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**Rewriting Therapeutic Failure: Ethics, Aesthetics and Politics in the
Critique of Psychology's Institution**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Psychology

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I have to say goodbye,
Turn away, and walk,
Determined, along the road
That, in the end, leads to nothing,
Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing,
Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing,
Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing
Of what I thought I'd find.

— *Gilberto Gil, If I Want to Talk to God, 1981*

Abstract

This thesis developed from an interest in questioning the boundaries of psychological understanding and its inquiry and practice frontiers. The research project initially intended to take personal accounts of failure in psychotherapy as a means of mapping psychology's conceptual and applied boundaries. However, embracing an emergent procedure inspired by schizoanalysis — informed by Deleuze and Guattari's contributions — and drawing on elements of institutional analysis, existential cartography, Foucauldian theory, and philological inquiry, the work shifted from a narrow focus on individual narratives to a broader critique of the institution of psychology. This shift surfaced from confronting the risk of reductionist individualisation, in which psychology's pre-formatted modes of investigation both control and limit the scope of understanding. At a fundamental level, failure embodies a gap between expectations and outcomes, along with an acknowledgement of limitations in methods, proficiency, or feasibility. There is an extensive body of research on failure in psychotherapy, focused on a wide range of isolated and non-comparable protocols, sometimes without fully recognising their own contextual limitations. These studies produce conflicting assessments due to psychology's diverse and situated knowledge production systems. Irreconcilable gaps between three personal accounts of failure collected in interviews and the prescriptive structures of psychological theories/protocols further articulate the silencing of complexity and subjectivity that repeatedly emerge in therapeutic encounters. Even so, failure necessarily takes on local configurations with varying degrees of objectivity and subjectivity, in assemblages with a range of disparate elements — possibly including

metatheoretical principles, the commodified dissatisfaction of therapy consumers, and any further influences bridging abstract and concrete domains. Such configurations of failure are often treated as structural realities, becoming the restrictive focus of scholarly analysis and resulting in self-referential practices. This thesis offers a performative academic critique that moves beyond these analytical confines. Written as what is termed a *trapizonga*, it presents an adaptive ethico-aesthetic-political critique of the institution of psychology. As the embodiment of a relational and immanent ethos, attentive to the collective struggles of living together, and performing a minoritarian and parrhesiastic arrangement of the sensible, this trapizonga offers a reflexive account of the broader failures embedded in psychology's institutional and therapeutic limitations.

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¹ Our family's cherished, one-of-a-kind motto: "The sweetness of life is something we make ourselves." It continues, "Try it, and you'll see — you are capable of making it happen."

Preface

The course of life flows through everything. Life is like that: it heats and cools, tightens and then loosens, calms down and later becomes restless. What it wants from us is courage.

— *Guimarães Rosa, Great Backlands: Paths*²

Like every other preface, this one comes at the end — after the thesis is drafted, after the core ideas have found their form. Yet, deciding which words make the cut to a thesis, and which ones should be entirely skipped, is an ethical and aesthetic decision, but it is, primarily, something other than that. Academic writing is a political act. Accordingly, the vetting process of an academic composition also places the knowledge produced within institutions and ultimately within society, shaping the realities we inhabit. Workshops on academic writing guidelines often dictate rules, organising production into a standardised style that is replicated everywhere. “Objective” writing, with its cuts and jumps, tries to hide affections, uncertainties, pieces of second-hand furniture, gossip, fried snacks, diet fizzy drink glasses, and the history of ever-changing immutable hypotheses; hypotheses that need to be tested, at incalculable cost, in a divinatory exercise. The discriminatory performance appears travestied as informed guesses — selling future selves, auctioning possible realities, and erasing the history of bodies while painting skins in pale beige (suddenly called white, after some inexplicable colonial tradition).

² Guimarães Rosa was a Brazilian writer and diplomat, known for blurring the lines between myth and reality in his literary landscapes. This excerpt is from his novel *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, published in 1956. In this work, life’s journey is shaped by a continuous negotiation with uncertainty, where the protagonist navigates existential dilemmas and moral ambiguity. Translation is mine, from the original: “O correr da vida embrulha tudo. A vida é assim: esquenta e esfria, aperta e daí afrouxa, sossega e depois desinquieta. O que ela quer da gente é coragem.”

My story writing this thesis began like many other academic journeys, and these political tensions never subsided. How was I to negotiate with these models of forced objectivity when studying subjectivities? In a sense, my approach to writing was never unique: words were typed into a document, sentences and paragraphs were shaped, and endless rounds of proofreading followed. Still, academic structure imposes its own façade, compelling me to frame these reflections as if they emerged fully formed — the endpoint of a journey, rather than part of its winding path. It is precisely because of this backward process that I feel compelled to share some thoughts on the procedures I followed, especially where they might diverge from more established dominant conventions, as the pressure to comply remains unyielding. In the following lines, I will explore how *change*, *challenge*, and *chaosmosis* shaped and guided the development of this thesis. In doing so, I hope to begin creating a shared space that is open to negotiations (Deleuze, 1995) and dialogues (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007), where our automatic academic certainties can rest or at least recess for a moment, ultimately allowing you — my reader — to join the conversation that will soon unfold, if you so wish.

Change... From the outset, the research leading to this written thesis acknowledged processes. I wondered, in my somewhat tentative ignorance, how the understanding of failure in psychotherapies would end up looking if it were to flow through a machine of pure difference (Deleuze, 1994). Throughout my academic history, failures in general have continually drawn my attention because they tend to make explicit the outer limits of our collective knowledge. Within this research, my interest in failure was also always situated in the

particular context of my arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand, where I was overwhelmed with news about a failing mental health system in crisis (Ainge Roy, 2018; Hutton, 2018; Wright, 2016). While failure has always been of personal interest to me, I soon humbly realised that my contribution to this conversation would have to keep shifting, given my limited understanding of New Zealand's health system. At the time, my knowledge — largely built around discussions of Brazil's health system — seemed to hold little relevance in this new context³. So, my first impulse was to do what one does when arriving in a new neighbourhood — I decided to look around and engage with people in my daily life, casually talking about these issues. The project that turned into this work grew from that first, less systematic disposition. Initially, my research centred on making sense of individual stories of therapeutic failure — those moments where expectations in therapy do not match reality, where things go off course, and how people experience and recount these moments.

However, as the work continued, I began to realise those failures were not merely isolated events; rather, they seemed to reflect symptoms of broader institutional dynamics. My focus gradually shifted from analysing specific instances of failure to questioning the underlying structures of psychology that influence how we even come to define success or failure. Looking back, my early diary entries had already touched on this issue, even if tangentially or superficially. This turn was not exactly about altering the research focus; it marked a fundamental transformation in how I approached the entire project.

³ Although I have since gained some understanding of New Zealand's health system, I remain far from a specialist. Truly grasping its complexities likely requires dealing with it from within.

My work evolved into an ethico-aesthetic-political critique — one that aspires to move beyond narrow academic abstraction, opposition for its own sake, or critique as an end in itself, aiming instead to open up new possibilities for how psychology can be practiced, understood, and lived collectively. The three people who talked to me on the record — along with the many who approached me casually and influenced my voice, even if invisibly — shared their personal, intimate stories of failure with little to no concern for overarching theoretical or political matters. Yet, both in formal interviews and casual exchanges, their recounting was not really addressed to me as an individual. In one way or another, they were assessing how “psychology” had treated them, offering feedback on its practices, and demonstrating how our systems in place might help or hinder a life. I was often placed in a supposed category of “great professional,” largely because I took the time to ask about their experiences and heard them without defending age-old psychological protocols — a simple act of being fully open to the encounter. Their lived experiences highlighted the insufficiency of our fixed structural standards in psychological practice, which reduce our ability to truly hear what is being said, selectively filtering out anything that does not align with pre-existing frameworks or biases — those we are already trained to *recognise* and *listen for* (Adams, 2015). At the same time, rather than acknowledging these biases as intrinsic to the frameworks themselves, some approaches seek to minimise ideological influences by doubling down on the very structures that produce and perpetuate them (Frisby, 2023). This realisation led me toward a more flexible, evolving engagement with my own work, one that allowed for unexpected insights and shifts in direction. In

this changing space, I began to discern that even an open-ended procedure could become prescriptive over time, no longer serving the complexity of the lives being studied and, by extension, the questions I was asking.

The shifting territories and dynamic boundaries I encountered pushed me to embrace a more fluid approach, letting go of fixed routes and allowing the path to emerge as I moved forward. This is where this written thesis — which systematically evolved into what I came to call a *trapizonga*⁴ — began to take shape; not as a polished or predetermined product, but as a makeshift document constructed from whatever scraps of knowledge were within reach each time. Rather than following a rigid structure, I needed a local and contingent process to study processes; one that could navigate uncertainty, adapt to changing directions, and remain open to unexpected encounters. This project began by grappling with the paradoxes of following an existential cartography (Guattari, 1989/2013) — an (anti-)method established in Eurocentric histories and traditions. Even when these foundations are questioned or delegitimated, and the boundaries such traditions once imagined as stabilising are breached, these influences persist. The *trapizonga* emerged as a necessary departure from the overarching framework of existential cartography; although this (anti-)method initially operated as a productive force in shaping the work, it began to solidify into familiar patterns, risking becoming the very kind of rigid structure it sought to resist. In this shift, the *trapizonga* responded to the call for a process that, like Guattari's (1989/2013) cartographic paradigm, gladly embraces its own

⁴ *Trapizonga* is a makeshift term. A fuller elaboration follows later in the Preamble. Here, it appears as a placeholder — a name that resists premature definition.

obsolescence when it threatens to replicate what it aims to dismantle or challenge.

Challenge... Painstakingly assembled as an ethico-aesthetic-political critique, this work directly confronts some of the typical institutional reifications in both academic and therapeutic practices. Yet, beyond embracing a critical voice in response to well-established knowledge conventions, the construction of this trapizonga also had to contend with a process in which pre-programmed destinations were not a given (Guattari, 1989/2013). This process gradually intertwined with my lived experience, blurring the lines between scholarly inquiry and personal narrative, where the work itself became a reflection of the life that animated it. The concurrent immanence⁵ bridging a life and an emergent scholarly process can be intimidating, as it certainly was throughout this research. As I resisted traditional, transcendent schemes, the work unfolded in more localised and adaptable patterns, avoiding fixed configurations. Through this unfolding, a kind of consistency began to emerge — not from rigid structures, but from the immanent forces at play, weaving together disparate elements into a provisional yet durable coherence. While this process formed a tentative *plane of consistency*, shaped by dynamic intensities rather than imposed by the empty centres emanating power (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), the meanings it has produced continue to extend beyond this provisional coherence, remaining fluid and open to ongoing interpretation and interaction.

⁵ *Immanence* is used here in the Deleuzian sense (Deleuze, 1997): not as a transcendent principle or underlying substance, but as a field of relational intensities. A fuller discussion of the plane of immanence appears in the first section.

However, long before any perceivable consistency surfaced, the research process felt more like surviving daily life, where sporadic certainties lingered briefly before departing. As I alluded to earlier, this work abridged the process of living — my dinners with rice, my sugary cereal bars, Aotearoa’s colonial past and its current immigration politics, Brazil’s ever-changing political scenario — with the process of researching. Failure had mutated into a concept embodied everywhere and nowhere, and writing a thesis became an impossible task that was somehow undertaken daily — even between marking student assignments. The struggle against metaphysical destinations instilled a paradoxical tension, blending the illusion of heroic redemption with the mundane disillusion of daily life. Yet, it is precisely this agonistic tension, rather than resolving into a definite conclusion, that forms the core of the work, embracing an endless process of questioning, writing, and becoming, where a rushed, pre-coded answer is never the aspiration. A work like this is always in the middle (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). While beginnings and endings still appear in the writing, at least in certain domains, they are not sought out — they eventually surface and are acknowledged when they do. The trapizonga, instead, focuses on learning their hidden trading routes and unseen alliances. And though I ultimately let go of existential cartography, its simple yet persistent task of accompanying processes (Guattari, 1989/2013) remained with me throughout my studies, like a spinning gyroscope — maintaining stability through momentum, creating the effect of balance amid constant motion.

Maintaining systematic inquiry while balancing empirical, historical, contextual, and interpretative dimensions of psychological knowledge production

presents a unique challenge. Once causal and teleological methods are no longer metaphysical mandates, the difficulty lay in finding gyroscopic stability — holding onto a sense of direction without resisting the inevitable deviations and swerves of daily exploration. Aware of my intentions and committed to accompanying the unfolding processes, I set up a simple procedure: a practice of composing daily diary entries, regardless of their size or completeness, focusing more on capturing the flow of thought than on producing a polished outcome. The entries were not just meant to document the process, but to maintain momentum in the face of uncertainty. I wrote about anything that connected even tangentially to my theme, from theoretical notes to personal rants, intensive perceptions, and work-related situations. Once this daily routine was established, gathering material became less of a challenge. The real difficulty was resisting the urge to impose coherence between the entries too soon. Holding back from forcing a rigid structure onto my work produced a great deal of discomfort, but I was determined to let the direction of the work emerge iteratively, allowing connections to surface in their own time. This process required a humbling acceptance that some of my “incredible” ideas in progress would remain unrealised, and a deeper understanding that the narrative of the trapizonga might never “make sense” in a traditional way. In studying failure, I also came to admit the possibility of failure within my own process of study, where chaos and flux were constant, inseparable companions.

Chaosmosis... How might contingencies of structure and deliberate procedures to think through perpetual change become textual expressions? Navigating tensions similar to these, Guattari (2006) offered chaosmosis as a

fertile and multifaceted mode of expression — one that embraces paradox and resists quick and oversimplified interpretations — within his eco-political-philosophical-clinical project. This disconcerting epistemological thrust often defies our academic habits, challenging orthodoxy by displacing the exercise of thought from a centripetal *model* to a transformational *mode* — perspectivist, transitory, and minoritarian. Within this image of thought, thinking is no longer about settling into perceptually stable, routinely practised frameworks; instead, it becomes the provocative endeavour of crossing settled boundaries, where difference, as a force for new possibilities, emerges through contamination (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Chaosmosis, then, is not an antagonistic struggle of order against disorder with one clear winner. Rather, it resembles a dance between multiple forces — a dynamic interplay where all forces propel the work forward in synchronisation, both conducting and being conducted, creating a life while simultaneously constraining and restricting it. Otherwise, we risk reifying some processes as compositional and others as destructive, re-establishing the binary model.

On initial examination, this transition from an antagonistic model to an agonistic mode of thought might seem inconspicuous, yet it carries significant implications. Attending to this shift is enough to disrupt our usual classificatory systems, allowing creation to infiltrate the work. Instead of binary forms in opposition, a dynamic interplay of forces of unequal intensity emerges like a dark precursor — a distinct yet indeterminate difference in potential, creating singular territories of expression (Deleuze, 1994). In my work, too much order, and the writing became rigid, brittle, unable to respond to the ever-changing

conditions of the process. Too much chaos, and it risked coming apart entirely, fracturing into meaningless noise. Maintaining a delicate gyroscopic stability and tuning between these forces allowed the possibility of something new to emerge — something that could not have been planned or predicted. The process shifted towards embracing these moments of friction, where the writing felt unstable, and ideas clashed rather than cohered. Instead of smoothing them out, I let those points of tension remain, trusting their agonistic relations would eventually reveal the bridges connecting disparate elements, exposing threads that might not have been obvious at first glance. Therefore, this trapizonga is held together not by a neatly organised system, but by its capacity to remain fluid, to adjust, and to grow through the very pressures that threaten to pull it apart. This is where a written assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) finds its utmost strength — not in a faultless context-independent coherence, but in its ability to be reassembled, time and again, through the interplay of chaos and order.

In practice, this meant allowing the writing to be as dynamic as the process itself. It involved constantly revisiting ideas, rearranging pieces, and letting the work find its own shape within the turbulence. The trapizonga thrives in this in-between space, where a fleeting experience of clarity emerges *not despite the chaos, but precisely because of it*. The gaps, the breaks, the friction — they are not signs of failure; they are the cracks where something new can sprout, and where diverse lines of thought can converge and diverge, creating a living, breathing process. Ultimately, the becoming-trapizonga of this thesis is not just an outcome, a product, or a method — it is, in a provisional manner, a

way of moving, of living within the ongoing processes of inquiry at the borders of the psychological institution and in life itself, where success and failure are not oppositional outcomes, but modes of engagement with the unknown.

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⁶ Page 154 features an unnumbered and untitled image as the epigraph for Section 5. Its visual and material nature is integral to its meaning.

Preamble

Inconclusive are we, women and men, but inconclusive are also the jaboticaba trees that fill my backyard with singing birds during the harvest; these birds are inconclusive, just like Eico, my German shepherd who happily “greet” me early in the morning, is inconclusive.

— *Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Autonomy*⁷

Due to untraceable stylistic reasons, books and academic texts often do not greet the reader. There must be exceptions to this rule, but it happens even in texts with actively conversational narrators, like the ones in Melville’s Moby Dick — “Call me Ishmael” — and Calvino’s If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler — “Relax. Concentrate.” It probably gets worse in academia, where not even Preciado’s unique body-essay Testo Junkie escapes from only mentioning the reader openly twice, both in the introduction, never saying “Hola, ¿qué tal?”. If my intuition is fitting about what comes next in this text, it behoves me to break such a dismissive etiquette. Bom dia, kia ora, good day. More than in the linguistic formula, I genuinely hope you are well. As I write this preamble, I am well myself, regardless of the diverse failures I have followed (and that followed me...) for years. Indeed, this work presents many of my inconclusive stories — something that will hopefully make evermore sense as you continue reading. So, before I really jump in and start doing my thing, I feel the need to offer some threads of how I came to be where I am, doing what I do. For now, I will start with my initial encounters

⁷ Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and philosopher from the 20th century, one of the exponents of the critical pedagogy movement. This snippet is in his book from 1996, originally called “Pedagogia da Autonomia” and often translated into English as Pedagogy of Freedom. I chose to keep the term closest to the original. In his work, material-vitalist inconclusiveness is an autonomic escape route to inevitable social conditioning. Translation is mine, from the original “Inconclusos somos nós, mulheres e homens, mas inconclusos são também as jaboticabeiras que enchem, na safra, o meu quintal de pássaros cantadores; inconclusos são estes pássaros como inconcluso é Eico, meu pastor alemão, que me ‘saúda’ contente no começo das manhãs.”

with Deleuze and Guattari, a duo of French authors that changed my relationship with academia, made me rethink the purpose of my professional practices, and helped me find some liberating options in life.

I was truly introduced to the work of Deleuze and Guattari when I was on my undergraduate course at Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF) in Niterói, a city in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It was 2008, and the last couple of years of a lengthy academic programme in Psychology had just started for me. Before that, I had heard about these two authors, but they lived only as readings I could not imagine approaching. “They are difficult to understand” seemed to be a common line in the stories told by the more senior students. The last two years of the undergraduate course in Psychology at UFF had three primary purposes: a professional practicum, the writing and presenting of a research report or a theoretical work, and courses about some extended practices in psychology. Our “extended practices” included areas like therapeutic techniques and ontologies borrowed from Buddhism, psychological therapies derived from body awareness in dance, and schizoanalytic therapy, to name a few.

