change of perspective or action? A *space for transformation* to me means a frame, a situation, a context or even a constellation of things (people, objects, ideas, places) that rely on subtle instability for survival.

If I translate this into the social/ educational contexts within which I have worked I can think of for instance the SAS that has a structured program whose edges are subtly flexible so that students' presence can, if needed, create movement in one direction or another. Not because they want to but because this movement, this flexibility, is necessary for the structure to work as a learning environment. This breath comes in part from the SAS's "institutional independence". Apart from having to conform to certain aspects of the state school curriculum they have some freedom in following their own logics born from working in a specific terrain where educational needs meet complex emotional cacophonies in a very direct way. Their mission is both educational and social, and I would even claim political.

SAS is an organisation that offers an alternative one-year education to teenagers who drop out of school. Between November and May the teens work on radio programs, visual art projects, theatre workshops, ecology and photography as a means to re-find the pleasure for learning.



Halfway days presentation at a.pass where I was transposing symbols, roles and architecture from the prison system onto the world of art and my practice, February 2022



Halfway days presentation at a.pass where I was transposing symbols, roles and architecture from the prison system onto the world of art and my practice, February 2022

Block 2 a.pass (May-August 2022):

I began my second block in a.pass with the goal to invite an enemy into the process (this idea came out of my reflections around organized semi-randomness) and to experiment with structured cacophony. This then led to a lot of time spent conversing and reflecting on the role of activism and whether activism done differently could be applied to my way of thinking art practice. I am resistant to identify with activism partly because to

me it implies a forceful relation to others, a kind of force-feeding of ideals. I do not consider my artistic practice activism but found it necessary to stretch my vision on the matter to consider whether my intentions to work outside of the arts, or within the arts for that matter, were related to force-feeding my principles. This work was difficult and I found myself several times in an emotional and conversational knot, having discussions where I was trying on a certain voice and language to see if they fit. They rarely did. A few examples of things touched upon were; slow activism (activism that works over time), poetic activism (this was hard to separate from activism although it feels different), invisible activism (does activism need to be called activism to have an 'activist impact'?). In the context of a pass these were mainly discussed rather than actually tested. In the end, I think it all felt too forced, as if I was trying on a costume that didn't quite fit the body, perhaps partly - a thought I have now in hindsight - a consequence of the borders of my research still being frail and movable thus making it difficult to define a clear context. Activism, I have a feeling, works when it is pushing the boundaries of a clearly defined context. Our discussions felt a little too wide and non-specific, and as a result, prone to assumptions and superficial conclusions.

My experiments around *structured cacophony* led me to study multilingualism. Goda Palekaite, one of the block mentors, also introduced me to literary theory and more specifically the teachings of Mikhail Bakhtin and his concept of *heteroglossia*. From here I went to consider my own position as a multilingual person and some of the potential reasons behind my interests. I grew up in Finland to a Swedish speaking mother and French speaking father. From an early age, I was in the position of the stranger. At first enjoying the freedom that being different brought me, especially the access it gave me to my own imaginary world and later, as a teen, struggling with the feeling of being out of place. Now, after living abroad for more than 25 years and in what has become my new home and yet isn't (Belgium) for the past 23 years I have started to speak my third mother language (Finnish) with the accent of a foreigner. It is a very strange thing to witness.

It is as if my body has assimilated the "being stranger" to such a degree that it can no longer perform "the local" in a "convenient" way. This multiplicity and movement has definitely become such a big part of me that my desire to confuse myself and others, this world and other worlds is hardly a coincidence. Being a body in constant transformation is addictive and liberating. In this block, which introduced me to the topic of auto-theory, I generally spent quite some time reading and learning about different perspectives related to multiplicity, the relational and overlapping borders.