It was while discussing schizoanalysis in an undergrad course that the two French authors first became my go-to study source. Eventually, schizoanalysis turned into part of my training in the practicum, which evolved into writing a theoretical work about the Deleuzian concept of refrain⁸ and its utility in therapy. Unnoticed contamination had occurred, and all my activities as a student

⁸ In English, *refrain* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 310) is used to translate *ritornello*, which is an Italian word. It is noteworthy that Deleuze used the Italian word in the French original. The word *refrain* seems to simplify the concept, as *ritornello* is not only the name for the repeat signs on sheet music but also a compositional form in Baroque music. The original word also makes an easier connection to the concept of eternal recurrence in the Nietzschean writings.

gradually migrated to these analytical surroundings. By the middle of 2010, as I started my master's degree studies at UFF, schizoanalysis seemed a pathway without any possible return. Also, my practice as a clinical psychologist in Brazil had just started, and I gathered with three other newly graduated clinical psychologists — all with similar theoretical interests — in collective supervision of our clients' cases and of the case of clinical psychology itself. This cooperative practice, together with a role assisting my supervisor in the undergrad practicum at UFF, informed my master's degree research.

The dissertation that resulted from my master's degree studies was written as an opera booklet. I investigated the approximations and distances between music and psychology by composing a story about the changes in Western music and its relation to the changes in Western subjectivities. The story was then used as a framework to talk about a previous client from my therapeutic practice, which led to the creation of the term aria-multitude: a take on the idea of multivocality, a concept that can be traced back to Bakhtin (1984) and his critique on Dostoevsky's writing style.

Arias are songs for one voice best known for their use in operas. Much like the musical forms of the German Lieder or the French mélodies, arias generally have one lead singing voice accompanied by musical instruments. Also, the traditional staging of an opera hides the orchestra underneath the stage, or at least takes the attention away from the group of instrumentalists to the singer, as the focus stays on the lyrics portraying the story of a character. The innocent listener could be tricked into forgetting that many disparate elements create an aria, and not only the words and the solo melody. The musical harmony (with its

consonances and dissonances), the rhythm, intensity, phrasing, and even many other non-musical aspects — this multitude of elements — add to the soloist's voice, changing their narrative, while creating context to what is sung.

I defended in my master's degree dissertation that the same order of things occurs in a therapeutic setting. Here again, the innocent listener could be tricked into valuing the lyrics and the solo melody that appear to tell the story of a single character. Instead, recovering the thickness of the consonances and dissonances, the variances in rhythm, and all kinds of hidden or ignored performances could bring not only context to what is being "treated" but it would also change the possible expressive articulations inside of a therapeutic setting. Aria-multitude appeared, then, as a reminder that when one says something, many forces from disparate sources are being expressed simultaneously and sometimes inadvertently.

The indirect citation of the title of one of Foucault's books⁹ was intentional at the beginning of the last paragraph. That almost-hidden reference was used as a strategy to underline an episteme of rupture and not one of continuity and progress. Trying to make myself more explicit: the proposition of aria-multitude intends to be a fracture within several corpora of practices that only reflect over themselves, secluded in a self-referred cycle of self-realisation. These practices seem to fall for the siren song of a single chanter without conflicting surrounds, as they reify their ontological belief in a pair of monolithic subjects, both the theoretical subject of studies and the cognisant subjects studied. Thus, aria-

⁹ The English title *The Order of Things* was used, although the French original is called *Les mots et les choses*, literally meaning words and things (Foucault, 1994).

multitude appears as an attentional proceeding and not a metaphor. It is an effort to shake the assumed schemes in (clinical) theories and practices while showing that invisible forces are ignored or hidden everywhere. In this exercise, the connection between psychology and music passes from an analogy to a relation between shared processes.

Yet, despite their shared relation, one could rightly assume that the very use of aria-multitude as a prescription for clinical interventions or as a structured protocol for practising psychology would lead to the exact opposite result of what was accomplished with the type of analysis that created the term. Instead of a dispersive force that affects attention, aria-multitude would be forced into a set of perceptual rules, disconnected from the processes at hand. In that sense, all methodological work in such epistemology is ad hoc (Kastrup, 2019): created when necessary and for a specific purpose. I clearly point to a methodological discussion here. I will partially continue in that direction, but I am afraid this conversation will be primarily delivered in woven-in layers of this thesis' sections. For now, I need to address a stylistic decision in the composing of this writing that unfolds from the forces of multivocality.

As said before, the needs that led to the creation of aria-multitude were local and circumstantial. The broader issue of multivocality was tackled as a side effect of my previous work, and it came connected to the historical changes in the production of subjectivities in Western societies. In this present work, my writing turned out to be often populated with different authors and diverse ideas that infiltrate the text and my voice. The Herculean effort to explicitly refer to every tiny idea that inspires and contaminates the text seems impossible to embrace. So,

while facing this difficulty, I decided to follow a stylistic procedure of anthropophagy inspired by the Modernist movement in Brazilian arts from the 1920s. In this movement, a principle of swallowing the other, especially the admired other, functions so that the particles that make the other's universe may entwine with the particles inhabiting the anthropophagic subjectivity, producing a transmutation (Rolnik, 2000, pp. 452–453)¹⁰.

The anthropophagic exercise moves my position and intends to be an aesthetic/stylistic gamble to push the work onto diverse territories and avoid the trap of a unison voice. There are no guarantees that this specific choice will open the text to its multivocality, as even Deleuze (1995) admits that such treatment with an author is not always possible. On that topic, Nietzsche is recalled as the author who taught him the wicked taste of speaking on his own behalf (Deleuze, 1995). Hence, academic anthropophagy is an effort or an exercise of depersonalisation, not one of finding a true identity or subject. In the context of this thesis, anthropophagy creates this paradox: by using my own name, I adhere to multiple positions that come from places other than my intimate self. So, in the points where this effort succeeds in the coming sections, my subjective perception will be forced into an intensive multiplicity, inhabiting the very margins of my knowledge. However, risks abound when someone (academically) writes in this manner.

¹⁰ Page numbers are provided here in respect of APA guidelines to include them when a text in another language is translated so closely that it is barely paraphrased.

The main risk is improper attribution of authority¹¹, but there are other, more serious risks. Anthropophagy is a two-way procedure, which means I may see myself in connection to others in such a way that frightens me or drags me into unproductive chaotic loops. Fearful or struggling, I may write against the openness that is initiated by anthropophagy, which would lead the text to retract and repeat itself endlessly. Such sca(r)red repetition would force my production into sameness, and little or no thought would make its mark in the text. Thus, the exercise of anthropophagy urges a qualifier that instils desired openness to becoming always another. The clue is on the title of this introductory part, as it is a preamble — which means before walking (Harper, 2001) — and that is a peripatetic ambition of the anthropophagic endeavour I follow: movement, not any movement, but one that is in-between, not focused on beginnings and endings, relaxed in its tensions: nomadic forces that provoke the act of writing into a flux, instead of a code (Deleuze, 1995).

Accordingly, the sections of this academic text are ambulant. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would ascertain, the directions-in-movement of such passages are more important than their existence as organised unitary sections. Instead of a clear start or a conclusion, a work like this is always in the middle, and it gains territories and moves in different directions until it overflows in/to different plateaus of existence. It was while writing this multilayered itinerant anthropophagic thesis that I noticed it developed into what could be called a trapizonga in Portuguese. And the word “trapizonga” followed me back home from

¹¹ There are significant differences in the practices of citation within the continental European and Anglo-American traditions and especially among the poststructuralist writers whose texts I drew because they are particularly privileging the impossibility of authority over thinking, ideas and textuality.

work that day and many days after, until I decided to keep it. However, do not be fooled into thinking that I present a domesticated beast just because I let it stay, as this would be an absolute misjudgement. In its thisness, this trapizonga is an esteemed being but also feral, tentative and proud of its untamed nature. With this in mind, and before it gains uncontrollable momentum, I herein announce the trapizonga promulgated.

The Trapizonga Declaration

Of Its Substance

This piece of written work is a *trapizonga*. In Portuguese, *trapizonga* means *a bunch of small stuff* (Houaiss et al., 2001). And it also refers to any conglomerate ingenuity made of disparate elements. So, one could infer that bric-a-brac, old furniture pieces, and improvised apparatuses have all been considered *trapizongas* at least once by someone, somewhere. In the recurring allegory told by Professor Titular E. Passos (several personal communications, 2008–2012), *trapizongas* are like human dispositions: it is like being thrown into the sea without knowing how to swim due to a shipwreck that we call birth, and debris is floating around in the water. There are no lifeboats and no time to build a ship. Holding on to whatever is nearby, we survive by relying on a hastily collected *trapizonga* made of buoyant wreckage, which allows a life but is also life itself. And, even if it was created out of desperation to stay alive, there is no time to stop and start afresh; there is no rehearsal or planning before the action takes place. Consequently, what remains is to make its maintenance: improve it when and where possible and lovingly care for it without getting infatuated.

This trapizonga makes series with, and at times becomes, other better-known systematic knowledge compositions. Therefore, it sometimes resembles bricolage (Rogers, 2012), mosaic (Clark, 2017), kaleidoscope (Mausner, 1996), texture (de la Fuente, 2019), and so on. But it is mostly a trapizonga.

Of Its Hodos-Meta

The trapizonga works better with *intensities* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Consequently, this document is not trying to describe inner qualities as much as it is attentive to degrees of energy and their varying potencies. A trapizonga *follows processes* (Barros & Passos, 2009).

Instead of adhering devotedly to a method — from the Greek¹² *metá*, a nuanced affix that contextually means *beyond*, and *hodós*, a Greek term for *path* (Harper, 2001) — no transcendent route to knowledge imposes its guidance onto this work, but the very processes happening each time. Therefore, a trapizonga inspires something closer to a hodos-meta, a *pathway among* processes — evoking another usage of the Greek affix *metá*, which means *between* in this novel context.

Considering it accompanies series, *difference* is a noble material in a trapizonga. Not identity: reified as *the different*, difference collapses into partial (or apparent) discrete points of comparison (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Such individualising effect continues to exist in this trapizonga, but not without resistance.

¹² All references to Greek are transliterated to the Latin alphabet. This choice is blatant, as the Greek alphabet might hide some of the resemblances portraying my ideas.

Of Its Aesthetics

Assembled in a perceptual facility that processes stolen symbolic mediations, this trapizonga is a sort of *makeshift handiwork*. Instead of a reproducible instruction manual, it is justly manual — done by hand, locally. Manus-factured. Whilst completed predominantly in English words, this trapizonga contains traces of Latin, Greek, French, Portuguese, Spanish, German, and any other language allowing its survival. And 73 asterisks purposefully cut the flow of what is written, hopefully allowing for breathing to occur.

Of Its Politics

Instead of trying to create a new system or protocol, a trapizonga wanders by the disputed borders of territories — may they be existential, theoretical, scientific, artistic, technological, ecological, aristocratic, plebeian, and so on — and reconnects long disconnected expressive bridges. Nevertheless, it also detaches fragments that were long coupled.

In its wanderings, a trapizonga is *an institution against tyrant institutions* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). Despite reciting long-established academic verses, it may adhere to less-known textual corpora. It could copy-and-paste prized psychological recipes whilst offering unexpected, localised practices that are not replicable.

Of Its Ethics

A trapizonga is not a collection of metaphysical promises, and it does not impose a morality. It is, instead, a *utopian locus for autonomy allowed by a quantum of parrhesia* (Foucault, 2001), with regional ethical, aesthetic, and

political unfoldings. This piece of temporary work talks about failure, and the following pages accept this fortune.

*

Attention, Ambulant Sections Ahead!

The following sections were written assuming they will be read in the sequence provided. Indeed, I did not take it for granted that this would be my readers' first choice. Still, I felt most Westernised folks would be used to this format — gruesome assumptions on my part (both that all my readers are Westernised and that they are used to following texts from start to finish in a linear, teleological manner); sorry for that. At the same time, a prior endeavour of mine to offer a sprouting trapizonga with self-contained sections is possibly still perceivable to a residual extent. However, the proliferation of partial concepts and layers of consideration did not allow that first project to be entirely feasible. That said, you are welcome to adventure yourself and try to read this makeshift document as it pleases you, especially if you are feeling frisky or bored by the order I decided to pursue, in a sort of “build your own trapizonga.” Most ideas are explained when they appear for the first time, but you will soon notice that this is not a persistent (or a realistic) rule in this document. In addition, some definitions also change and build up over time. Be my guest in this journey, knowing that — despite talking too much through these lines — I value and expect our conversations to continue.

*

In the first section, I arrive in Aotearoa, the land of wonders, but I soon confront issues of authorship and authority, especially in academia. As I start

justifying this research, I consider the constitution of the lines brought up by my encounter with the land, whilst thinking with these lines to begin building a politics of the trapizonga's narrative. In sequence, I tease out some of this trapizonga's ethico-aesthetic colours, and I offer my collectivised body as a medium for writing. As the lines building this work continue to be explored, I encounter the risks of institutionalisation, and the section is wrapped up with a safety consideration.

Section two questions some historically imposed lines dividing the cluster art-techne-science-episteme. Simultaneously, it traces the Anglocentric coup d'état against specific streams of systematic knowledge. Whilst visiting some of the mainstream Western ontological traditions, a parrhesiast emerges hoping to talk some truth back to power. Procedural issues of the research are explored further, with machines being presented as a productive mode of thought, and the three schizoanalytic movements surface as non-prescriptive tasks I followed. Assemblages are brought up as a multiple unit allowing expression and bodies to create territories, and their openness to transversality is considered.

The third section offers a demolition of selected literature about failure in psychotherapies. Failure is considered through the paint stains of a tie-dyed scholarly pattern — in relation to expected success, its imperceptible contaminations as becoming, and as a persistent event. Efficacy, effectiveness, efficiency, and validity are considered in their necessity and insufficiency. The complexities of therapist effect and the reification of failure onto the individualised other are briefly explored. Failure is presented in different therapeutic traditions, exposing its very failure as a unison concept.

Added points of entry to this makeshift document are offered in section four. While disparate affections are followed, my immigrant self's linguistic difficulties become connected to the translation of idiolects in therapeutic spaces. Difference, complexity, and Spinozian encounters set the stage for a conversation about ethics. The cognitive politics of attention in therapeutic spaces is considered, with partial insights on how to be present in the moment. The therapist's role as a witness — one who does not control all the therapeutic action — is embraced through their positive professional uncertainty. Blurred colonial issues traverse from my Brazilian history to Aotearoa and arrive at the colonising dangers of psy¹³ practices, hoping for immanent liberation through an effort to reestablish a quantum of communication into language.

Section five grapples with the monolithic institution of psychology, exposing fractures in its seemingly unified structure. A critique of the imposed separation between culture and institutions is followed by an exploration of how cultural and institutional processes intertwine, shaping both collective meaning and individual experiences. Radical thought is invoked and immediately assessed in its rhizomatic ability to sprout, contrasting with arborescent ideals that rigidly confine ideas within predetermined boundaries. A tale of many voices recounts the shifts that eventually brought about schizoanalysis as a movement. It also recalls the persistent role of institutional psychotherapy and the branching paths of Guattari's and Lourau's institutional analyses. A

¹³ With this term, I follow a long line of Foucauldian-inspired critique, where “psy” encompasses all fields related to the mind, mental life, and behaviour, including psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and so on. — cf. McAvoy, J. (2014). Psy Disciplines. In: Teo, T. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*. Springer.

redefinition of the word “clinical” opens space for a change of tone in the upcoming sections.

A concise passage revisits and analyses the main institutional documents propping up this trapizonga, exposing how protocols materialise as both instruments of institutional control and sites where alternative futures are quietly seeded. This exercise sets the stage for an interview triptych, where three personal accounts of therapeutic failure collectively weave psychology’s institutional clinical case, tracing its fractures and revealing its entangled subjective and institutional forces.

Giulia’s section follows a bird — easy to draw yet resistant to being drawn — whose symbolism flutters between less and more instituted interpretations in a series of awkward journeys. Her voice challenges the theatre of expertise, opening it to the productive potential of the factory and exposing therapy’s failure to meet the complexity of adolescence as an institutional construct. Giulia situates her experience in the subtleties of kinship, race, and class projections, where the therapy room becomes a microcosm of power, compliance, and unspoken elephants, prompting her to cultivate self-parenting solutions. Her pulsated rhythm — “you know” — resists over-coded scripts while offering affective bridges between desire and shared understanding. In weaving contested meanings, therapy reveals its fractures, hopes, and potentialities, yearning for an ethos that embraces becoming without demanding conformity.

Nise’s section navigates the fragile terrains of trust, care, and institutionalised harm. Her narrative unfolds through ruptures — betrayals by family, friends, and institutions — and fleeting moments of relational care,

where trust emerges as both precarious and transformative. A succession of diagnoses trails her life, offering explanations yet often reducing her to symptoms to be managed. Imagined letters written back to her grapple with the weight of witnessing and the ethics of respectful response. In the company of cows, she finds herself suspended between terror and revelation, waiting for an answer that does not arrive. Her resistance to sedation and institutional control surfaces in a question, “When do I start living?” Through these fractures, a quiet defiance persists, exposing the inadequacies of care-as-control and gesturing toward a relational mode of care attentive to multiplicity and becoming.

René’s section steps onto the stage, where rushed therapy, medicocentric diagnosis, and instituted scripts unfold in a performance of legitimacy and constraint. His search for understanding mirrors a cat that meows at precisely the right moment — serendipitous, inscrutable, neither fully explainable nor entirely meaningless. The timings of care shift between fleeting sessions and the pharmacological rhythms of substitution, where medication marks time more than presence. His case for ADHD unfolds between self-diagnosis and institutional scepticism, and legitimacy becomes a question of monetary access. Worth and time are salvaged in the continued staging of life. In the glow of performance, René finds resistance in drag’s exaggeration, even as past taboos linger in silence. But even in defiance, the stage demands repetition, leaving open the question — when the lights dim, what remains?

Instead of a conclusion, the trapizonga leads outwards in an exoduction. Neither an ending nor a resolution, it slips past closure, scattering its movements into the world. Presence, groupality, and parrhesia linger — not as

fixed certainties, but as invitations to stay with what resists finality. Failure, too, does not conclude; it unsettles, reopens, and carries forward the unfinished. And so, life insists.

*

The trapizonga, much like the assemblages it builds and follows, will resist closure. Listing its sections may provide a fleeting sense of continuity for some; yet this provisional canvas risks simplifying the fluxes it seeks to trace or over-codifying their complexity, ultimately eroding their possible meanings. The coming sections are not static entities but territories in motion, shifting as they are read, reframed through diverse encounters, and lived. What I offer is less a map of fixed paths and more a tangle of forces that provoke, interrupt, and overlap. If the composition fails to settle into clarity, perhaps it is because clarity could at times limit the offering this work hopes to extend. So, as the reader, you will be invited to move alongside this work's lines and lanes, leaving your own gestures in the process of meanings continuously becoming. You will most probably encounter fragments, spills, and textures that refuse to settle into a cohesive whole. This results from a deliberate insistence on keeping the fractures open, resisting the over-coded urge for finality. Your steps in this trapizonga matter as much as those that led to its crafting — every rhythm, every pause, every singular turn you bring will inscribe its own affective counterpoint. From here, the work unfolds into its sections, not with a declaration of arrival, but with an invitation to wander. Let us move, then, into the living multiplicity of what comes next.