Heteroglossia refers to the simultaneous presence of competing languages within one person's vocabulary. In other words, it is the existence of conflicting discourses within any field of linguistic activity, such as a national language, a novel, or a specific conversation. In Bakhtin's work, this term addresses linguistic variety as an aspect of social conflict, as in tensions between central and marginal uses of the same national language; these may be echoed in, for example, the differences between the narrative voice and the voices of the characters in a novel.

The meshwork implies continuous meetings between things as part of their "normal state" (in opposition to the idea of network where one can clearly identify the edges of a beginning and an end to meetings).

It is also in this block that my admiration for the writings of Tim Ingold grew. His theories around *correspondence* have had a great influence on my research. The idea that things, people, ideas speak to each other through a meshwork pattern feels to me way more accurate than anything I had considered before. Suddenly I understood why I see structured cacophony as a natural habitat and a place of peace rather than chaos. I also relate this to my practice that mixes artistic experiments and working as a volunteer in social contexts. I find the separation between what I do as a citizen and what I do as an artist artificial. All parts of me inform what my practice is and how it develops and morphs. I am now only understanding that part of my desire with my research was to learn to articulate this better. The (constant) co-existence of multiple me's needed visibility, recognition and space. It is not about doing artistic research AND in that including my social interests. It is about articulating a practice that wants to erase certain borders and extend the field of play. A practice wherein I am a volunteer, an artist, a witness, a listener, an organizer, a facilitator and a citizen. Roles that sometimes merge, contaminate each other or whose limits blur.

In this block, through the score work proposed by Lilia Mestre, I also became more aware of how writing gradually replaced the position my performing colleagues usually take. *Writing as a companion, a tool and texture*. I was working mainly through mini-performances and I realized that more and more I was relying on my own writing as an additional voice in the presentations. This could take the form of several texts to be read simultaneously by several people or as an installation type set-up with text both read and said out loud. The texts I wrote at this point ranged from diary entries and loose notes to poems and auto-fictional snippets. The diary notes and the loose notes were a way for me to anchor my rambling thoughts into something more concrete, less transient, whereas the latter functioned as outputs of creativity and imagination, often resulting from a process of automatic writing or similar.

The scores proposed weekly performative outbursts as a form of sharing our researches with each other. They functioned through a system of 5 minute presentations followed by a feedback/response through letter writing presentations the week after. Hence each week one presented 5 minutes of something and then wrote a response to somebody's presentation that they then in turn could integrate, digest or comment on in their next week's proposal.

In parallel to my work at a.pass I was also conducting a series of *night walks* in and around Kortrijk. These night walks were built around encounters with night workers in factories, care homes, post offices, police stations, petrol stations etc. Back then I was following a curiosity of *discovering something I didn't know* (this is often the drive behind my actions and decisions). Thinking back to it now I can see these walks as a metaphor for digging into existing *institutional cracks*. Cracks in the sense that when most of us think of work-life we fail to consider those in our close vicinity who live a life almost completely in the dark. It was fascinating to see how night workers many times have taken a choice of this other lifestyle and carry it with a lot of pride. There's a whole world out there that many of us have no clue about and you don't have to travel far! Another aspect to night work is that it both isolates and creates very strong communities. Partly because isolation creates unity. Those that aren't seen, see each other, so to say. These are communities born out of context rather than institutional definitions. They exist because of the conditions within which they function and they are largely chosen rather than imposed.



Night Walk, 4th-5th of July 2022, Kortrijk and surroundings © Simon Verschelde

Alongside this, the night walks were also yet another attempt of mine to experiment with ways in which artistic work and research can be shared with people outside of the ongoing process. The rather informal set-up of walking with strangers through a whole night (the *duration* of a regular night shift= ca. 9 hours) was a pleasure and revived in me the desire to invite *informality* into my working situations with others. From these walks, I have continued exploring the concept of *working shifts* as a form of framing durational proposals. This led me, among others, to propose both a *night shift* and a *two-day shift* to the participants of a.pass (see later).



Night Walk, 4th-5th of July 2022, Kortrijk and surroundings © Simon Verschelde

In June 2022, I had an interesting conversation with Veridiana Zurita, a Brazilian artist and ex-a.passer who has been working for many years on a project called 'Don't eat the microphone' in which she creates an informal hang-out space in a psychiatric institution. She manages to create a *free space within a confined system* in a very creative way. Accompanied by a multitude of objects she collects, together with the participants, over time, a kind of archive of togetherness that allows for an informal/formal art practice to emerge. We discussed her work and mine and our relationship to the idea '*to un-discipline*'. Even though working within a psychiatric institution isn't the same as working within, for instance, a prison, many of her concerns touched mine. How can we create pockets of alternative collectivity that are artistically nuanced and rich? How can we *improvise as yet unimagined systems*? How do we "un-trap" ourselves from *rules* we did not invent?

From this conversation, I started working on the idea of *frames for constructive emptiness*. This was a way for me to formulate the desire to create contexts or situations within which a considerable lack of pre-determined content in fact created a structure within which *spending time together* could provoke artistic content. I later tested these frames in a performative context (see Buda residency) but also fitted them to articulate what I had done with the night walks.

In this block, I also started transforming my questions around the prison system into questions around *imprisonment*, as something potentially experienced by everybody, not just prisoners in a punitive institution. Imprisoned became akin to enclosed and confined. Influenced by the lack of clarity and specificity around my approach to activism earlier I was driven to bring questions closer to my own experiences of feeling

stuck, suffocating or claustrophobic. Inevitably much of this had to do with the arts field and the many conventions we still abide by even though we function in relative freedom to stretch those conventions. We are imprisoned by trends, some of us more some less, that govern what gets made, what is visible, what gets funding. These trends vary with time but tend to relate to ideas around age, sexuality, gender, collectivity, responsibility, usefulness etc. More than relating to specific trends however, I became interested in breaking the sensation of being imprisoned by the conventions in the contexts within which I work and the lack of imagination I sometimes relate to the constraints I live with. So, at this point in the process questions around freedom and constraint and how both depend and feed on each other were very much on the surface of what I was doing and thinking. How could an awareness of constraints be used to create spaces for breathing? From prisons and education, I decided to turn my focus on my artistic practice and the field within which I am active.

September - December 2022 (officially a skipped a.pass block):

In the autumn 2022, after having taken the decision to turn my focus almost solely to the artistic field many things were put into place and practiced. I was, after all, in familiar territory and things could happen without much resistance.

Monthly Collective Research and Exchange Sessions:

In September, I picked up anew an initiative I started in 2020 but later had to drop because of the corona situation, namely the *Monthly Collective Research and Exchange Sessions*. The new series of sessions started with a collective of about ten practitioners active on the Flemish and the Wallonian side. Today we remain a core group of eight people (mix of performing artists, visual artists, researchers, a dramaturg and a film maker) who meet once a month to exchange and discuss our current practices and any issues, questions or thoughts we want to share. These sessions were thought of as a platform for hands-on sharing where we could come together and address what needed attention at any given moment.

A space that is available for transformation in which its instability is its strength. Moving from concept to practice. I am not sure in which form these sessions will continue in the future as the idea is very much that they morph with what is needed over time and depend on those who form the collective but it has been an interesting endeavor to cross the linguistic/artistic border and to work across needs that stem from aesthetic, economic and political differences within the group. It has also opened my eyes to how differently Flemish and French speaking institutions relate to the artists they work with and the openness or lack of it towards experimentation as a valid form of exchange and practice. Some places still lack an understanding of what collaboration can mean, both between artists and artists and institutions.

I see these sessions as live moments of negotiating some of the concepts I touch on in my research, such as trespassing, being stranger, imprisonment, freedom and constraint and fluidity of frame, form and group dynamics and identities. Part of this process has been to hand over power to the collective to make decisions that do not always correspond with what I would decide on my own. This means that the concepts of my research are not only practiced in the content of some of the sessions but also through the negotiation of our continued existence and shape together. True to the nature of a space open for transformation it is an ongoing conversation that sometimes feels just and sometimes frustrating.