Jerônimo's Adventures in Wonderland: for a Politics of the Narrative

Imagine that, until then, I knew nothing of Javanese, yet I was employed and about to represent Brazil at a congress of scholars.

— *Lima Barreto, The Man Who Knew Javanese*¹⁴

I begin with the unacceptable. The following snippet is my cake recipe for the afternoon tea with psychology. You may believe in me if you wish.

*

Ele estava sempre atrasado. Atrasado para decidir, atrasado para se formar na universidade, atrasado para formar família. Uma série de atrasos que, no fim, ganharam um gosto de bolo bem-feito — aquele que combina com um chá da tarde — quando ele descobriu a psicologia. A paixão o levou longe, muito longe, para uma ilha de pássaros destemidos e de gente que, às vezes, prefere manter distância. A curiosidade, aquela velha senhora que sempre se mete onde não é chamada, o carregou até lá.

Sua cabeça girava tão rápido que parecia imóvel. Em silêncio, ele se perguntava, perdido em seus pensamentos... Por que alguém escolheria tornar outra língua sua ferramenta de trabalho? O que leva alguém tão longe de casa? Que acontecimentos fazem com que alguém aceite passar por toda essa dor de cabeça para aprender algo novo e útil? Será que a saudade, o tempo que escapa e o medo são apenas ruídos — ou também têm um propósito?

¹⁴ Lima Barreto was a Brazilian writer and journalist from the early 20th century, known for his sharp social critiques and irony. This excerpt is from his short story *O Homem que Sabia Javanês*, first published in 1911. The story satirises how social prestige can stem more from the performance of knowledge than from actual expertise. Translation is mine, from the original “Imagina tu que eu até aí nada sabia de javanês, mas estava empregado e iria representar o Brasil em um congresso de sábios.”

Ele queria muito chegar lá. Isso, ele sabia. Mas sabia pouco mais do que isso. Além desse pouco, só sabia que a psicologia era saborosa, como um bolo recém-saído do forno. E, mesmo sentindo um frio na barriga, teve coragem de provar um pedaço dela. O motivo, ele não sabia. Mas bolo com gosto de psicologia era como a alegria de uma festa de aniversário. E ele já tinha vivido mais de quarenta aniversários — e sempre gostou do cheiro de festa. Abandonar o porto seguro do português ainda lhe dava calafrios. Todo dia. E ele supôs que esses calafrios o acompanhariam em suas aventuras pela terra das maravilhas, Aotearoa, por um longo, longo tempo.

*

I have no idea how this snippet of text in Portuguese looks to my readers. Some of you may feel an urge to skip the last snippet of writing in italics entirely, ignoring the beginning of this first section. Others may try to find words that are recognisable in their first language, struggling to make sense of it, thinking that I may have a more profound reason to have written in such a way. Many will probably copy the text on an online translation device, split between anger and curiosity, or between boredom and some kind of sense of duty. A few may even look at it as an exciting piece of concrete poetry, inspired by the modernism of arts that flourished on the verge of the 20th century. These options, and all other possibilities¹⁵, make this text as much mine as it is the

¹⁵ This is an exercise of imagination, not a comprehensive list of possibilities. For instance, I have not forgotten the more than 250 million native speakers of Portuguese spread around the globe, who would have little difficulty with those three paragraphs. Even if their existence does not support my argument here, I want to acknowledge that we are not so few. Also, the existence of native speakers of Portuguese does not contradict the point I discuss further.

readers' as they engage in dialogue with me — learning about where I come from and what I have been studying over the past few years.

Yes, the way this text will be layered — through a dialogue between languages, both national and personal, academic and everyday, spoken and unspoken, as well as imagined readers and a collective of intensities — produces a lack of complete ownership over what I write, making it unacceptable to compose this text in Portuguese. This text is not really mine. The use of “I” and “me” and “myself” is a calculated error (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that must be reckoned with in this mixed journal that gains layers until becoming *trapizonga*. Also, this may seem secondary to the uninformed reader — whom I hope will soon understand why such a topic is indeed primary in my studies — but I will continue writing it in English. Not because English is a better language or an easier one for me personally to articulate my thoughts, but because I chose to think outside of my comfortable territory, in this new (wonder)land called Aotearoa.

I am aware of two questions that unfold from this exercise of inadequacy that I act out, both of which move me and that I will try to address shortly. By exploring these questions, I intend to accomplish quite a lot: highlight the necessity of a politics of writing — one that produces specific stylistic choices and constraints — and to begin justifying the work I present on the page. In doing so, I aim to considerably demonstrate the need to construct an acceptable text, even if it comes from the very limits of knowledge. One of those questions is the issue of authoring/authority, discussed for at least half a century now. The other

question broadens the first one and is related to the practices that censor or permit any given discourses, embedding language in categories of power.

Since Barthes (1977), it is said that authority over what is written has shifted to the reader. I wish this were entirely true, not because I sneakily hope to evade my responsibilities in writing this text but because it seems language is still perceived as reified in the author figure and their history as a person — at least since Romanticism, and arguably still today. Barthes (1977) remarks that the composition of a text is something performative, in which the “*here and now*” (p. 145, emphasis in original) is the only sphere enunciated. Therefore, everything I write here — whether as a history of myself or a position on my studies — only makes sense and creates a world when read in the present moment. Also, my written history and research do not represent a single beginning, or a linear path, or even some sort of catechism or an indisputable truth, but a composition made of several entrance points, a collection of disparate materials that have their own histories and grey areas, and that came together as this text. A text, I stress, that has multivocality (Bakhtin, 1984) not only in its compositional materials but also in its meanings, as an author is a mere mediator to the sense constructed by the readers.

I have not said it openly until now, but this issue of authoring/authority needs to be addressed in any given psychological practice, as I see it. In a clinical setting, for instance, the authoring of an intervention shifts between the people who seek help and the professional, cycling back and forth. Strangely, the authority seems to be stuck on the professional, often portrayed as the carrier of a history of knowledge, disconnecting the space of the intervention from the here

and now of performativity. In having named this issue, I now beg you, my reader, to be patient, as I agree this question seems rushed and forcibly painted in an incomplete landscape. I am not sure I will be able to give you much more than that right now, but I will continue discussing this issue and how it connects to the questions I was already investigating.

There are many possible objections to what I have just affirmed which I do not intend to silence. One could comment that authority is always expected from the professional, by all involved in the therapeutic process (Bartle-Haring et al., 2022). Alternatively, one could argue that the expert is never an author, but someone who applies protocols previously written as optimal guidance (Bruijniks et al., 2018). Even I could object to my own provocation, as it is still solely centred on individuals, giving little or no space to think through the process of the praxis in psychology as a composition in-between subjects rather than of two or more discrete individuals. Every objection to this issue of authority seems to point to a broadening of the scope of the matter of authoring, which is precisely my second question.

Foucault appears to have followed a similar trajectory, moving from the issues of authoring and the “author-function” (Foucault, 1979, p. 20), to the broader topic, which he called the order of discourse (Foucault, 1981). This shift from the author-function to the order of discourse signals how Foucault moves beyond Barthes — not merely extending his provocation but reframing the question altogether, shifting the focus from the author’s disappearance to the broader mechanisms that regulate discourse itself. While Barthes (1977) proclaimed the death of the author, shifting power to the newly born readers,

Foucault (1981) demonstrates that even this proclaimed death must be analysed as enabling a range of practices of control, which operate differently in each given case. However, before turning more explicitly to the regulatory issues surrounding authoring, Foucault (1979) argues that, even if the author has lost their centrality in the contemporary discourse, they still enact four functions within it. I feel the need to point out which those four functions are: a name is given to the author, but it is neither a simple proper noun nor an easily defined description; the author appears as the proprietor of a text and a body of work, even when it is difficult to determine where an opus begins or ends; this appropriation enables attribution — whether granting or withholding authorship over something that was said or written; and finally, attribution establishes the author's position in relation to discourse. In short, the author-function consists of *name*, *appropriation*, *attribution*, and *position* (Foucault, 1979).

The trapizonga is no exception to these functions. First, there is *name*: “Jerônimo” is affixed to this text, yet it does not fully capture what speaks here. A name signals authorship, but it neither encompasses nor contains the forces at play. But there is also *appropriation*: though I may appear as the proprietor of these words, they exceed my control and existence, drawing from borrowed fragments, reworked ideas, and voices that are not my own. Equally, there is *attribution*: this act of assembling — appropriating, if one must — renders authorship both granted and withheld, dependent on the frameworks that legitimise what counts as a text and an author. And finally, there is *position*: this attribution places me within a discourse that both enables and constrains what I can say, situating me in relation to the very structures I interrogate. Even as

these four functions can be referred to separately, they do not remain distinct. They fold into each other, shifting boundaries as discourse operates. Naming invokes property; appropriation unsettles attribution; attributing defines a positioning, only for position to retroactively redefine the name (Foucault, 1979). The trapizonga — like any text — does not merely contain these functions but enacts their movement.

Who — or what — speaks when I speak? I have already invoked several implicit and explicit interlocutors in this opening section: Alice and Lewis Carroll, Deleuze and Guattari, Barthes, Bakhtin, and Foucault. But what kind of exercise is required to force these voices to present themselves and reveal their connections explicitly in my work? Naming the multivocality of a text seems insufficient, just as in-text citation — though procedural — does not suffice. There must be another level of discourse in which a politics of the narrative enables these voices to emerge and take part in the work. What am I, if I deliberately attempt to break the very functions of authoring and authority in my writings? Until now, I have had to assume a utopian land of wonders in order to speak. However, there is more than fascination in this position.

*

There is a moral apprehension that insists on invading every topic I have been studying. A sort of moralism that makes me feel ashamed of myself. I use the American Psychological Association (APA)¹⁶ citation rules in my texts while mostly ignoring its guidelines against writing in the first person. I intend

¹⁶ The APA publishes one of the most used style guides in psychology for English-speaking countries, shaping not only how research is presented but also, to some extent, how authoring and authority are enacted.

ambiguity! I can only imagine what an exclamation mark signifies — horror, perhaps — within such guidelines. I work beside this feeling of failing. I mention this moralist instance because I need to feel free from it, somehow, at least to some degree. But also because this exercise may free my readers as well. After all, I would find it entirely acceptable if my words did not make me completely clear.

I write together with a long tradition of thinkers who do not believe that ideas can be reduced to clear and distinct perceptions. Admittedly, this Cartesian notion of rationality seems mostly well-suited to fields like basic engineering or general astronomy, but it is limited by its attempts to erase the conflicts and complexities that arise when the subject of study is ourselves. Descartes' (1960) meditations ultimately become an act of faith, as his conclusions are presented as proof that God is not a deceiver, particularly in the third meditation — an impossible task, logically speaking.

Moreover, if I refer to humans as “ourselves,” it is because of a peculiar habit in some psychological practices: a tendency in which certain (re)producers of knowledge behave as if they were a distinct type of nonhuman humanoid, extracting themselves from the scope of their own studies. This statement may sound humorous to my readers, as I aim to engage in compositions that productively dialogue with the critical turn nonhumans — animals, affections, technologies, geophysical systems, bodies — have brought to the social sciences (Stark, 2017). In a certain way, by granting such high status to nonhumans, Cartesian (should I say Popperian?) researchers find themselves forced back into the field. Within such an ontology, they inevitably reappear in their studies, even as they pretend to be another kind of humanlike being when studying and

producing knowledge — all while striving to be clear and distinct in their own way.

*

Yes, Wonderland brought me back to an arena of majoritarian discourses, of (not so) disguised privileges, and of unspeakable hierarchies. Judgment has been the main byproduct of this encounter — an embodied force dictating verdicts about me, my ability to express my thoughts in a foreign language, and the theories I abide by. Strangely, it has also made me judge others in the same way. But that is not the place I come from; something must have happened on the way to paradise. This force, which I called “a sort of moralism” in my intensive diary entry, easily falls into a broader series of power practices that enable or constrain discourse. And it leads me to my second question — one that moves from who speaks to what is allowed to be spoken.

I will follow through on some of the steps of Foucault’s work, as I previously mentioned. *The Order of Discourse* (Foucault, 1981) is a relatively short text with rather significant achievements. This often-overlooked transcription of Foucault’s inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1970 is his only written piece between two of his more celebrated books, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*. This seminar highlights Foucault’s efforts to both refine and expand upon his archaeological methodology, which later culminate in his genealogy (Karim, 2021; Koopman, 2008). My task here, I assume, is not to describe these two methodologies, but to highlight what Foucault’s work with the concept of the author-function ultimately generated in his later research, while broadening his scope of analysis. Within the context of

this lecture, Foucault (1981) identifies ten processes of exclusion that regulate discourse by controlling, selecting, organising, and redistributing it into categories of power and danger — an attempt to restrain its potencies and avoid its materiality. He classifies these processes into three groups: external procedures, internal procedures, and conditions of access to discourse.

In the first group, there are three external procedures of exclusion in discourse: interdiction, rejection, and the opposition between truth and falsity. Each of these mechanisms is tied to power and desire. The second group of exclusionary practices is internal to discourse and relates to events¹⁷ and contingency. This group includes commentary, the author, and the organisation of disciplines. The third group, within the regime of access, establishes conditions for participation in discourse, constraining who may engage with it. These mechanisms regulate access for specific subjects to certain discourses and include rituals of qualification, societies of discourse, doctrines, and the social appropriation of discourse (Foucault, 1981).

I recognise that the last paragraph risks undoing the work of this emergent mixed journaling — one that does not sit still, that layers itself in movement, accumulating tensions rather than resolving them. It exposes a tendency — one I find difficult to escape — toward listing, categorising, and stabilising knowledge into retrievable units (Lima & Maculan, 2024). A disciplined student in me compels my hand to arrange what I read into categories, reducing fluid processes into static markers, as if meaning could be

¹⁷ The translation to English seems inadequate here, even though “event” is the term commonly used in philosophical contexts and is technically correct. *Événement* in French could also be translated as *happening*, *occurrence*, conveying a broader sense than the everyday meaning of “event” in English.

crystallised through an index of snapshot-titles. This is not merely habit; it is institutional training. I leave the paragraph there, not as an endorsement of this practice, but as a trace of the familiar tension I inhabit — just as I kept the paragraph listing the processes connected to the author-function earlier. In giving labels to processes, I risk sealing movement; in resisting them, I risk saying nothing at all. Here, I invoke a Brazilian saying: it seems I am trying to wipe the ice of its condensed water — the more I rub, the more condensation appears, an endless circuit. If knowledge arrives in cold blocks that become fluid when touched, then perhaps my task is not to fight this cycle, but to follow its shifts. Instead of merely describing the procedures of exclusion, I feel the need to attend to what they *do* — what they ask of writing, what they make possible, and what they render impossible.

Even as I struggle with these tensions, my own writing remains bound by them. These mechanisms are not abstract; they shape what I can and cannot say. I cannot introduce topics at will in this text. I should not write a haiku as my dissertation. I will not become a Doctor of Philosophy by public acclamation after preaching in a park. My discourse may be deemed unsuitable or inappropriate if I break certain discursive protocols. Moreover, my writing is expected to maintain an appearance of verisimilitude — an expectancy that persists even after one recognises that a regime of truth is arbitrary, violent, and changeable when viewed from outside a given discourse (Foucault, 1981). The very act of constructing this text demonstrates this regulation: by following a recognisable academic form, I align with the expectations of scholarly legitimacy, even as I interrogate them from their frontiers. Were I to blur the boundaries too

much — if my argument dissolved into fragmented poetics or if I abandoned the scaffolding of citation altogether — this work might no longer be legible as “serious” scholarship. My adherence to certain conventions, then, does not merely reflect my choices as a writer but signals my positioning within the order of discourse. Beyond this, I may be dismissed as repetitive or seen as constructing a minor, less valuable narrative. I might even be accused of departing from psychology altogether. My tone could be deemed inappropriate — incorrect or immoral, disrespectful or unruly — or too far removed from what is considered both procedurally correct and morally appropriate way of conducting psychological work, as if my prior studies had failed to inscribe me correctly within the order of discourse.

These issues, succinctly put, mean that I must write an acceptable text — bringing me back to the beginning of this memoir and concluding this long, elliptical consideration of matters. The eagle-eyed reader of academia may have already noticed that if these are the proceedings governing any discourse, they extend beyond my personal experience of composing a mixed journal — a journaling endeavour that, ultimately, gets entangled in a broader trapizonga. The same expectations apply, for instance, to the clinical professional and to those who seek psychological help. With this explicitation, I hope to have expanded what may have initially seemed like a personal concern — authoring and authority — into a broader issue, particularly as it pertains to psychological practices.

*

Indeed, at this point, the forces that constrain and enable any (professional) practices seem far more diffuse, and authority can neither be claimed nor conquered voluntarily or individually. On a first level, there is a form of censorship inscribed in our *institutions*, regulating meaning-making through norms that are (more or less) universal within a given society. These norms appear immutable and peremptory unless rigorously interrogated. At first glance, they reveal their lines “of rigid segmentarity” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 124), which distribute experience into categorical blocks and demand adherence to these imposed divisions. Regarding discourse, these molar¹⁸ lines determine authority, either granting or restricting it, thereby delimiting one’s ability to act. The Foucauldian approach to authorship, authority, and the author-function (Foucault, 1979; 1981) primarily engages with such rigid segmentary lines, but it also appears to extend beyond them.

In fact, aligned with these rigid lines, there is another type of segmentary line — one that is more malleable. This second group, *molecular lines*, should not be mistaken for idiosyncrasies, despite sometimes resembling such predispositions (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007). Instead, they create thresholds and fluxes, functioning with greater flexibility than molar lines (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Offering potentialities, they may even produce the sensation of choice and volition while remaining subtly saturated with rules and impossibilities (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007). These lines might also manifest in a way that resembles an all-encompassing commitment to difference or acceptance — perceptions that

¹⁸ The term *molar* (or rigid) here contrasts with *molecular* (or flexible), which is another type of segmentary (or customary) line. In a trio, these two segmentary lines stand in contrast to lines of drift, more commonly known as lines of *flight* (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

perhaps hold our time's most insidious entrapments. Such risks are well recognised in works like Bauman's (2000/2006), where liquid relationships promise an abundance of micro-alternatives but ultimately deliver constrained possibilities and immobility. In a world where excessive discrete options lead to crippling indecision, stagnation is produced rather than movement. The same flexible lines were also once noted in Sennett's (1998/2011) arguments on modern capitalism, where stable careers had gradually been exchanged for serialised bits of jobs or tasks. Instead of pursuing a career, one was now perpetually between jobs. These new liminal spaces fractured the ability to construct stable life narratives, eroding the gradual development of a unified character and enforcing the emergence of decontextualised moralities.

I must be more explicit here: rigid and flexible segmentary lines are neither good nor bad, as these constituting lines are not moral but *political*. I chose to highlight the inherent risks of molecular lines in the last paragraph because molar lines are typically more easily critiqued for their severity. On a rigid "*plane of organization*" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 130, emphasis in original) composed of molar lines, one is either an adult or a child, a human made of flesh or an inanimate stone. In contrast, flexible lines create a *plane of immanence* (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007) that allows for passages in which an elder may find a child within or acquire a heart of stone — not as metaphors, but as lived thresholds, liminalities, or neighbourhoods. Thus, categories and thresholds — molar and molecular lines — express different politics of life, each with its own strengths and associated dangers.

As I just mentioned, the plane of immanence — composed of molecular lines — does not function metaphorically, and this is an essential point that adds to how this text layers itself into a trapizonga, which I want to explore for a second. Perhaps the best way to speak about immanent thresholds is indeed through linguistic structures that could also function as metaphors or direct comparisons. And yes, this text contains plenty of such structures across its multiple sections. But while these formulations sometimes operate metaphorically, they can also function as signals of real movements across thresholds. I consider them a calculated limitation in my writing: while they carry a substantial risk of misinterpretation, I do not know how else to write thresholds.

*

While I do not support unison meanings, I certainly do not engage in naïve pluralism. In everyday conversations, metaphors and comparisons are often experienced as poetic and aesthetically pleasing, which may lead my work to read as a cute piece of naïve self-expression rather than an acute necessity — a life unfolding in what I have become used to calling myself. I write out of necessity: I would never voluntarily choose to endure the painful process of working toward a PhD. To be fully sincere, this work is not about my-body so much as it is about every-body. More precisely, it is about many-body: myself, my colleagues, psych-related professionals and practices, human participants and nonhuman participations, bodies (or boards) of knowledge, the academy, Aotearoa, and so on. But there is another issue: structures similar to metaphors and comparisons may read as if I am excusing myself from engaging with a foundational material

reality — a so-called “objective” reality — that supposedly exists a priori and should not be defiled by “subjective” words. In this view, the perceived poetry in such structures would act as a form of holy respect toward an untouchable material existence, shielding it from contamination and relegating my work to a second-class status — one that merely colours the world with appearances.

However, in research ontologically akin to the one I engage with, material reality may only emerge in an assemblage with expression (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) — they are co-produced, just like reality schematically splits itself each time the object of study and the knowing subject are created together, always in a different way. In this sense, even such a “protective” aesthetic in poetry would only be permitted within specific conditions of expression and in relation to the bodies it supposedly seeks to express.

At least one point remains. More broadly, what differentiates metaphors and comparisons from molecular lines is that molecular lines materially mean what they say (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Deleuze & Parnet, 2007). These flexible lines are not a curse — “you’re as malicious as a viper” — nor a romantic gesture — “your companionship is the water that satiates my thirst.” Instead, they point to becomings. For instance, in the poem Snake (Lawrence, 1923/2024), when D. H. Lawrence sees a snake at a Sicilian water trough, he is caught between his humanness and his snakesness. He no longer knows whether to follow the voice of his human education and kill the snake. Clearly, Lawrence did not biologically transform into a snake; he remained aware of what his human upbringing dictated. Yet, for a moment, we as readers cannot fully define who muses on whom: the snake’s eyes seem to be his eyes, and they both are like cattle on a hot

day. So, Lawrence experiences his snakesness, and both he and the snake become one another's prey. These immaterial transformations hold a quantum of life that should not be hijacked as "simple" poetry. The neighbouring space between Lawrence and the snake is a lived, embodied experience — not a comparison. And when Lawrence finally returns to his human ways, something inevitably changed. Now, when he acts like a human should, his actions carry the weight of pettiness.

*

So far, I have discussed two types of customary lines that compose individuals and groups. These two segmentary lines — molar and molecular — form a system in which rigidity and flexibility may be mistakenly seen as oppositional. If treated as a binary pair, these lines would produce a political world in which one is either conservative or liberal — “rigid” or “flexible” — but always subject to strict rules of confirmation and conformation. Indeed, this is a widespread (and dangerous) oversight of common sense that misreads segmentary lines as fixed categories. The attentive reader may have already inferred that if molar and molecular lines were simply two opposing categories, they would ultimately be subsumed into a molar framework on a plane of organisation, erasing the plane of immanence and mischaracterising the molecular line itself. Thus, the relationship between these lines is less an opposition than a contest: “all the time, flows and interruptions” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, pp. 8–9). That is, molar categories cut the immanent flows of the molecular lines, just as flexible lines reconnect blocks of rigid segments into a process.

Besides the two visible segmentary lines, a third type of line operates differently. It disrupts the perceived opposition between molar and molecular lines, allowing pure difference to emerge. These lines drift and wander, simpler in composition than segmentary lines as they move through tides, flows and currents without a set direction or goal. These are *lines of flight* (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007) — lines that scramble the codes of segmentary formations, ensuring that creation is at play whenever meaning is made, even when it remains hidden behind more or less rigid segments.

In my unreasonable little box of examples, I compare lines of flight to those moments when one stops trying to make sense while speaking out of exhaustion or sleepiness. Such moments may be funny, tense, or fluid; they may later be forgotten, intriguingly revealing, or simply nonsensical to those still awake. At the same time, there is no assurance that anything unusual will happen, and yet, such drift could just as easily reinforce rigidity — like deciding “I must shut up when I’m tired.” In this example, it is the liberation from segmentary authority over one’s own words, meaning, expected logic and so on that authorises authoring (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), understood here as the ability to compose connections between these three types of lines. But, as I said before, such compositionality should not be taken lightly, as these connections may just as easily produce extinction (Guattari, 2006): a wisp of sense that unravels and vanishes into thin air rather than becoming the next thread in a life that unspools.

Writing with Colour Pencils

The entanglement and relationship of a multitude of those three types of lines, then, compose the political processuality of this narrative. But when a story is told (or written), such politics are populated by ethical and aesthetic colours. So, I will continue by giving away a few of the ethico-aesthetic tones in the research process palette. Be aware that these tones are provisional and tentative: I expect many more hues to appear in the coming sections of this trapizonga. Also, I might not return to overtly mention the three types of lines, and I will only mention them if and when they help me again. Plenty more could be said *about* them if needed, but I intend to continue working *with* them instead. So, please keep a reference note to those lines in your travel backpack as we go, as they may be helpful as a sort of keycode to your understanding. Anyway, I shall focus on discussing the act of writing and its colours now, considering that this thesis' most obvious product is a text.

As I just started mentioning, there are colours — many colours — in one's writing. Not quite long enough ago, I heard an assessment from a more senior colleague during my years as a graduate assistant that I should teach academic writing by erasing the undergrad students' hopes of becoming Vincent van Gogh and teaching them to paint by numbers. My fellow worker was rather brutal in their words, and I hope they never find out I went back home that day and cried copiously. I did not cry for myself as I can take some hits — all in all, I have been successfully surviving academia's meat-grinding machine for more than two decades — but because I felt my coworker had made a solid point, at least as a quick, insensitive judgment of the general state of matters. And, of course, I

made sure my students had at least a bit of Van Gogh in that paint-by-*numbing* class.

Somehow, over the years, it seems that structure and formatting have taken over a significant chunk of what is expected from academic work, both from folks in training and those in more senior positions. And to be extremely clear — for the sake of good practice — I cannot fully substantiate my point in a “proper” academic way right now, and I am not aware of whether it has ever been much different before my time. In my *affective* memories, I vividly recall a course on research methodology in psychology back in my early undergrad days in Brazil, in which I mostly learned the Brazilian equivalent of the APA formatting guidelines, called ABNT¹⁹ norms. The main argument then was that without a common technical standard, we would not be able to understand our colleagues’ work clearly. Especially if I jump in time to where I am now, there is a comicality in the fact that, of the six ABNT norms that rule academic writing in Portuguese, only one has remained effective since my time as a student; the other five have changed over time. As if it were not enough that these rules are useless to me now that I begin writing this trapizonga in English, the initial version of the APA guidelines that I learned in 2016, when I first arrived in Aotearoa, is now outdated.

Without trying to be comprehensive, I immediately recall other points that could be of interest in this discussion. For instance, the variety of standards in academic journals and the cost related to formatting. On those points, Le Blanc

¹⁹ The acronym ABNT stands for *Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas*, which translates to Brazilian Association of Technical Standards. ABNT is responsible for publishing all Brazilian technical norms, including those for academic formatting.

and colleagues (2019) once calculated that, on average, manuscripts take 52 hours per researcher per year to be scientifically (re)formatted before being accepted for publication, adding up to nineteen hundred US dollars' worth of academic labour per researcher in the same timeframe. Businesslike discussions on the topic, as Le Blanc et al. (2019) also note, include lobbying for each journal to have its own formatting team, demanding a more stable hegemonic norm, and issues of government-funded higher education with calls for the more rational allocation of the public subsidies for academic work, and so on.

So, the issue of structure and formatting in academic work — a matter related to customary, segmentary norms or lines — might not be about teaching, learning, and understanding as much as it is about practices of controlling access to academic authorship. This systematising training in writing may be perceived as a ritual of qualification (Foucault, 1981). Still, through its continuous replacements of rules, it enacts the ever-changing eligibility requirement to enter the academic order of discourse. In such a cruel system, one is “forcibly invited” to keep obsessively updated on such rules if one intends to hold up their voice. As I already pointed out in the preamble — before we began walking together — resisting such a mandate, I adhere to practices of academic anthropophagy, and my strategy diminishes my voice's personal worth by devouring and becoming entwined with the esteemed other (Rolnik, 2000).

However, another process is also genuine in this first-person writing. When I talk in my own name — bringing my affective memories, my situated history, my sensemaking — it is because this research has happened on many surfaces, but my material body is the one surface that was there most of the

time, affecting and being affected by what unfolded. And erasing my body would hide this work's most obvious styles and contaminations/compositions. So, as you are already advised, I will make my best effort to write an adequate text. And, of course, I intend to follow the expected standards for my work. But this trapizonga is not painting by numbers; it is writing with colour pencils — an open-ended composition, where failure itself plays a role in what is drawn. I write about failure, not about success. This is the most identifiable politics of my writing. So, rest assured that failure is everywhere in this text, even (and especially) in the passages that feel highly successful in their academic tone and content. In the land of wonders where my afternoon tea with psychology happens, past and future — failure and success — are less important than the pure event of *becoming*. In that sense, it is by failing that I succeed, just like “Alice does not grow without shrinking, and vice versa” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 1).

And while I write this thesis, one of the items from my office's underdeveloped affective mural (Figure 1) — a small research venture for building memory that failed to endure due to the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns and alert systems in Aotearoa — travels with me, reminding my academic self that Aotearoa is not a one-person wonderland. Instead, a slender brown house with purple windows and a green door — a home much taller than a tree — is where I must live now, having flown in a box-filler, fat-chicken-like aeroplane with tiny wings. Studying in Aotearoa, then, is the fantastic accomplishment of a great number of kinsfolk, a project entailed since the times of my grandparents. For my loved ones, this research is about shared dreams coming true and the quixotic bravery to go where life takes us.

Figure 1

Nephew's Drawing on Research's Affective Mural — Zoomed In and In Situ



Note. The activity book asks, “And you, do you know how to wait? Think, research within your family and register if there is something that you are waiting for.” My nephew’s words, in truncated Portuguese, read, “TRAVEL TO NEW ZEALAND SEE MY DINDO.” *Dindo* is a loving nickname for godfather, often used for uncles. All translations are mine. Reproduced with permission.

I have been sketching so far that this text has many politics of authoring and many ethico-aesthetic colours: scholarship, persistence, failure, paradox, fulfilment, courage. As I honour the large, crooked letters drawn by a dear kid’s neatest effort to disclose support, the more general politics of this writing also presents its colour. In this work, I offer my collectivised body as a writing surface while I follow *intensities* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). What moves me in my nephew’s response to his school activity is not his artistic ability, his unrivalled choice of vibrant colours, his aesthetic of concise wording, or his free-form calligraphy. Instead, what is touching in his (e)motion is his effort to make intensities visible — forces that are invisible by themselves. My eyes tear up not because I am loved or remembered, but because what I once experienced as my solitary endeavour — flying almost half of our shared planet to pursue a dream — now reappears as a commonality. So, my family not only supports me: they

write as I write. In my nephew's words, the distance between us does not dissolve, but it is written into being — a waiting that inscribes itself as a shared act, a minor yet forceful gesture of co-authorship. This trapizonga is not written by me alone. It is written in waiting, in anticipation, in the ways my family plans my successful advancement — whether in their school activities, prayers, or agreeing to have fewer video calls while I study.

In my out-of-nest Brazilianness which I only truly learned existed when I moved out of the country where I was born, I also am a bit like this kid learning to write, and the images I am able to portray in writing are sometimes similar to a disproportionately large chicken-aeroplane. So, I need you, my reader, to understand that writing intensities is a work one only accomplishes *collectively* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). And despite the insufficiency of the English language — which forced me to say “one” in the last sentence — I am already many just by being myself (Guattari, 2006), which has allowed this research to unfold until it became a written text. Still, my writing insists on learning from your eyes and your reading (Barthes, 1977). It begs you to devour my words (Rolnik, 2000), to teach them some meaning, and to follow with me in an indeed scary and hopefully rewarding process. My writing hopes to be a door — or a traversable looking-glass — to the fantastic afternoon tea in which we become prey to each other like Lawrence (1923/2024) and the snake. Perhaps this is what writing ultimately desires — to be devoured and to devour, to find itself in a communion of those with nothing in common (Lingis, 1994). And hopefully — I repeat — it will be a moment for us to muse together on the one little-big problem I have followed for some years: the complexities of failure and success,

and how our institutionalised practices transform into lived accounts when praxis fails the expectations of those suffering — and please keep in mind we all suffer sometimes; I am not only talking about “consumers” of therapy.

I am aware this may be too much of an ask, and I hope I have already created enough space for you to know you can decline any of my offers comfortably. This should not feel like another one of academia’s forced invitations. I just do not take for granted that reading this work is interesting or enjoyable, for each attractive tone also opens ancient academic and professional wounds in at least some of us. This is probably also why I have been talking mostly about my writing, and I have not gone back to openly talk about our practices in therapeutic spaces. It is by failing that I succeed. So, remember that this work constantly *derives* — which is not to be confused with it being derivative (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) — and by not talking about what could be considered my “main point,” I will pursue it much more intensely. Do not be fooled into believing in the very first plateau of every aspect of what I bring. The currents and the flows, the many topics, and the lack of “objectivity” are carefully crafted here to *produce* — not to produce *something*, but just to produce (Deleuze, 1994).

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I have been talking about the ethico-aesthetic colours of this text. For von Goethe (1840/2006), colour emerges in the interplay of sight and light. So, it is neither a property of the material world (for example, the sun’s rays) nor the simple subjective projection of a specialised sensory input system (that is, the eye) being decoded by a superiorly designed brain. With this understanding, von

Goethe added a welcomed complexity to Newton's lab-induced contributions to the study of light. Existence, then, if one understands colours in daily life in ways similar to von Goethe, occurs by the shores of the inner and outer worlds — at a place that is not ocean yet and not the beach anymore. Ethical and aesthetic hues only find their reality in this liminal space. The sea will continue having majestic whales with penetrating gazes that lay our souls bare (Boxall, 2011), giant squids that look sadly desecrated if taken to a museum (New Zealand Herald, 2024), and male clownfish that grow older to become females with renovated brains and new gonadal function (Casas et al., 2016). But taken out of the seawater, such fabulous existences can only strand and die.

At the same time, this is not an invitation to transform into a siren, although there is nothing negative in swimming effortlessly or singing beautifully. But the siren's voice is in unison — undivided, seamless (Gresseth, 1970) — while this work moves differently, carrying many voices, many currents. The proposed transformation is immaterial, as whales, squids, clownfish, humans, sirens, the water, the sand, and the seafloor are welcome to stay where they already are — remaining well, continuing to be. I guess what I am trying to say is that I do not mean to dissect a giant squid with this work and then put it in a museum — this would be far too violent and teach less than it would destroy a life. Probably, it would impress, too — like colourful images of the brain's electric circuits are impressive, indeed (Tripathi et al., 2019). And fun; they are pretty playfully fun, especially because they do not immediately kill. But the invitation is to return to simplicity, which is not the same as easiness — simplicity is an effect, not an essence (Deleuze, 1993/2006). Rather than being a

resolution of complexity, simplicity is one of its immanent compositions, arising where molar stratifications begin to dissolve (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). There is nothing as simple and taken-for-granted as colours in our daily experiences. Yet, colour perception remains an uneasy topic: understanding it is insufficient in many ways, as colour is usually reified in its existence in daily life. And to prove my point, I do not need to replicate ableist ideals about colour-blind folk or appeal to how different languages and cultures name and perceive colours. I can follow basic Western science of colours and still have plenty of room for debate (Martins & Celestino, 2001).

For instance, despite being largely regarded as incorrect by the canons of natural science for a long time, *Farbenlehre* — von Goethe's (1840/2006) theory of colours — is arguably more helpful to visual artists in their daily work than Newton's assertions relating to the refraction of light. This usefulness probably stems from von Goethe's four-decade obsession with studying light and colour as they are *perceived in the world*. In contrast, Newton's approach isolated light refraction under controlled conditions to describe only its physical properties. Taken by the *Zeitgeist* of his time, von Goethe's extreme efforts to confront Newton's findings may now appear as a lesser project, as Newton's take is sedimented as more in-line with how modern physics understands light and its properties. Yet, as I began mentioning before, one point that was never disputed in von Goethe's findings is that colour is not an inner property but an effect of surface, a perceptual characteristic that emerges in the liminality between light and dark (von Goethe, 1840/2006).

In modern physics, darkness is merely the absence of light — a principle so deeply embedded that finding a reputable academic source to cite becomes a nightmare, as this assertion is treated as self-evident and rarely explicitly justified. Yet, colour is not simply the opposite of darkness; it emerges in the interplay of light and shadow. It is always a phenomenon of dawn or twilight — there is no colour in the complete lack of light, just as it is also absent in the presence of full, bright light (von Goethe, 1840/2006). By *imagining* darkness as a positive phenomenon rather than just an absence, von Goethe stumbled upon some very unique processes of colour production that successfully bypass Newton's two-prism tests, which were designed to identify his concept of "pure" light. This issue, which makes any physicist happy and discombobulated — as it forces a political positioning in the expert's opinion — has been studied extensively for some years now. In the context of current physics, von Goethe's contributions still spark much discussion (Lyre, 2018). Yet, by simply adapting Newton's experiments and inverting light and dark zones, von Goethe (1840/2006) did not isolate red, green, and blue pure lights, but rather cyan, magenta, and yellow ones. These findings are easily falsifiable, and are often conceptualised as evidence of *symmetry* — a property of spectral phenomena (Sällström, 2018). Published research has even measured this symmetrical spectrum beyond visible light: in addition to the well-known ultraviolet and infrared radiations, ultra-yellow and infra-cyan complementary regions can also be isolated and quantified (Grebe-Ellis & Passon, 2020).

If even the spectra we cannot see follow patterns of symmetry, then colours' surface experience should not be taken lightly. Plato might have reached

an essential procedure when he proposed the allegory of the cavern (Ferguson, 1922), but it was never a projection of something more real than what was seen reflected on the walls. Otherwise, the surface phenomenon of the shadow only makes sense in its simplicity: the shadow and its fuzzy borders produce colours — colours that possess properties of symmetry. A shadow's hue does not point to anything other than itself in the world, as it results from the sum of all the existing lights on a surface at a given moment and from a specific perspective. Colour is a perceptual existence in itself, always embedded in a context and dependent on a liminal experience. So, there is nothing beyond immanence in a shadow, as colours can be “pure” even if they are not inherent properties. And I should argue here that purity is not a value for me or for this trapizonga. I use this word mostly to repurpose Newton's idea, meaning that *there is no farce in surface processes* (Deleuze, 1993/2006), and they can be — and, in our case, are — the deepest layer of an existence. This is why I continue to write with colour pencils — because surfaces, and the colours they bring forth, are all there is.