Night Shift (see report for more details):

In October I organized a night shift in a.pass. From sunset to sunrise me and seven a.pass participants met to work and rest on the 4th floor of the old brewery in Molenbeek. The shift was a combination of open conversations, co-mentoring type tasks in smaller groups and informal moments of hanging out together both in the space itself and outdoors. Some of the questions and topics we tackled were; How does the material of another speak through you? How do we invite others to research with us? And the importance of specificity when we use words to articulate what we do and the *joy in not understanding as a form of access*.

It was interesting to spend time practicing together in this other momentum. It felt softer and more open to overlappings than usual. At night, conversations tend to have space for pensiveness that enables a special kind of listening to be practiced too. Our discussions had a lot of space for silence. This felt good. Seeing that the shift was in large parts aimed at serving a need to attend to anything that needed attention individually and as a group I exercised soft guidance that allowed for an organic process to emerge.

Field work around prisons:

In November 2022 I attended the National Prison Days, a yearly ten-day focus around prison conditions in Belgium and abroad. Here I, among others, met Ali Aarrass, a middle-aged man with double nationality (Morocco/ Belgium) who was, during a trip to Spain in 2010 falsely accused of collaborating with weapons dealers and extradited to Morocco. There he was sent to a secret location and tortured to obtain a false confession that eventually led to him being sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment and numerous tortures. Because of his double nationality the Belgian authorities were for a long time reluctant to intervene. Eventually he was freed with the help of Amnesty International. The scars that he carries with him are unimaginable. During the month, I also attended an installation set-up by La Ligue des familles around the conditions of families who live with a member being imprisoned and the continuous struggle with the authorities for even the simplest form of decency, such as regular visits.

What has struck me repeatedly, in this process of collecting information about the Belgian prison system, is the cruelty, inefficiency and lack of basic human rights that are continuously baffled in Belgian prisons. It is hard to understand how a developed country like Belgium still maintains such an archaic punitive system that seems far from extinction even though there is important work being done to change this too. Like much else in Belgium the prison system does not evade the absurdism of extremes. On the one hand the government continually implements laws and regulations that increasingly limit the freedom of movement of its citizens and follows a politics of punishment and constraint. The new mega prison (prison village à l'Américaine) of Haren just on the outskirts of Brussels is a very recent example. At the same time, new detention houses are opened, spread over the country, that prioritize a small-scale, community driven approach to restorative justice. Even though I have largely, temporarily put this part of the research aside I continue the fieldwork and accompany that with a reflection on art in prison and what my contribution to the context could be. One of the next steps is to find a partner, a person with whom to continue reflecting and planning. Ideally a person who is familiar with the context, who has some form of experience of it. This person could be a social worker, a criminologist or other interested in cross-disciplinary reflection.

In December, I spoke to Thora Dolven Balke, one of the founders of Agder Kunstakademi in Norway. Agder Kunstakademi is an autonomous art school in Agder Prison, based on experimentation and independent thinking. The academy was founded by artists for the inmates and receives 3-year funding for its implementation to hopefully become an ongoing part of the prison system. What attracts me in the Agder Kunstakademi is the belief that artistic education can prepare inmates for a life outside. I am impressed by the trust in artistic methodologies as forms of learning to live in co-existence with others. It gives me hope to see that the course combines critical and creative thinking, hands-on work and group conversation in an institution that traditionally functions on the belief that isolation can be a form of repair.

When I look at the art projects that have marked me the most this year (Agder Kunstakademi and *Don't eat the microphone*) there is a clear pattern of interest towards practices that create a breath of fresh air in an otherwise suffocating context. Questions around constraint and freedom are here closely intertwined but also twisted in unfamiliar and interesting ways, opening a small gap of hope that things could be different.

Buda research residency:

As mentioned earlier, whilst in a pass my usual practice of working with colleagues from the performing arts has been replaced by rather solitary daily ruminations that translate into writing processes. Even though I have enjoyed this, I have also felt slightly amputated. To partly circumvent this I set up three residencies outside of a pass where I could experiment differently. The first residency took place in Buda Arts Centre in Kortrijk in December 2022. Here, I worked with three colleagues, performers Mark Etchells (UK), Phil Hayes (UK/CH) and Jen Rosenblit (USA/DE) on translating the idea of 'frames for constructive emptiness' into a performative context and improvisations. We brought objects and material into the room that we instinctively related to correspondence and imprisonment (ropes, mirrors, musical instruments and texts) and then "hang out" with these materials seeing what performative and collective conversations could arise. It was quite challenging. In the end, we had to conclude that the concept of 'frames for constructive emptiness' requires other kinds of input in a performance making scenario. For instance, maybe we should have practiced in an apartment instead of in a "neutral" dance studio? Maybe we should have further limited the frame to force us into a less familiar situation? In some ways, in retrospect, this was to be expected. Work that has been developed within

one context often does not translate into another context without its life being sometimes radically altered. Because in performance almost anything is possible freedom and space for invention isn't necessarily generative unless it is accompanied by constraints (that very quickly become like scores), undermining the whole idea of emptiness as a form of trigger. It did make us work differently than we would otherwise probably do but we never quite found 'the thing'. We did however engage in regular collective writing tasks that led me further on the path of *levels of visibility* that I link to the idea of imprisonment. Who is visible in society? Who and what do we see and who and what do we ignore? We played around with levels of visibility through reflections on x-rays, surveillance, blind-folds (this has been a reoccurring prop during my presentations in a.pass), night vision, glow in the dark, transparency...

Another thing that also occurred and that will certainly re-appear in the research is the idea of copying and translation as a form of correspondence. A correspondence happens here between two bodies, a sort of conversation between the "original" and the "copy". When this procedure is done repeatedly and over time a meshwork of correspondences is created where relation is what forms the individuals rather than the other way around. The result being that what remains embodies a structured cacophony with (mis)understandings, assumptions, interpretations and imaginations.

Block 3 a.pass (January-April 2023):



Halfway days presentation at a.pass, March 2023.

Experimenting a form of collective performance imagination where individual projects converse with others to form a whole.

The start of January 2023 in a.pass was framed around the idea of horror. Over one week, we were introduced to various horror styles and materials by Sina Seifée and Adrijana Gvozdenovic. As we were presenting our research in its current form we were also asked *what we promote with it*. This was an interesting way of looking at our researches and later combined to the invitation to identify a horror aspect in our work and present it using any of the materials in the room (scary sounds, costumes and body parts, fake blood etc.). I ended up reflecting on the horror of assumptions. Assuming is like a poison we invite into conversations, situations, contexts we don't know. Instead of accepting our own lack of knowledge we assume things.

Assuming is based on a lack of courage to admit we don't know everything or that perhaps others know better or more than we do. I made a short video in the tool storage dressed in a chroma key green suit. (<https://vimeo.com/nadagambier/openingweekvideo?share=copy> password: green1). In retrospect, it is pretty obvious that my attraction towards the green suit was triggered by the work I had done previously on levels of visibility. The chroma key green suit is used in film when you want a character to become invisible. I felt liberated by the re-found trust towards intuition and decided to spend this last block on diving into a more 'do first, think later' type experimentation period. The result was that I also found back the momentum for more performative work. Something in me had been unblocked.

The horror lens also inspired me to go further into my explorations on *gentle trespassing* and using fiction as a tool in my experiments. Horror translated from the genre of horror movies to my research made me see the pleasure within questions of misunderstandings, contradictions, overstepping boundaries and mixing territories that are present in my work right now. The concept of gentle trespassing came about from my explorations around structured cacophony and multilingualism.