And if I return to my previously insufficient image of an existence that happens by the shore to refine it just a bit — after briefly considering Plato's cavern (Ferguson, 1922) and von Goethe's (1840/2006) *Farbenlehre* — then one should study whales, squids, and clownfish where they are, for their shadows only make sense where they are produced. The borders — the shores — are a form of liminality embedded in the very act of living; they are not fixed to a unitary space, but nomadically shift wherever a life goes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Indeed, biology will still exist and may have hues that accept entrapping clownfish under certain artificial circumstances to force them to change sex

(Casas et al., 2016). And neurology will continue offering its rainbows of blood flow on functional magnetic resonance images, as if these hues directly mapped neuronal function (Tripathi et al., 2019). But like Newton's contributions, the hues of these kinds of biology and neurology differ from von Goethe's untamed perception because they ignore symmetry. The processes I follow are symmetric, and they have no other layer than a surface. Paradoxically, my writing has many layers otherwise.

However, when examining knowledge produced with asymmetric hues — with intense tones of metaphysics, box-ticking ethics, and a paint-by-numbers aesthetic — one will notice that such knowledge's writing is supposedly "objective": clear and distinct, with tamed possibilities of intelligibility (Foucault, 1981). This type of knowledge invests language with a symmetry that is lost when a process is captured beyond the shores, creating another paradox — one that appears as an inversion of the paradox explored in this study (Deleuze, 1994; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). So, like Alice's inverted room through the looking-glass, symmetry emerges even within the paradox my work carries when compared to other politics of knowledge. And please be aware that in saying this, I do not intend to create a binary opposition — Alice versus the real world, this work versus another type of work. If some of my emotional responses seem to lean in that direction, it is not because these realms are inherently opposed but because the procedures of language creation in these two cosmologies are so distant that oppositional structures often appear as the quickest means of comparison, even as they fail to fully account for the relations at play (Derrida, 2004). But, as I said before, biology, neurology, whales, squids, and clownfish are

not this work's enemies, and they will continue to exist — thankfully. In this trapizonga, political matter is always about ethics and aesthetics.

Thus, the processes of surface I follow are ethical and aesthetic, insofar as existence unfolds as *ethico-aesthetic-political* (Guattari, 2006). And I suppose this ever-changing proto-axiom could be extended to asymmetric studies if one deemed it necessary or desirable. But as I have already mentioned, and at least for the purpose of this work, I intend to leave sea creatures where they are. Before moving forward, however, I will briefly stay with a problem in the authorship of this thesis: the risk of *institutionalisation*. Not as a full descent into the matter — that will be layered in later — but as a moment to acknowledge the feeling of being caught in its threads, perhaps even failing in the process.

*

When this section transitioned from inspecting the forces restricting authorship to discussing the three types of political lines that constitute individuals and groups, I pointed out that the plurality of social norms creates *institutions*. This definition is still relatively simplistic, as it only positions institutions as a visible outcome of the production of planes of organisation by rigid segmentary lines (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Still, I will roll with it for now, as the definition seems sufficient for what is needed in this section. There is much to say about institutions, and I will return to the topic multiple times throughout this trapizonga, layering depth rather than leading toward an ending.

As it may be reasonably noticeable to the attentive reader, there are many risks in what I manufacture as a product of my work. If I were to start indicating possible missteps: structurally, many of my paragraphs lack topic sentences and shift across themes within themselves; logically, the points I make intertwine with issues that might seem already settled, reopening old debates; argumentatively, some lines of inquiry are left behind while others are obsessively dissected — and so on. Yet — this is what I intend to be doing, even if I cannot fully know — there are blatant intentions in how I do my writing, and there is plenty of effort put into building blocks that flow, sometimes with abrupt jumps and other times more softly. Talking about my writing in this way could “break the spell” of this type of production, but at this point, it is necessary — especially given the danger of institutionalisation.

Probably one of the most hurtful moments in writing this thesis came when I unequivocally realised that my work was *not a breakthrough* in the more conventional sense of the term. Like a fourth narcissistic wound — after Freud perhaps narcissistically self-proclaiming his work as the third (Horgan, 2015) — my eternal-student self was hurt by the failure of not knowing how to produce something special enough. Blinded by a romantic academic dream of being more than just helpful — of completely revolutionising psychology from within — I received this perception of failure with unrivalled pessimism. At that moment, I felt that, beyond the difficulty of writing in English and engaging with the complex philosophy that interests me, I had failed to be serviceable to academia.

Missteps, failure, hurt, pessimism, difficulty. These and other damaging words have stayed with me all these years as I worked on this project about what

goes wrong in psychotherapies. And, by contagion, this is how I slowly started feeling too. These colours, taking control of my collectivised body, began to institutionalise as a norm and a rigid line. A Brazilian motto — a joke, really — says, “I am a Brazilian, and I never give up.” Like that: in the first person, as a form of self-mockery that acknowledges how excessive effort may not yield the best results — but at least persistence produces some outcome, even if not the most desirable one. In my darkest hours, this self-mockery became my space to unwind, breathe, and return to work. But the risk of institutionalising failure in my writing never went away, and it recycles its menace in every word I write.

This issue is perhaps most evident in the parts of this section where I openly played with the dangers of failure, spinning them back into my arguments as the only way to accomplish my work — *it is by failing that I succeed*. I had to find something in my surroundings to cope with these forces because I chose to follow these lines — they attract me academically, somehow (and this attraction, by itself, could be why these lines institutionalise around my existence...). But I do not assume that my readers will have the same access to Brazilian self-mockery or any other strategy to fold failure into success. At the same time, I am fully aware that this worry could be unfounded — or even arrogant — on my part, as if I were trying to predict how people will relate to the pages of this trapizonga or, worse, as if I had momentarily fooled myself into thinking I had written ideas so incredible that the commonfolk would struggle to decode them. Nevertheless, my worry is genuine, and the narcissistic wound of not having created a genius work does not allow me to feel full of myself now.

When one writes about intensities, it is indeed difficult to forecast anything — this is not the strong suit of such work. Still, as this text was written using a symmetric approach and invites the reader to co-author the work, the chances of institutionalisation are not dim enough for me to skip this long consideration about safety. So, if the text somehow *breaks through into* you at any point (and here I am, almost proposing it... is there any way out?), please pause and breathe in. Breathe — not as a meditation technique nor a self-help gimmick — but simply to inflate existence with space. Space within your body, space away from hurt. Just a simple movement.

Of course, breathing is not *the* solution to the risks of institutionalisation. But, in the case of this text, it is probably the easiest way to reconnect to our most basic lived experience. For humans, breathing is the icon of birth and death. And *breath* is the etymological origin of the word *spirit*, the Latin alternative to *soul*, which we name *psyche* in the word psychology, derived from the Greek (Harper, 2001). So, breathing is also about reconnecting to our field of knowledge. Again, if this does not make sense to you, that is probably even better. Because it is by failing that I succeed. Is this acceptable?

Science or Arts? A Safeguard of Assemblages

- And you, what's your side?
- I'm on the side of Good. And you, what's your side?
- I'm on the side of Good, with the Light and the Angels.
*Legião Urbana, 1965 (Two Tribes)*²⁰

I have heard many times during the last years that my studies are focused on the “artistic side” of psychology. This point was raised so many times that I gave up counting my diary entries for this research when they reached ten written mentions of similar events, considering I was very far from the last entry. The remarks only got more frequent and more evident over time. I was also aware that I had not written down all the mentions, as those journal entries were intensive instead of extensive. Most mentions, though, seem to have served as a type of procedural prompt. These reminders have helped change the kind of engagement in my work from a more theoretical or “philosophical” one (my go-to place of comfort, as it helps to avoid openly speaking for myself) to a more experiential place. In these refreshed spaces of conversation, material from my background, my daily practices of research, and my feelings were resources to craft even the smallest of ideas.

This way of talking — a work that studies “art” — became a collective and intuitive shortcut in my everyday academic language. Of course, this quick way of mentioning my work left no space for brewing any sizable scholarly

²⁰ Legião Urbana [Urban Legion] was a Brazilian rock band from the 1980s and 90s, composed by Marcelo Bonfá, Dado Villa-Lobos and Renato Russo. This song from 1989, originally titled *1965 (Duas Tribos)*, is explicitly themed around the Brazilian civic-military dictatorship, which was imposed on the Brazilian people for 21 years following a U.S.-backed coup d'état in 1964. The translation is mine, from the original “—E você de que lado está? —Estou do lado do Bem. E você de que lado está? —Estou do lado do Bem, com a Luz e com os Anjos.”

disagreement over this topic — such dissent would make no sense. In my routine appointments and discussions, this shorthand was effective, and it was a strategy that suited a momentary purpose. Now that I write this long-considered makeshift document, though, I feel the room needs to be cleared before I can move forward. I worry that a reader engaging the trapizonga with an oppositional mind frame may undermine or at least misunderstand what this work can bring at its best. In blunter words, I mean that an implied question like “science or arts?” is a trap, at least within the scope of this trapizonga, if not more broadly.

The English word “art” comes from the Latin *ars*. Contemporarily, a loose definition taken from common sense would describe art as a wide range of human expressions that involves creativity and an aesthetic, spanning visual to performing arts of different kinds. One could even think of a well-known figure in the visual arts, like the painter Vincent van Gogh. Additionally, in Latin, *ars* is not only related to our concept of *fine arts* but also to *applied* and *decorative arts* — a difference that sounds within reason to most of us. What daily usage of the word “art” tends to erase is that its Latin root is closely intertwined with what we now call “science.” Art, then, in its Latin roots, is a broad term that encompasses *knowledge, technique, skilled work, or a craft* (Harper, 2001).

Schatzberg (2012) traces some of the complex lines in the historical relationship between art and science, highlighting the power struggles that culminated in their perception as two very distinct entities. Through a series of shifts in meaning, the older, more-encompassing understanding of the arts became ever more restricted to what we now understand as artistic. Similarly,

the word “science” — once used loosely and mainly as a synonym for art — started to gain authority, especially from the late Enlightenment onwards and finally in the 19th century with a discourse that wound up in the separation between *pure* and *applied* sciences after their estrangement from art.

A trusting pair of eyes could read these changes as a natural line of progression or as a result of humanity’s better understanding of the world: from a less defined concept of art-science to a more refined separation between what is, in fact, artistic and what is scientific. However, the pathways to what we now broadly accept as either art or science presented a more complex dispute than a simple development. Instead, Turner and Commins (2002) situate in the late 19th century — specifically in the United States — the discourse that claimed the definite primacy of natural sciences over all other types of knowledge. By the beginning of the 20th century, social sciences in the United States were broadly experimenting with alien methods artificially taken from a natural science environment. It was never for the progress of human knowledge; it was, indeed, an overt “coup d’état” (Turner & Commins, 2002, p. 771).

Schatzberg (2012) shows that Turner and Commins’s comment about the change in the meaning of science in the United States is also applicable to Britain. The struggle seems to broadly derive from industrialisation, in a period when artisans lost space to factory-made items. Beforehand, there was little to no difference between the words “artisan” and “artist.” Following the ascension of a new industrial middle class, the work of artisans was increasingly undermined to favour industrialised goods, as if by necessity. This capitalistic necessity enabled discourses that reinforced the divide between art and

artisanry, valuing the former in the shape of fine art and devaluing the latter as a less creative and ultimately less desirable skill (Schatzberg, 2012). This schism also created the idea of technology in the way we understand it nowadays, separated from the *tékhnē* — the Greek name for both art and knowledge²¹ (Harper, 2001) — and from science.

Yet, it was mostly through a “circular hermeneutics” (Turner & Commins, 2002, p. 755) that the term “science” became a perfect synonym for “natural science” in Anglophone countries. At the turn to the 20th century, historians of the U.S.A. largely accepted this implied meaning, ignoring that it was built upon a regional predilection for natural scientists and a lack of attention — if not disrespect — to what was happening in the non-Anglophone world (Turner & Commins, 2002). Instead, the early root for the English word “science” is in the Latin name *scientia* (Harper, 2001), which simply means “knowledge,” just like the Greek terms “*tékhnē*” and “*epistēmē*,” and the Latin word “*ars*.” While “knowledge” is an uncountable noun in English, “science” is countable. Despite being enumerable, “science” is still used in the singular form and without any descriptor when it implies “natural science” in daily conversation, which surreptitiously helps to strengthen the notion that this type of knowledge has a supposed primacy over all other forms of knowledge. Even more troubling is that this underlying assumption has been naturalised beyond the English language, possibly propelled by the global influence of English-speaking countries in

²¹ *Tékhnē* is not the only way to express “knowledge” in Greek. Another Greek word for knowledge is *epistēmē*. Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* makes the most famous distinction between these types of knowledge. Despite Plato’s almost interchangeable usage of the two terms, Aristotle posits that *tékhnē* needs human agency, whilst *epistēmē* requires a passive stance, as it comes from God (see also Schatzberg, 2012). Aristotle’s take on the matter could be interpreted as an insidious inflection point in the power struggles between terms.

shaping dominant epistemologies — issues tied to colonialism and the postwar order, which I will not pursue here but leave as an invitation for further attention. Now preponderantly understood as *the* science due to a coup d'état, natural science gains political traction to dictate the rules of what is scientific and what is not.

One thread to follow from discussing the primacy of science as knowledge, speaks to the overarching matter of this trapizonga: the English word “conscience” derives from the Latin *conscientia* (Harper, 2001), which adds a prefix to the word “science” and means “with knowledge” if translated to the letter. So, in Westernised practices, the term conscience implies that something or someone has “knowledge within.” If I may simplify the many loops and hurdles this topic brings with it from Western tradition alone, conscience appears as an inner property that qualitatively measures the existence of subjectivity (Lipman, 2023), at least since the Cartesian cognisant subject, and despite the Freudian unconscious. Cognition — or *to get to know* (Harper, 2001) — appears as the procedural ability to acquire consciousness. Thinking more broadly, then, the meaning of “knowledge” expands, going beyond the scope of what we generally call (natural) science.

I beg the reader’s pardon as I have used the expression *natural* science so far as a synonym for *empirical* science, which is not precise enough. Empirical science uses the *scientific method* — which I will loosely refer to from now on simply as the empirical method — as a systematic approach to acquiring knowledge (Silva, 2022). I am afraid not every study in natural science uses the empirical method. For instance, when studying events that cannot be replicated

like the Big Bang or the extinction of dinosaurs, even natural science needs to employ narrative approaches. In that direction, Wise (2011) revisits the struggles of physicists while navigating between the empirical method and historical narrative methods. After experimenting with different examples, Wise (2011) estimates that historical narratives might be invariably needed when studying complex systems. More than a century after the scientific coup d'état, it seems the artificial divide and subsequent hierarchisation between types of systematic knowledge hurt even the fields of expertise within the supposedly privileged group called natural science.

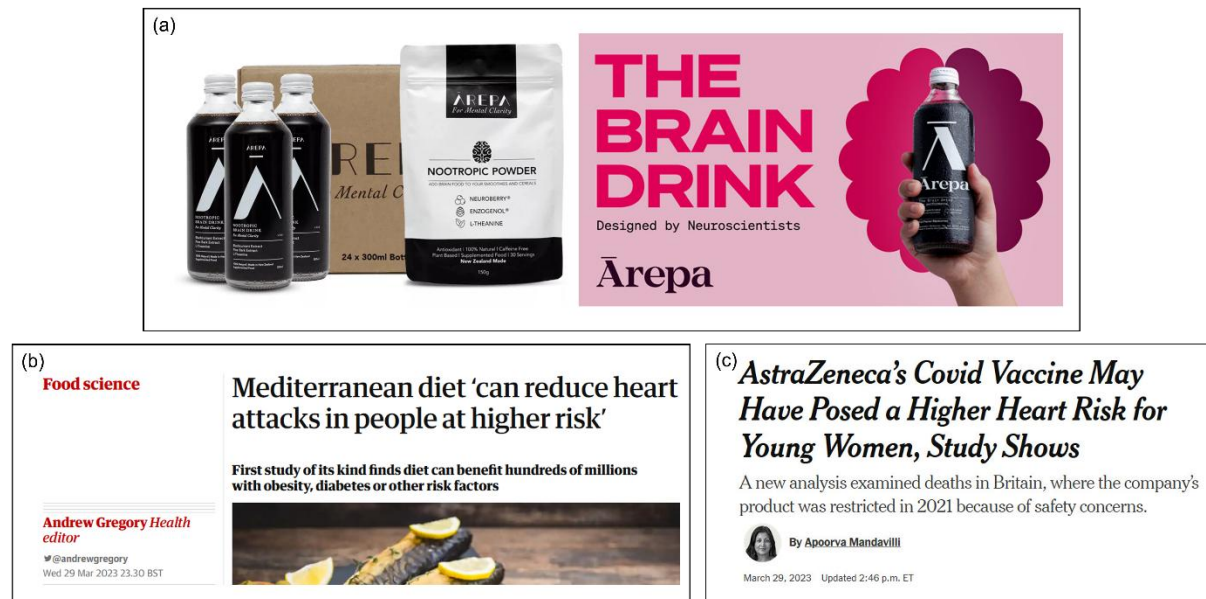
One of the effects of this change in the axis of power from the cluster art-techne-science to a natural-empirical monopoly is that expressions such as *hard* and *soft* science (Shapin, 2022), *formal* science, *pseudoscience*, and *pseudo-scholarship* (Lilienfeld et al., 2015) were brought to the centre of the arena. These terms carry deliberate judgment and create a dangerous intersection with discourses of Truth²² within academia. On the one hand, there is an absolute need to expose and combat non-systematic discourses that use jargon for the most diverse reasons, whether to instil perceived value or safety into commercial products, to borrow empirical science's autocratic power over the formally educated public, or to lead minoritarian and at-risk groups into further danger (see Figure 2 for examples). On the other hand, since the coup d'état, there has been widespread belief (even within certain academic groups) that the only way

²² Truth here is intentionally capitalised. It signifies Truth as the one and only correct discourse, reified and naturalised as such. However, such discourses are only true in a "historical a priori" sense — meaning the metaphysics of Truth is not beyond time, but rather produced by the discourses that exert clearer power at a certain moment in history (see Foucault, 1994).

to create systematic work — and therefore “true” science — is by following the one empirical method.

Figure 2

Quick Clipping of Ads and Headlines Using Scientific Jargon in Daily Contexts



Note.

(a) Arepa products promise to boost cleverness/cognitive function. Initially, they were advertised with the word “nootropic” attached to the brand. However, following a rebranding in 2022, the label now reads “Designed by Neuroscientists.” In both cases, scientific jargon was used to add credibility to the product. The very fact that the product appears to have been empirically tested at a certain stage of development serves as a means of increasing its commercial appeal, leading to profit. Available at: <https://www.meno-me.co.nz/win-brain-food-with-arepa/> and <https://www.mad-daily.com/new-look-for-brain-drink/>

(b) The Guardian announces the publication of a study — a systematic review comparing seven different dietary programmes for patients at risk of heart disease. However, the headline implies that the study conclusively identified the Mediterranean diet as *the* way to benefit patients, overlooking the nuances of the findings and potentially influencing readers’ dietary choices in a restrictive manner. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2023/mar/29/mediterranean-diet-can-reduce-heart-attacks-in-people-at-higher-risk>

(c) The New York Times reports on a UK government study examining cardiac mortality in young women after a single dose of AstraZeneca’s COVID-19 vaccine. The study’s finding of higher cardiac mortality in women raises at least two concerns: (i) the study was conducted in an at-risk cohort, which was already likely to exhibit higher mortality rates regardless of vaccine status; (ii) the oversimplified headline could instil fear in at-risk populations — especially young women — potentially leading them to refuse vaccination, even when offered by professionals. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/29/health/covid-vaccine-astra-zeneca-women-heart-risk.html>

Indeed, this now established dogmatic position in favour of only one way of “doing” knowledge equates science to religious faith, casting scientists as priests. But, just like psychology’s history has been compared to religion, industry, and market relations (Kvale, 2003), this type of restrictive positioning also leads to commodification and control of people’s lives and bodies.

*

Today, one of my conversations on campus ended up — again — in a discussion about the Cartesian establishment of modern science as an act of faith in a god that is not deceitful (Descartes, 1960). My undergrad-student self would never have imagined that the “old-style” Brazilian university degree I painfully endured to achieve would be so valuable to my present self. In these five-year qualifications, the first couple of years were allotted to teaching the basics of natural and social sciences, as well as the core principles in Western thought that led to our current insight into knowledge production. Scattered over two academic years, I took introductory classes in sociology, anthropology, neuroanatomy, biology, biochemistry, embryology, neurophysiology, statistics, and history of philosophy. I confess that seeing these topics in a list makes them sound quite interesting — and they genuinely are. But this broad introduction to psychology was very much a blow to my then-young system. A blast that makes me thankful nowadays, even if it probably would not fit within current university practices.

Indeed, I recall one class from my more senior years in undergrad, where a lecturer pointed out that she believed those two “basic” years had taught us indirectly how our Westernised surroundings colonised our minds. I kept those words untouched in my memories for the longest time and am still sorting them

out — as I do now, in writing this entry. Anyway, back then, she was discussing libertarian anarchic practices within society and how — even from a Westernised historical perspective — one could find threads to resist the institutions in place and build new ways of living. The discussion made the concept of parrhesia emerge in class. And Foucault was mentioned, as he took some time to study truth-telling as an enterprise in its relationship with morality and care for the self and the others, in the last bits of his work (Foucault, 2001). From the many tensions that come to mind between the concept of a Cartesian cognisant subject and that of a libertarian parrhesiast, one is particularly interesting to me: Descartes encapsulates true knowledge within a subject that knows, whilst the Foucauldian approach to truth-speaking acknowledges it occurs in a socius.

As localised systems of knowledge production, I do not dislike Cartesian rationalism, Baconian empiricism, or Popper's critical rationalism. But one must admit that, as pathways to knowledge, both rationalism and empiricism (and, by extension, Popperism) split the world and the knower into two completely independent entities. By supposedly existing beyond — before and after — the very world that produces them, men (and this is gendered on purpose!) create knowledge either by doubting their senses with calculations inspected by a non-deceiving god or by adhering to scrutinised sensory input in controlled environs. Even the preference for corroborated theories in Popper's falsifiability still circumscribes knowledge within individualistic effort, which is not surprising if

we consider Popper's (2002) critique of historicism²³. So, in these forms of knowledge, the attitude of the knower may be more passive or active toward the world, but knowing is always at least slightly disconnected from what is known.

On the other hand, a parrhesiast can only know within a given power struggle in the world. In this case, the separation between the knower and the known is unfeasible, as the knower's position in the socius validates the truth being spoken. So, instead of a passive empiricist observer, an active rationalist enforcer, or a Popperist commuting between both, the parrhesiast is an engaged participant in the ongoing construction of knowledge — locally. In very simple terms, parrhesia is the ability to talk back to power (Foucault, 2001). A parrhesiast accepts what is said as true, not as mere report but as testimony to the relational reality of the speaker. Parrhesia is not a skill or a technique but a stance, a modality of truth-saying that leaves no information deliberately concealed. It is only accessible to the disenfranchised in a relationship. Therefore, there is no parrhesia without risk — the parrhesiast's life is always on the line. Parrhesia, then, is knowledge that makes no sense apart from the world and only gains meaning through its proclaimer's attitude — locally.

Some problems remain in understanding this praxis, though. First and foremost, it emerges from the same misogynistic lineage that led to the "boy's club" of majoritarian empirical sciences. In fact, in ancient Greece, before being allowed

²³ Popper (2002) argues that historicism falsely assumes history follows deterministic laws, which would supposedly lead historicists to claim that large-scale predictions are possible. Instead, he contends that knowledge develops unpredictably through critical individual efforts, making any collective or law-like historical progression an illusion. His emphasis on *falsifiability* and *piecemeal social engineering* reflects this stance, as it privileges incremental, testable changes over broad systemic transformations — reinforcing his preference for individual contributions to knowledge over historical or structural determinations.

to practise parrhesia, one needed to be a citizen — a status granted only to Greek men (Foucault, 2001). More than wondering how much of today’s misogyny stems from ancient Greek practices, I worry about how this kind of “courageous stance” still finds a place within traits socially attributed to manhood. In that direction, Irigaray (1985) critiques Western philosophy’s phallogocentric structures, highlighting how female subjectivity has been marginalised — not merely by exclusion from discourse, but through the very structuring of who can be a subject of knowledge and truth-speaking — which reinforces concerns about the gendered beginnings of parrhesia. Similarly, Spivak (1988) discusses how subaltern voices — often those so structurally marginalised that their speech is rendered inaudible within dominant discourses — are not merely excluded but positioned outside the frameworks that make speech recognisable as such; this epistemic erasure complicates the possibility of expanding parrhesia beyond its original exclusions, as parrhesia still assumes a subject whose truth-speaking can be acknowledged, even if it is contested. The critiques of Irigaray and Spivak immediately make me question whether parrhesia can be expanded beyond its gendered beginnings. I do not know the final answer to this question. Still, I tentatively see how women can create spaces to exert parrhesia in our society, even within the minoritarian position imposed on womanhood — a position that, though structurally silencing, still holds cracks where truth-speaking might yet emerge. And, yes, maybe this possibility does not find an unrestricted echo, and that is fine. It would be a mistake to assume parrhesia is the one way to fight against injustice.

Indeed, parrhesia can be oversimplified and forcibly “applied” everywhere, even if such exercise stretches the concept to the point of destroying it — an issue

characteristic of our capitalistic times (Guattari & Rolnik, 2008). More than ever before, one is invited to participate in the complex geometry of online relationships, where surveillance, exposure, and self-expression intersect, creating grey territories of existence (Özçağlayan & Çelik, 2014). Parrhesia does not immediately fit well within such extractive and enclosing demands and could all too often be mistaken for the expression of a reified self or an identity, for instance.

If I may explore and expand the example above a tad further... It is rather interesting — but not surprising — when Breithaupt (2005) collects threads of German Romanticism to describe the “invention” of (psychological) trauma and how modern psychology was institutionalised as a promise to build victorious selves that triumph over an inevitably distressed existence. Indeed, the “traumatised individual” — just like some nuances of Özçağlayan and Çelik’s (2014) monitored, exposed, and self-expressive selves — is a model²⁴ of subjectivation that psychology has cultivated dearly over the centuries, as it reifies life in the individual sphere and creates identity labels that are quickly and easily recognisable. Entrapped in such roles, our individualised lives are denied parrhesia. In fact, the privatisation of the self not only authorises modern psychology but also limits participation in constructing contextual knowledge, especially when the institutions in place perform productive power, coding life into pre-established market-driven modes of subjectivity (Guattari & Rolnik, 2008).

²⁴ It may be important to note that this expression naughtily derives from *modes of subjectification* as found in Deleuze and Guattari’s work. The issue here is that modes of subjectification are diverse, whereas models of subjectification constrain these possible modes into highly restricted options — forming a rigid segmentary line that cuts the flux of multiple possibilities (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

In a sense — just like in the libertarian anarchic practices discussed during my undergrad — when someone struggling in life seeks psychological help, the captured voice that asks for help must first be liberated from these individualised forms of pain before it can speak truth to power. Unfortunately, I suppose psychology’s hegemonic institutionalised protocols — whether in the form of rigidified diagnostic classifications, over-standardised treatment models, demands for commodified measurable therapeutic outcomes, and so on — often do not allow for the time, commitment, or patience (or even knowledge) necessary for parrhesia to occur inside a therapeutic space, despite the openness of an ethical and engaged professional. I suspect this ever-interrupted process is where negative pain perdures, and failure is built into the psychotherapeutic institution as the “excluded-included” — just as capitalism needs embedded poverty within its internal fringes to sustain its prosperity for some (Guattari & Rolnik, 2008).

*

I am not a preacher, an industrialist, or a businessman. And despite appreciating how Kvale (2003) has framed institutionalised psychology in his sprouting metaphorical analysis, I will resist being confined by these outlines. So, the trapizonga is not a cathedral, a power loom, or a prêt-à-porter knickknack. Indeed, there is no salvation at the end of this document, and reading it should, hopefully, feel more liberating than any sort of purgatory (considering there is no purging needed in such a trapizonga-esque ever-layering configuration). At the same time, the empirical method is not to be demonised. If this written safeguard appears to stand against empiricism so far, it means the one point I am trying to make was lost somewhere in the previous paragraphs

and must be reinstated: an oppositional mind frame is a trap, at least inside the trapizonga, if not more broadly. As a matter of fact, the empirical method can produce useful knowledge, and I *choose* to believe most scientists operating within its boundaries are well-intended. However, in order to open this document to transversality, certain autocratic academic habits must subside. A piece of work that celebrates difference requires a disposition to sit side-by-side with what is disparate (Guattari, 1984).

And this is precisely the point I have been trying to make so far: the reason empirical science appears as a misdirected “opponent” in this text is that this way of producing knowledge gained its political power not through reason or organic advancement but through industrial capitalist interests (Schatzberg, 2012) and a repetitive interpretation by Anglophone scholars (Turner and Commins, 2002). Rather than empirical science itself, the concern is the coup d’état suffered by art-techne-science and the implanted notion of superiority granted to only one way of producing knowledge²⁵ over any other systematic approach. This dominating force continues to strive to keep artisanry out of the scope of higher-end epistemes. Perhaps the best way to make sense of this is to step away for a moment and let the wood speak for itself. This might seem like a detour, but stay with me — sometimes the best way to get somewhere is not in a straight line.

Artisanry deals with difference. A log that becomes a solid wood artefact by the hands of a woodworker — may it be a table or a chair — somewhat

²⁵ And here, it could well be “one-way products of knowledge” to mark the disposable character of what must be produced: an alienated form of science that disregards articles more than ten years old (or two to three years in certain fields). By erasing the multiple overarching historical processes that lead to a conclusion, science too enters in the Fordist era.

commands the possibilities of its transformation into furniture. Before becoming a resource, the hardwood tree grew without human control, establishing relationships with other plants, bugs and all the natural and social elements surrounding it. In that sense, prior to being utilised, a log needs to be singularly understood in its curves and colours, different girths, and variations in age. It needs to be appreciated and prolongedly stared at before an artisan defines where and how to explore and expose the wood veins to produce their work. The log also forces certain shapes and details on the end-product. The metaknowledge of the woodworker stays with them, but each log imposes a brand-new start. There are no general schematics to be drawn because there is only a small degree of predictability. Each time, a personalised scheme is needed, but it may change during the process, as the inner parts of the still-to-be-known wood get slowly exposed. Moreover, there are infinite ways to transform the wood, and there will always be an aesthetic choice. The entrances are multiple, and the process is led by *singularity* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

When transformed into straight planks of timber, wood is standardised in such a way that crafting unique solid wood pieces becomes increasingly rare, if not entirely displaced. It may become a simple shelf or a geometric pillar, but nothing much beyond that. However, such planks — made from softwood that rapidly grows in human-controlled plantations — can be engineered like jigsaw pieces in predictable and replicable patterns to be transformed into items. Such technological innovation removes the woodworker and their manual tools from the centre of the scene, replacing them with automatic machinery and factory workers who no longer need to understand the entirety of the process. Now, only

a few engineers have access to the schematics of the entire production line. Beyond that, this transformation creates a new aesthetics based on mass production. Even the few remaining woodworkers will tend to replicate assembled work in workshops that reproduce controlled processes with electric equipment — either giving up the labour of creation or, despite all odds, subverting the industrial logic from within to reintroduce creation. In such a setting, the entrance points feel more constrained, and the keyword is *repetition* (Deleuze, 1994).

This discussion on artisanry and technology is not abstract; it stems from a friction between work and two different pieces of furniture — my own lounge table and a table in my parents' home in Brazil, a gift from friends who had lost their matriarch. One day, working “old-style” with papers, I found my writing had imprinted itself onto the pine surface despite the protective layer I had carefully placed. It made me furious. And in that moment, my memory drifted to the table at my parents' home, one that carried its own history — a weight that contrasted with the disposable smoothness of mine. It was then that the parallel between artisanry and engineering took shape — less as an abstract idea than as something lived, inscribed in wood. The concerns of this trapizonga emerge with fragments similar to this one — not from a singular origin but from what remains, what persists. They take shape as entrance points, constrained and formed by the materials they engage with. Some allow deeper grooves, others demand surface strokes, yet all leave traces. The woodworker, the engineer, the writer — each navigates resistances, thresholds, and the transformations their

medium affords. If there is a story here, it is one carved from the residue of working with what is at hand.

The observant reader may have noticed that this safeguard section — first appearing as a dispute between the envious arts and the one reasonable empirical science — has ultimately unfolded into a reflection on the procedural difference between artisanry and technology. And I am aware that this extended consideration about woodwork might tempt a reading of opposition as if I were advocating a return to artisanry in an aesthetic yearning of sorts. But please, do not be tricked by these perceived or localised oppositions. If artisanry engages with singularity and the unpredictable demands of material, and technology streamlines production through repetition and efficiency, then the question is not which one to favour, but how these modes of working shape what can be thought, known, and created (Foucault, 1976/1990; 1995). The trapizonga is neither a lament nor a manifesto; it is both difference-producing repetition (Deleuze, 1994) and singularity-in-flux (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), and it will only achieve its desired significance as such. It takes sides — but not in any devoted way. It moves between modes of production, teasing and caressing them, paying respects and offering insults in the same breath.

The artisan, in learning from the wood, does not impose a singular path but instead co-composes with its knots and veins, responding to constraints without forcing them into a preordained schematic. The engineer, in overseeing the production of timber planks, operates under different demands — ensuring efficiency, predictability, and reproducibility. In doing so, knowledge is structured differently: one mode accumulates an intimate, embedded

understanding of material; the other abstracts and codifies processes so they can be replicated at scale. If knowledge production operates through regimented methodologies, the trapizonga refuses to be tamed; it works between these systems, bending, undoing, and reassembling their logics. This movement is not a call to abandon systematisation, nor is it an embrace of pure contingency. It is an insistence on transversality (Guattari, 2015a), on the necessity of keeping both repetition and singularity in play. This is where the trapizonga thrives: in the tensions, in the back-and-forths, in the gaps where something new might emerge. The peculiar machine of this document does not simply critique; it performs its own engagement with what it addresses, continuously shifting and undoing as it goes. Indeed, such a peculiar *machine* works everywhere in this document.

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A surprise brought by Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work is that machines appear everywhere in it, from a machinic unconscious to a machine of war and desiring-machines. What is at stake in each of these ideas is that, in simple terms, machines produce. So, the focus of such notions is on *production*. Indeed, in their work, the duo production-creation appeared at first as a critique of the familial triangulation of the psychoanalytical Oedipus (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). Whatever goes beyond consciousness — which we once defined as the theatrical unconscious, established in the Freudo-Lacanian tradition — now reappears, not entrapped in a web of meanings, but instead as a productive Spinozian field of forces. The focus shifts away from the raw material that enters the manufacturing machine and its processed products. Despite still having

entrance points and end products — much like the previous discussion about making wooden artefacts — the very process of production is what matters when machines are evoked. In this trapizonga, production mostly occurs while the makeshift document unfolds.

Yet, a machine does not negate systems of meaning produced historically and locally (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). On the contrary, examining production processes and forces of a machinic unconscious exposes the phantasmic creations of a time, distinguishing a certain number of possible meanings, but not the one unequivocal (and illusive) signification. So, Freud and Lacan were not delusional when they saw an unconscious formation resembling a tabooed domestic love triangle. Instead, the actual ethico-aesthetic-political forces of that society produced Oedipus as a majoritarian performance (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). Awareness of the situatedness of this system allows us to acknowledge it — and to point out its specificities, changes, and renovations — when it still happens in our time. It also provides an understanding of diverse systems of meaning, locally. Ultimately, the careful appreciation of machines allows minoritarian forces to be made visible, which transforms the very act of perceiving (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). Finally, this trapizonga expands into three simultaneous movements or tasks, following machinic processuality instead of prescriptive interpretation — a differentiating approach that, from here, also borrows the name schizoanalysis (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; 1987). These schizoanalytic movements are not prescriptions but machinic processes themselves, like fractal germinations that multiply, creating both localised and broader designs, singularly.

The first task is negative: to terminate anything that separates a life from its potentialities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). When meanings are taken as ahistorical and absolute, local structures like Oedipus (or specific modes of knowledge production like empirical science) are understood as the Truth instead of bearing truthful contextual insights (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). A crucial issue in this safeguard section is to make visible some of the processes by which such structures, once assumed to be ahistorical and absolute, are naturalised as the univocal reality. In fact, Aotearoa's stories probably have more Oedipean influence after colonisation than is often acknowledged. Still, the exhaustive empirical scientific discourse I found in this mostly-Anglophone, colonised land territorialises people's perceptions, classification systems, feelings, and pain — consolidating such frameworks in favour of an averaged, calculated, probable person that does not exist in real life. It is true that Deleuze and Guattari (1983) specifically wrote to an all-encompassing Oedipus found in 1960s France. However, their point seemed to be less about denying the existence of a Freudo-Lacanian Oedipean structure and more about calling attention to how reified modalities of knowledge tend to produce non-negotiable affective preferences over time, hiding the singular processes unspooling in a life. Indeed, desiring-machines ignore Oedipus just as much as they ignore empirical scientific knowledge and any other majoritarian enforcer (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). And the negative movement of schizoanalysis stands to release production from its captors — even capitalism... — in order to enable the other concomitant schizoanalytic tasks.

The second and third tasks are positive. The first positive task is to refrain from interpreting and focus on analysing the functions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). A machine only makes sense in its processes of production: how and where they work, which bonds they make with other machines, and which processes stop or enhance their mechanisms. In complex (political) lines of production, there are only machines connecting with machines, and that is all there is to it — there is no hidden meaning in a process. So, whenever a process is interrupted by rigid segments — such as: “I wanted to have a muscular body,” “I wish I could buy a better car,” or “if only he looked at me with that same interest” — the articulated desire may appear with an individualised meaning of lack or longing, but the schizoanalyst is attentive to understand which lines (whether molecular or lines of flight) singularly reconnect these cuts to other machinic processes. A desiring-machine, in that sense, is never produced by a lack — of exercise, money, or love. In the allegory that compares desire to a carrot on a stick in front of a horse, the carrot that keeps the horse moving is there not for the horse, but for the person who supposes they own and control the animal. By definition, nothing lacks for the horse. The equine moves because it knows how to trot: the carrot is an enslaving distraction, not the enabler of the process (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Indeed, a perceived cut in a process only points to other lines or machines that interfere with the one process that was supposedly being followed. The disentanglement pursued by the negative task of dismantling molar segmentations that restrict life’s potentialities seeks to allow these other processes to present themselves.