You are working on artistic and social enclosures and how institutional borders and identities can be practiced in negotiation and / or negotiated through practice.

mentoring session with Kristien Van den Brande 16.2 2023

When we cross borders we create hybrids and undo separations between things, people, contexts. This can be both a destructive as well as a constructive act, depending on your position. It thus also relates to forms of breakage and repair. What or who is *original*? What or who has been broken then fixed? We live in a world where everything has history so when we speak of originals, what we really mean is the one that came before. At what point does breaking divide us from the before to an extent that we must find new vocabularies, new relations, new reference points? If breaking is needed to create change, how can we deal with the apparent cruelty of it, which will always be an inherent part of it? If we take time to "bother" each other in constructive ways what is produced, what are the effects and affects? What can we learn from practicing hybridization?

Personally, I long to be trespassed but in a gentle way. I'm not looking to be violated. I'm longing for the experience of being opened by another, touched by difference. Longing to be extended into more than the image of myself. In small doses this trespassing may happen through dialogue. In more radical ways it may happen through a destabilizing of habits, principles, values and knowledge. Could practicing gentle trespassing daily eradicate, at least partly, violent forms of trespassing to take place? Could gentle trespassing be an educational tool? Could gentle trespassing help us act constructively in the space of cracks?

In the frame of my research I have practiced trespassing mostly with others, through proposals of *conversation, collective imagination and co-mentoring*.

The most recent example was the *two-day shift* I organized with my colleague Jen Rosenblit in March 2023. The first day of the shift we engaged in two Q&A based exercises that confuse the borders between researches and create a field of cross-pollinated conversation. The second day we rolled up our sleeves to physically hand over material from our research to another person to play with. In this we used the idea of wrecking as a tool for progress. The results were fascinating and I was exhilarated as the room filled with works of art embodying a conversation between the different people in the room. Not only was it fun but it was also informative. To see another person take apart and build anew from your own material is - after possibly a brief passing moment of panic- a useful way to look anew at what you are doing. It is as if your eyes have suddenly expanded to include many other eyes. Gentle trespassing is successfully at work.



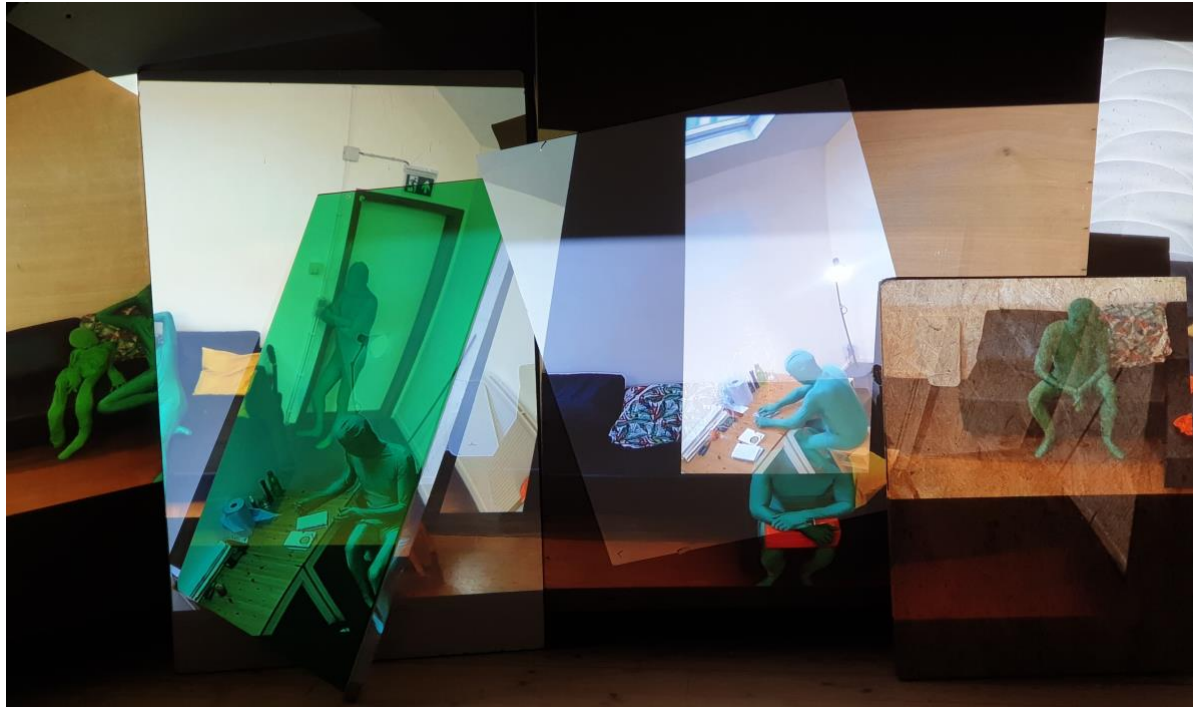
Two-day shift at a.pass, March 2023. Alyssa's marley served as material for Andrea's performance art.