The third concurrent movement of schizoanalysis, and the second positive task, stems from the assertion that production only happens when invested in social machines (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). Put simply, there is no production that is merely theoretical, or a process that occurs outside of a socius. Muscles, vehicles, and attention-seeking only make sense in a life that is lived, embodied, and contextualised. As a result, schizoanalysis cannot only stick to the examination of social machines, taking the subject as a cog or user. Nor can schizoanalysis confine itself to examining treasured technical machines, even if they are perfected — or manufactured by bricolage — by the subject. Finally, it cannot limit itself to the examination of the subject's usage of machines in their dreams and phantasmic meanings. The complexity brought by this last movement is again aided by the negative task, in an agonistic relationship that strives to go beyond social, technical, and interpretative factors, reintroducing the process in a machine of pure difference (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

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As I started mentioning before, this trapizonga understands its place as a schizoanalytic machine. So, there is unsolvable tension in every bit of this text. In it, language — which is akin to interpretation in our most prominent critical practices in academia — arises in social, technical, ecological, institutional, ethico-aesthetic-political lines (and so on...) that function beyond what is more strictly enclosed in a perceived “meaning.” And language itself — or, better saying, expression — only exists within multi-layered machines (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Much like Escher's drawings — in which climbing stairs may bring someone to the lower floor, and getting to the bottom of waterfalls may

lead to the top of the water stream — expression does not adhere to a unitary machine of reference: a process once referred to as the infinite task of interpretation (Foucault, 1998). Following this acknowledgement, instead of trying to control the unfolding of these multiple productions, the trapizonga travels by such lines as they derive, taking notes and letting meanings diverge.

Let me reconnect the schizoanalytic effort to the previous discussion about modes of knowledge production and the coup d'état imposed upon art-technoscience. Indeed, I shall point out that the trapizonga openly understands its existence as an *assemblage*²⁶ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) — seen as a diagram in Figure 3. It is, to begin with (but not initially), a “collective assemblage of enunciation” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 88): a segment of expression, with its acts and utterances. Such enunciations impose incorporeal transformations that are ascribed to bodies²⁷. In the case of this text, the partial result of a long, complex battle of enunciations (or discourses) dictates what it means to make science in the 21st century and what it means to create art or technology. In varying degrees of precision, this battle also defines which meanings can be negotiated and which changes appear as non-negotiable. For instance, technological advancement in the extraction of pigments was necessary before Van Gogh could use the newly found cadmium yellow in his paintings. However,

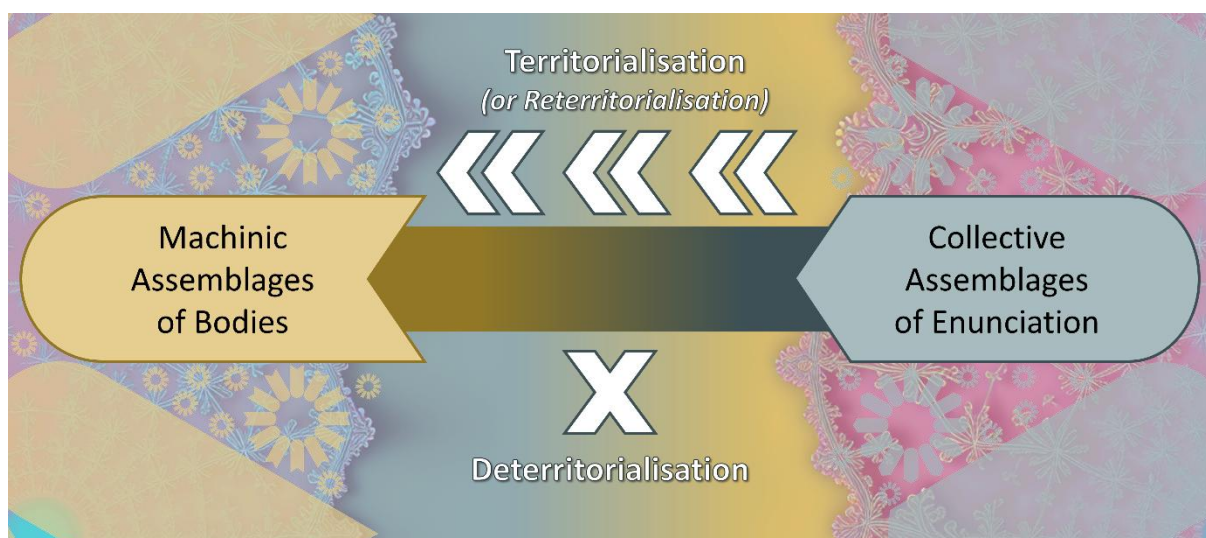
²⁶ The term “assemblage” is the standard translation of Deleuze and Guattari’s “agencement,” but it is not without problems. As Thomas Nail (2017) explains, “assemblage” implies a coming-together of pre-existing parts, whereas “agencement” emphasises the arrangement or composition of heterogeneous elements in a way that produces emergent properties. This distinction is crucial when discussing multiplicities, as it shifts the focus from an additive model to a relational mode of co-emergence. See Thomas Nail (2017), What is an assemblage?, *SubStance*, 46(1), 21–37. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2017.0001>

²⁷ Bodies here are understood very openly, not only as human bodies. From tiny, molecular, imperceptible bodies to cities, forests, biomes, the universe, or even a body of work (more on Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

despite being enabled by technology, what makes him a well-known artist is not this or that avant-garde pigment in his work but how he uses them to produce the brush strokes on his post-impressionist canvases. Likewise, a whole field of scientific inquiry has derived from the fading colours of his paintings, making use of its highly specialised diffractive, fluorescent, and spectroscopic methods (van der Snickt et al., 2012). Such *scientific* endeavours even created lines of work that propose *technical* solutions to *artistically* restore the long-lost colours of Van Gogh's paintings. Here and there, art, technology, and science dance along blurred lines, yet persistently struggle to reassert the divide naturalised by the daily use of collective utterances.

Figure 3

The Nature of Assemblages



Note. The horizontal axis of an assemblage has two segments: one of expression (or enunciation) and one of content (or bodies). The expression segment is collective, and the content segment is machinic. These segments are perceived as more or less coupled due to a vertical axis of territorialisations, deterritorialisations, and reterritorialisations, characterised here as a gap on a fractal with either connective arrows (◀) of flux or the blocking (X) of cut. *Fractal edited with von Goethe's symmetric colours, over a design calculated in the free app Fractal Map by Michael G.*

As I started to point out, the expression segment of an assemblage imposes incorporeal transformations on bodies. These bodies intermingle in a content segment, which is a “machinic assemblage of bodies” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 88). Indeed, such a segment is made of actions and passions (or affections). In our example, before turning into at least 13 different psychological accounts (Runyan, 1981) and even prior to becoming a bizarre gift to a sex worker, Van Gogh’s left earlobe was just a body. Or — being precise — it was particles of a body that were then detached from the one localised body with a blade-body, creating at least two new perceived bodies out of this one encounter (and probably other bodies of hair or blood on the floor, on the knife, on the shirt, and so on). In this case, it is psychological knowledge that (en)forces a discourse of anger, madness, and inadequacy. Still, the enunciation segment could well be about the outsider manners of art geniuses or how Van Gogh was perhaps experiencing the tertiary stage of syphilis attacking his brain, due to a promiscuous lifestyle. Beyond that, in theory, without any connection to expression, the content segment would only have movement and clash of bodies (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Before I can move on to explore the vertical axis of assemblages, there is at least one issue that calls for further explanation. As I was trying to point out, the segment of content is not to be confounded with the exercise of a particular type of objective language that would be opposed to an expressive neuroticism of sorts. Surely, there is an embarrassment when using words (or any other type of symbolic means) to give approximate descriptions of a machinic assemblage of bodies, because symbolic intermediation is not present in this segment. Any

tentative explanation is already an expression, and it immediately enacts the enforcement of a collective assemblage of enunciation over the content segment. This issue remains with (and also includes) any reasoning of the so-called “scientific” type, with its efforts to be clear and distinct, as if it were possible²⁸. At the same time, this point of tension requires the assertion that each of the two segments exists in ever-changing relation to the other, one pointing to the other and bringing them back to the assemblage’s *multiple unit*²⁹. And the incorporeal transformations ascribed to bodies by an expression segment may end up producing corporeal transformations in the content segment alike (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

However, there is no necessary or causal relationship between these two sets of transformations, and it is not a given that they will occur concurrently or at all. While machinic and collective assemblages share similar processes, they happen independently at each segment of the horizontal axis of an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). If I go back to the example — detached from Van Gogh’s body, an earlobe no longer accepts the title of artist or painter. It can now become an unsettling sexual gift, a sign of madness, or a piece of grotesque realism — corporeal transformations leading to incorporeal, expressive ones. But what allowed the appearance of an earlobe-body in the first place — the

²⁸ Since at least 1967, in the paper sent to the Société française de Philosophie called *The Method of Dramatisation*, and until his last interview — given to Claire Parnet and video-recorded as *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* — Deleuze consistently used the term “dark precursor” to argue that language is distinct and obscure. This stems from the notion that only difference exists, and these notable points (here, language) are effects of different potentials in reactive state due to a precursor that cannot be satisfactorily identified. Approximations and distances between potentials seem to enable such precursors, yet their status as always already expressions — as soon as they are enunciated — renders them illusory as reinstated beginnings.

²⁹ This is not a typo; there is no “s” after *unit*, here. It refers to a unit that is multiple — a multiplicity (more on Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

expression that produced an incorporeal transformation allowing or indirectly precipitating such specific intermingling of bodies — is not clear. And, historically, this bit of the expression segment was readily populated with a plethora of psychological enunciations — sometimes with teleological endeavours, other times due to simple scopophilia or voyeurism (Runyan, 1981).

Certainly, a rather disconcerting point that assemblages make is that, fundamentally, the segment of expression does not represent or refer to the segment of content, and vice versa (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Despite always demanding each other, the segments of the horizontal axis of assemblages create series only within their own segments. On the one hand, there is nothing to be finally uncovered that will reveal the “true nature” of the content. Like the coup d'état imposed upon the cluster art-techne-science, the forces transforming any meaning are occasional and localised (and therefore political). But the incorporeal effects can be — and, in fact, are in this case — long-lasting and widely spread. So much so that these transformations constrain or enable new expressive connections, valuing certain discourses (systematic knowledge exclusively as the one empirical science) whilst devaluing others (artisanry as a lesser form of art or technology).

On the other hand, as language is not representational, changes in content do not enforce changes in expression (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Despite having mutilated an earlobe two years before dying, Van Gogh's first name did not change, just as it remained the same throughout his childhood and teenage years, despite the many molecular changes in the composition of his body. In fact, the name Vincent was given to his older brother as well, who was stillborn

just a year before Van Gogh's birth (Blum, 2009). So, in this expressive series, "Vincent" actually means "son," in a sense, and goes beyond the painter we recognise. And it makes sense in Van Gogh's so-called "delusion" of being a double or a twin, or even a replacement — which modern psychiatry would probably so quickly label as derealisation. Here again, expression is something other than a precise characterisation of the content. It is more like an adjudication.

Moving on to the vertical axis of the multiple unit of an assemblage, what provisionally attaches collective assemblages to machinic assemblages is an axis of territorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Two segments — one of content and one of expression — may create a territory together, with an amount of stability and for a certain period. The borders of these territories — their disputed boundaries — are privileged loci that may connect to other assemblages (producing never-ending series of "assemblages of assemblages" ...), either creating clusters of expression or restructuring the territories altogether.

For instance, in this work, words like *trapizonga*, *symmetry*, *coup d'état*, and *art-techne-science* already remount to assemblages with almost entirely specific territories. Someone not reading this trapizonga would probably have difficulties reconnecting these terms to the bodies they are bound to locally in the same way, outside of this context. Other terms — like *ethico-aesthetic-political*, *parrhesia*, and even the word *assemblage* — were borrowed from more consensual territories. However, their meanings in this text remain circumscribed to particular philosophies and bodies of academic traditions, limiting their territorial extension. My very effort in performing and explaining

concepts and ideas with situated examples and in ways that serve this work's purpose also dislocates the territories of assemblages. This effort could even produce a disagreement with other scholars who already have their understanding of what these terms *should* mean and refer to, leading to a dispute or a captivating conversation. Indeed, the centre of a territory seems much easier to define and recognise in agreeable ways than its borders (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Paradoxically, an assemblage is generally more readily recognisable by its processes of border-locating rather than by a stable territorial centre. Relocation emphasises the geopolitical nature of territories, as it positions expressions and bodies back in the complex and multi-layered schizoanalytic machine. So, the vertical axis of assemblages refers not only to processes of territorialisation but also to deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Such movements occur either by attempting to express sameness each time — producing expressions submitted to restrictive language, like the empirical scientific endeavour to establish constants that are always identical, categorising different clusters of bodies with repetitive terms, or the name Van Gogh following ever-changing bodies until inhabiting a body of work — or by entering a line of flight, where perceived meanings might overtly change, leading to the possibility of recognisable movement in a territory. Indeed, these territorial movements — their deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations — continuously take place across diverse layers, like in a fractal: infra-assemblages, intra-assemblages and inter-assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). A river, a person, or a concept appearing as distinct units individually and collectively

often obscure the processes that sustain their minimally cohesive existential territories. Cohesion is maintained through processes of metastability (Simondon, 1992): derivations (even when a river's borders change along with the passing water, it is still the same river) and co-optations (an amount of treated piped water thrown into a passing river becomes part of the river). In every case, blocks of content and expression are constantly being adjusted to fit the changes needed to maintain the appearance of consistency. And it is in cracks of these adjustments that the vertical axis may be more easily recognisable.

If I may bring back my unreasonable little box of examples, when I try to think of how deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations happen, I always picture kids playing a travel game I know by the name *word-repeat*. In that game, someone chooses any word, and the other kids repeat it out loud non-stop until it loses meaning. It may feel a tad maddening to an outside spectator. Still, many laughs come from trying to remember what the word meant at first. But there is no guarantee that the word will lose meaning, in which case the game is not funny. And sometimes, the fun comes from the syllables in the words getting inverted and lost in the process, creating non-word words (*mascot* → *cotmas*), or from the inverted syllables changing the word's meaning (*burnside* → *sideburns*; *inside* → *siding*). Of course, this is a benign and partial example with limited practical utility in this trapizonga. Still, I believe it exposes how frail a collective utterance is in its territorial connection to the bodies it claims to express. Collaterally, it also showcases how easily a collective segment might produce series.

Within academia, the vertical axis of assemblages also allows, explains, and evinces the dislocations of knowledge from historically well-bound, highly formatted disciplinary fields to hybrid spaces that resist single denomination. In this sense, the idea of *transdisciplinarity* (Guattari, 2015a) can act as a “non-model exemplar” of such disputed borders. Indeed, some academic disciplines will be inclined to *découper* a linear history of progression in which collaboration between fields would first have led to *multidisciplinarity*: an almost-idyllic time when the borders of disciplines were clear and distinct, and various professionals offered their specialised gaze toward a communal object being studied (Choi & Pak, 2006). Then, *interdisciplinarity* would have followed as a specialisation, fusing two or more fields to enhance the quality, detail, and focus of knowledge outputs — neuropsychology, psychopedagogy, neuropsychopharmacology... When recounting what is often framed as a history of progress and advancement, the territorial movements that led from separate disciplines working around a table to specific reified clusters of knowledge might be highlighted as a turn toward further specialism and a broader breadth in the expert’s gaze (Klein, 2010). It indeed produces ever more particular problems to be solved in the very moment that new territories are enacted. Now, beyond a neurology, a psychology, a psychiatry, and a pharmacology there is also a neuropsychopharmacology with its own peculiar questions and explanations. In that specific sense, interdisciplinarity acts by colonising new territories, reinforcing structured hierarchies of knowledge production (Latour, 1987). It is true that such territories have a degree of recognisable hybridity, as the interdisciplinary territory is forcibly established in what were indefinite and liminal spaces

between territories. But it somewhat erases or ignores the tensions of such geopolitical entanglements, just as traditional disciplinary fields continue pretending their sovereignty remains placid (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994).

At the same time, the build-up of such a perceived need for interspace is not strictly colonial. It is assembled in this way chiefly because disciplinary power ascribes the function of border patrolling to institutions that employ ever more specialised techno-architectural surveillance bodies (Foucault, 1995), displacing the historical centrality of the panopticon — including high-definition cameras in public areas that monitor behaviour; the GPS of smartphones, enabling constant location tracking; facial recognition software identifying individuals at airports, borders, and urban spaces; AI-driven predictive policing that determines areas of “risk”; automated emotion detection software used in hiring and security screenings; and even health-tracking apps that collect biometric data for insurers and employers, influencing access to benefits. But even after someone internalises such institutional boundaries, minoritarian hidden spots and indecisive borders exist everywhere in these territories (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Rather than subscribing to a teleological logic in narrating the history of academic disciplines, this trapizonga occupies a site of tension within it — where disciplining movements can be unsettled and resisted in their unfolding. It does not align with majoritarian ideals without critique; rather, this text acknowledges that the vertical axis of assemblages enables the movements narrated in Guattari’s (2015a) non-model exemplar of transdisciplinarity to unfold in a non-linear fashion — not from a unitary past to a single future, but in

complex, layered processes occurring at every moment (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Even if someone can attach particular beginnings and ends in a linear history, these remain — just like my example of word-repeat games — only partial.

Transdisciplinarity, then, appears as the first layer of an ethico-aesthetic-political code scrambler (Guattari, 2015a). This writing actively insists on resisting the colonialist strategies of academic disciplines, multidisciplinarity, and interdisciplinarity. Yet, it is from within their tensely established borders — without trying to erase, control, or substitute their existences — that transdisciplinarity works. In such a case, the commitment to local understandings is an ethico-parrhesiastic choice in any cognitive elaboration offered within this trapizonga's tensed frontiers. These cognitive elaborations are also inseparable from the values they imply — whether colonial or libertarian, socially engaged or blindly locked in academia. So, there is risk everywhere, from neo-colonialism to the replication of fraudulent plurality. And the non-prescriptive tasks of schizoanalysis are my spinning gyroscope as I move forward, trying to avoid building either an instrument of domination or an over-coded pantomime.

So, if I may recap, this is where we have arrived in our exploration of assemblages as multiplicities: a horizontal axis of enunciations and contents, a vertical axis of territorialisations and its border movements, which bind or detach the horizontal segments, and a non-guaranteed transversal that acknowledges the fractal trimmings locally. In fact, transversality is a symmetric hue of transdisciplinarity (Guattari, 2015a; 2015b), struggling to liberate

(academic) processes from disciplinary power. In a narrow sense, transversality is not required for an assemblage to exist. It runs beyond, beside, and between the two necessary axes. But it would be foolish to suppose these transversals are secondary processes. The three schizoanalytic tasks, in fact, depend on a considerable coefficient of transversality to perform (Guattari, 1984). By scrambling the pre-coded logics of an existential territory at its disputed boundaries, transversality exposes, assesses, and resizes the dangers of nonsense, the horrors of territorial invasion, the certainties of academic production, and so on.