My second residency outside of a.pass took place in March in WpZimmer in Antwerp. Here I did two things. I co-orchestrated a workshop for kids. We worked on a fake reportage around a fictional parade/protest. We made masks and slogans. We conducted interviews where the kids took on fictional roles of their own choosing and we shot scenes from an ambiguous and fake parade/protest. This allowed us to touch on such notions as rules and disobedience, resistance and freedom (the result can be seen here:

<https://vimeo.com/809457430?share=copy> password: workshop). I also continued the work with the green suit, this time accompanied by my colleagues Mark Etchells and Vic Grevendonck (BE).

Looking back at my trajectory in a.pass I conclude that my initial quest to bring my artistic practice closer to my concerns as a citizen and my desire to work in various social and educational contexts has turned into a desire to experiment with how artistic methods can be used as tools to elasticsize rigid systems and institutions. I am now curious to see how a continued exploration of my research tools and methods can be implemented and tested further in artistic, educational and social contexts. However, I am not interested in this process as a one-way street. I am also curious in discovering how these contexts in turn influence the work I do artistically in artistic institutions like theatres, exhibition halls or art schools. The contamination should be cross-fertile. I think it is the only way to avoid my art from becoming overly simplified. The process needs to be cacophonous in a structured manner and open to avenues that aren't always direct or clearly lineated from the start. I want to continue looking for non-binary and non-dualistic ways of working (avoid the 'this or that, here or there')

attitude) that can accommodate the meshwork of relations I desire. In other words, I now feel that the concepts and methods I have barely started tickling such as *gentle trespassing, structured cacophony, conversational (in a wide sense) experiments, constructive emptiness, durational working shifts and adaptable systems* carry a lot of potential and will help me in further developing my research practice.



Video surveillance feed installation from the green room, end of block presentation at PAF, april 2023

In my end presentations in a.pass I share my research in two parts. Firstly, through daytime working sessions where I practice, together with participants/visitors, gentle trespassing through two distinct pedagogical formats. The first day is reserved for artists who wish to bring in a project or research of their own as source material to work from/with. This session is a development of the

two-day shift I did in March 2023. The second working session is open to the general public (with limited capacity). The aim here is to practice the simultaneous negotiation between who we are (or think we are) and who 'we' might be with a little interference of other 'wes'. Here, fiction plays a key role. In annex you find a rough step by step guide to these shifts. The second part of my presentations consist of an installation in three spaces that includes the live presence of me, Mark and Vic as well as some writing and video material that comes from my a.pass trajectory. The work explores the confinement of spaces, identities, institutions and ideas. Levels of visibility are present through surveillance camera feeds, invisibility suits and the notion of an anonymous collectivity.