This change in the image of thought is not trivial: it fractures the usual logic of sense, producing repetitions of difference and ever-changing reiterations reconnected to intensities that may be actualised at any given moment in a process of production (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). So, the role of language in this trapizonga — expanded as expression — is not univocal. At least in this work — and perhaps more broadly — even if signs contain a degree of arbitrariness (de Saussure, 1959/2011), they are not categorically connected to a unidimensional web of acoustic sounds. Nor are they locked in a rational system of forms disconnected from substances. Here, each exposed disputed border evinces the local arbitrations that ascribe incorporeal transformations to bodies at every moment. If de Saussure (1959/2011) pointed to the *arbitrariness* of the sign, what is emphasised here is its *arbitration* — meaning does not float free but is actively distributed, adjusted, and reconfigured at every institutional border. In that sense, language is put back into the ethico-aesthetic-political schizoanalytic machine, giving expression to a multitude of possibilities, while a life unspools at

the fringes of a multivocal fractal of assemblages. What I ultimately mean is that, in this trapizonga, there *is* more than one way of producing systematic knowledge.

*

This section operated as a safeguard to the trapizonga, marking a zone where meaning, discipline, and language are neither fully over-coded nor entirely deterritorialised. In it, assemblages navigated the tensions between majoritarian structures and the minoritarian resistances that unsettle them. Rather than defining stable meanings, the safeguard has sought to show how words — like disciplines themselves — are embedded in multiplicities that constantly shift, fragment, and recombine. Even if I caroused with several words and dismantled some of their most naturalised meanings in majoritarian discourses, their connotations did not exactly or fully change. Knowing that the cluster art-techne-science suffered a coup d'état may reposition a few of the reader's assumptions — a welcome incorporeal transformation that helps portray the issue of assemblages — but it does not alter the fact that, almost everywhere, the term “science” will continue to be used as a synonym for “empirical natural science” — at least for now, at least while science is collectively accepted as primarily such, even if someone thinks not rightfully so. As I explored with the diagram of assemblages, words do *not* represent or refer to things; they are less or more territorialised arbitrations that leave incorporeal marks on bodies.

Ultimately, we may have traversed too long of a steep road for simply going back to using art, technology, and science as synonyms. Still, in the context of this trapizonga, I invite you to journey into such a hybrid affiliation. And I

welcome you as my accomplice, silently gazing back at me with cheeky acknowledgement whenever I shift between procedural modes — whether by forcing the vertical axis of this trapizonga-assemblage or by following a sequence of “assemblages of assemblages.” Like an artisan who calmly examines a hardwood log, I will sometimes take my time inspecting clusters of expression before sculpting with them. Other times, I will simply build with blocks of pre-made softwood knowledge, hopefully achieving something other than pure reproduction of sameness. At last, this trapizonga is not a crash course in the form of a thesis designed to establish a new therapeutic protocol. Instead, it is an ethico-aesthetic-political machine with multiple open ends (and therefore entrances too), endeavouring to expose a small number of the inner bits of psychology’s metaknowledge (in its art, techne, and science), hopefully returning our practices to a parrhesiastic and responsible change — one that furthers care of the self and the other.

Figuring the Forces of Failure: Expectations, Becoming-Failure, Events

- In the end, everything works out... [...]
- If it didn't work out, it's because it's not over yet.
*Fernando Sabino, As My Father Used to Say*³⁰

By now, you are a little bit familiarised with this trapizonga. And you also know that, until this moment, I have mostly declined to talk about therapeutic work and failure openly. Still, I gave you a hint or two here and there to keep things in check. And I tried to minimally set the hues of ethics, aesthetics, and politics of how I am stepping into this symmetric oeuvre while inviting you to author it along with me. Also, by putting the trapizonga-machine to produce, I detailed the multiple unit of assemblages, the three vital schizoanalytic movements aided by transversality, and the unbreakable belonging constituting multivocal knowledge that intends to bring an amount of parrhesia.

Again, I would advise that the layer-building labour in the previous sections benefits from being attentively followed to avoid misunderstandings and tune presumptions. For instance, do not wait for a written “aha!” moment — in which all subtle and mundane (and carefully selected) textual invasions will be glorified and explained like a fable that stays less with its characters and developments than it points to overarching (over-coded) moralities. So, there is no hidden meaning anywhere in this trapizonga, which also means that the building of layers is not a game in which I enforce complexity onto a bunch of

³⁰ Fernando Sabino was a Brazilian writer, journalist and editor from the 20th century. In this snippet of his chronicle *Como Dizia Meu Pai*, Sabino observes that he echoes his late father's simplistic and optimistic moral teachings. However, the self-serving style from the beginning progressively turns into a recognition of his father's relational merits and longing for him by the end of the text. The translation is mine, from the original “— No fim tudo dá certo... [...] — Se não deu certo, é porque ainda não chegou no fim.”

chosen topics only to “unveil” their now-deeper meanings afterwards and create a magical moment of awe (only to reinstate what was previously there). Instead, I imagine such peculiar written incursions will bring you to different whereabouts and build unforeseen bridges. The bridges may bring you to esteemed territories, war zones, whimsical lands, traumatising places, unheard memories... but hopefully, the connections will also open gates to liminal spaces where the sound academic mind loses its undoubted ability to define what is essential and what is fluff, bringing your attentional disposition back to the very moment you engage with this trapizonga. These are networks that I would not be able to compose by myself, and I hope they offer escape routes to your stories that keep asking for passage (and were possibly blocked by hard-line institutional mandates or similarly demanding doxa).

So, once again, there is an invitation to collective handiwork in this section: we will *tie-dye* the fabric of this trapizonga with figurations of forces producing failure. And please feel free to either participate hands-on or just watch as the argument cloth is tied, dyed, dried, and untied. In this age-old technique of resist-dyeing, the knots, crumples, creases, and twists made in the textile are there to try and prevent the paint from fully covering it, designing patterns of the lack of penetrability of the dye (Simon-Alexander, 2013). In a sense, this process is only fully accomplished if the dye fails to cover the fabric in full. Yet, blurring of forms and cross-contamination of colours inevitably occur in this artisanal process, producing non-replicable results. Indeed, unfolding the fabric is somewhat of a moment of truth, where the tentative control of the tying shows its imperfections and points of failure. In this case, the combination of two

failures — failure to dye and to control — delivers the singular results of this technique. Such results might be eye-pleasing at times, but there is no possible certainty, and there is always a threat of creating something forgettable or ugly. There is risk everywhere.

Failure beyond Success — Expectations

Indeed, this academic trapizonga is an invitation to productive failure. And, of course, I will talk about failures in this section. Yes, in the plural. Because — if you provisionally tried to conceptualise failure when you started engaging with this work — you probably noticed this presumed “topic” could be problematic. In certain domains, one could even rightfully declare that I promised to investigate a too-extensive theme, which would be too broad to tackle, leading to an inexcusable academic flaw (and, therefore, a failure of mine). Still, simultaneously, a hazy fear of failure and the obstinate pursuit of its most common counterpart, success, seem to appear as obvious and necessary *expectations* in the most diverse psychological practices — including clinical settings. Moreover, it seems reasonable to think this expectation holds not only among professionals but also among those seeking psychological help.

Prior to moving on, I propose a quick exercise inspired by absurdism to minimally evaluate if my previous point about expectations sustains itself as self-evident, at least on a first layer. So, let me consider a therapeutic relationship that starts with inverted expectations: failure should be pursued, and success should be declined. Notice that, in this case, if the expected failure outcome happened, therapy would then be successful, creating an unsolvable inconsistency. Thus, it still feels reasonable that failure appears as an absolute

contradiction to success within this first plateau of expression, and they explain each other by tautologic negative comparison. In this territory, failure is everything that is not successful and, therefore, not expected. On the other hand, success is the expected outcome, which means everything that did not fail. So, for now, I am holding that failure cannot be successful, and success does not fit into failure. I will take these two ideas as discrete and in linear opposition. It also occurs to me that — by now — my attentive reader already expects (!) that I will not simply adhere to this one-dimensional and reified understanding as I move on in this section. Still, I cannot help but notice that most times (if not always), versions of this simplistic assumption — which believes the pair failure-success is in mere opposition — partially populated expressions of failure and its nominal substitutes in the various participations in this research. This intensive memory needs some attention before I continue.

In this specific configuration, the conjecture that there are two molar terms in basic antagonism produces delectable logic. Like in a computational on-off switch, one or some outcomes are pursued, and any other result is considered unsuccessful. The process is one of re-cognition: *success, failure, success, success, failure*; count, calculate, 60% success rate. Yet, some major complex elements in this oppositional construction are sneakily hidden when this counting happens. For instance, outcomes are expected by someone, and I wonder who has the right to expect and who defines success. And my mind immediately summons an angel and a demon, one fighting for the rightful individual seeking therapy and the other defending the moored categories informing practice — I am incapable of defining which side each one supports, despite having my preferences. Sadly,

this dispute is rigged from the start, either to one side or the other. If the power to dictate outcomes bends to the side of the individual seeking help, capitalistic co-optations quickly create consumerist relations (Bloomer, 1978; Levenson et al., 2010; Seligman, 1995), transmuting mental health into a type of pre-packed commodity that is exclusively acquired and vended, working under the rules of a market (Kvale, 2003). Conversely, when power leans to the bearers of clinical categories — practitioners, researchers, academics, boards, associations — any singular claims are subsumed to jargon and pre-established ruling systems (Acharya et al., 2017; Clark et al., 2017). Otherwise, if a claim does not fit into these naturalised classifications, it is mostly skipped, ignored, or statistically described as an outlier. In this second relational architecture that privileges professionals, these discourse-producing groups dictate molar lists of signs and symptoms to which individuals try to adapt minimally to be considered for treatment.

For psychological practice to function within these terms, majoritarian jargon must be hammered onto the socius in procedures similar to the one ordinarily called *mental health literacy* (Furnham & Swami, 2018; Jorm, 2000). Because one may ponder, how can a consumer choose and ask for a “service” if they do not know the options available on a menu? And at the same time, how can “service providers” purposefully attend to unspecified claims that do not fit previously accepted criteria? Indeed, mental health literacy might bring about some (sometimes shy) degree of easing in processes of social stigmatisation (Devendorf et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2018). Still, such supposed literacy works as an algorithm that produces a dangerous replication of

sameness (Deleuze, 1994) — nowadays, one can easily re-cognise similar echo chambers in “online bubbles” created by social media (Devendorf et al., 2020). Moreover, this repetition pre-stigmatises the affective experiences of the ones who suffer, building, on one side, a consumer that tends to buy prêt-à-porter solutions with hidden deals and excluded criteria. And on the other side, such literacy constructs a professional that “listens for” expected recognisable bits that accept the application of their prefabricated knowledge (Adams, 2015).

Indeed, when caught up in a polarising stratum, these complicated machinic clusters tend to jump into diverse political molar lines that perpetuate reification. As I started pointing out, within such layers, the processes producing failure and success are devalued in favour of the re-cognition of expected outcomes. Likewise, the procedures leading to the measured results tend to be taken as discrete actions that need perfecting, adjusting, and controlling in order to assemble a rigid protocol. From the factor analysis of psychometric instruments (Floyd & Widaman, 1995), passing through the assessment of replicability (Osborne & Fitzpatrick, 2012), and arriving at procedural guidebooks (Campbell & Rohrbaugh, 2013), the effort seems centred on algorithmically regulating the expected steps of all interventions, ensuring validity and reliability through brute force, in a meta-process unmindful of the complex processes that occur in singular existences and that constantly evade efforts of symbolisation and classification.

I will reconnect a previous point while moving on. I argued that mental health literacy appears as one of many possible visible territories fabricated by the expectation of building up an irreprehensible communal language or

expression — an all-encompassing symbolic mediator with minimal space for contingency — that partially solves the hidden power disputes deciding who has the right to expect. The replication of this meta-expectation appears in the most diverse settings — as a mandate to teachers (Gulliver et al., 2019), a strategy to promote early intervention (Kelly et al., 2007), a tool for the “correct” recognition of modelled illnesses by the general population (Lauber et al., 2003), and so on. Still, the supposedly scientific, majoritarian jargon used in such psychological and educational spaces is directly imported from the medical field — and I confess I giggle when I remember that, just like psychology and, in exclusionary interpretation, medicine is a *technique* and not *science* (Miller & Miller, 2014) — and the terms are simplified to fit a system of certainties that triggers the logic of repetition of sameness that I previously mentioned (Deleuze, 1994). This argument leads to pathways in which this “teaching” of supposed rightful terms over-codes diverse singular machinic assemblages, establishing a homogenising expression and enforcing the appropriation of the terms (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) used by these studies, even as clichés in everyday life.

And what I write about here is nothing more than common sense. For example, roughly one in three videos about depression posted on a famous social media platform is from non-professionals, and these videos replicate — to a reasonable degree — the majoritarian clinical ideals of our time (Devendorf et al., 2020). And looking into broader territories, one will find that the stereotyped remainders of popularised psychoanalysis, once a majoritarian discourse itself (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983), persist in even the most unassuming conversations with terms like “projection” — when someone inadvertently talks about

themselves while pointing to someone else (Freud, 1909/2011) — and saying that someone is “anal” — a common curse word for anyone who tends to have control issues that ultimately comes from the Freudian theories of psychosexual development (Freud, 1905/2011). Engulfed by everyday discourses, the psychologisation of life creates feedback loops that (re)produce an enforced uniformity, hijacking unique experiences and leading to a naturalising perception of correctness by professionals who re-cognise their jargon in the most innocent speeches in daily life.

Of course, I am aware that a discussion at this level brings about a considerable number of tensions that I will not cover enough as I inspect inter-assemblages of failure, creating tie-dyed patterns. But if I quickly recalled points from previous sections that would (re)connect here, I could mention the reification brought by painting-by-numbing strategies in academia, the unavoidable tension arising from the multiple strands of psychological knowledge with epistemologically distinct assumptions, the objectifying effects of artificial splits between the knower and the known, the geopolitics of external and internal censorship to authoring, issues of authority, institutionalisation... There is a dangerous circularity in what I depict here. Yet, instead of being recognised in its ability to shape reality — classifying, permitting, and constraining meanings through disciplinary mechanisms (Foucault, 1995) — psychological discourse is mostly adhered to without much reflexivity in daily praxis.

Still, without ignoring the many argumentative lines that could be pursued in this discussion about the psychologisation of life, I choose to move

forward yet again. And, to recap, so far in this section, I followed some rigid segmentary lines: a localised opposition between failure and success felt as a discrete phenomenon; success understood as outcome expectations that discolour the value of processes; polarising power struggles in the dispute to dictate expectations; and standardisation of expression producing self-fulfilling echo chambers. Indeed, one of the initial references that immediately came to mind when the issue of expectation surfaced in this trapizonga's discussion of failure was one of John William Atkinson's cherished models — the expectancy-value theory (Feather, 1982/2021) — intrinsically connected to the study of motivation in Anglophone psychology. The word "motive" can be extracted from "motivation," and it derives from the Latin *motivus* which means *moving* (Harper, 2001). So, it is as straightforward as this: *some thoughts move someone into doing something*. And this mostly-cognitivist theory posits that behaviours are the result of a system of expectations weighed in their positive or negative valence for an individual (Feather, 1982/2021).

My concern with such enjoyable elaboration stems much less from its theoretical insufficiency than from the assumptions it infers. In a sense, it is comforting to see a conceptualisation that is fairly open to repositioning itself due to context and may be adapted to local needs. Yet, it mostly presupposes cognition that is logical, assessments that are teleological, situations that are predictable, and individuals who distinctly evaluate possible outcomes when making decisions. To partially cover for this disproportionately unrealistic expectation (!), one of the core assumptions in the expectancy-value theory is that individuals learn from their past experiences and social surroundings

(Feather, 1982/2021). Again, despite allowing some subjectivity, this solution assumes procedural learning that is minimally logical, teleological, predictable, and evident. This conceptual landscape clashes with countless intensive memories from my practice back in Brazil. And it also reignites some of my reminiscences, bringing back the wandering pathos involved in my young adult self's professional decision process.

*

I cannot help but remember Freud's first formulation as I make an effort to collect intensive memories about the absurdity of expecting decision-making processes to be mostly guided by reason and reasoning — "hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (Breuer & Freud, 1895/1982, p. 7, emphasis in original). As I follow this memory, I will trace some hues of my historical mythologies, which I call remembrances but could well be my hysterical exuberancy.

I arrived in Aotearoa with a master's degree in subjectivity studies, making me a Master of Psychology — in spite of my usual lack of attention to whatever these titles mean. Nonetheless, my tortuous pathways in Brazilian academia started much earlier, in medical school, where — after five years of reasonable scholarly engagement — I experienced what I acknowledge as the biggest crisis of my adult life so far. After that half-decade (and less clearly beforehand, for at least half of this period), my very choice of becoming a medical doctor turned into a problem for me. Articulating this move is — until nowadays — difficult. Not because it gets me tearful or anxious or anything of the sort, but due to its embeddedness in my whole life before, during, and after the crisis. At that time (and it changed over time, at least a bit), my experience was one of disgust and

disappointment toward that highly pursued label in Brazilian society. I did not want to be recognised as (or turned into) a medic.

And my conflict was particularly amplified by seeing friends and colleagues around me, evermore proud of the status and expectations (!) such a labelling promise brought with it. In that context, being a medical professional meant immediate recognition of intelligence that opened doors to wealth, accompanied by the social status of being almost a type of superhero. A particular closing sentence of a master class from that time still echoes: “Medicine is a sort of priesthood.” After being well entrenched in the psychology course, it still took me almost five more years to start understanding that I was resisting some social expectations back in my medical school days.

An interesting artefact of my experience, though, is that when I retell my story publicly, it is generally received as a story of success — a young guy that was able to get in contact with his most sincere frustrations and refine his professional choices without looking back. Yet, my experience was one of failure — in my best assessments of my surrounding reality, it was sensible that I finished the last year of the medical course even if I decided to pursue another area afterwards. But, back then, my body would freeze when I tried to get to the hospital classroom, and I would cry for whole days, walking without a destination in Copacabana, wearing fully white clothes and being mistaken for a typical toasted coconut candy seller on the beach. For a long time, I struggled to define whose framing was correct, that of my peers or myself. I only found some peace when I made better sense of the pain I “felt within my bones” since my preteen years. And I guess I would be more readily accepted in academia if I

narrated those osteo-affections in terms of Bergson's (1903/1912) method of intuition for accessing processual reality. But my experience was (and still is) that of factually feeling one of my bones: on my right knee, just at the patella.

Indeed, my right patella is the portal to yet another intensive structuring reminiscence. Much like in Foucauldian genealogy, where the analysis of descent³¹ ties up body and history (Foucault, 1977), this bone carries — and still hurts with — a much more primordial story of failure in my life. Despite not being particularly attracted to sports when growing up, I became fascinated by artistic gymnastics at a very young age, which inspired my parents to let me train at a gym in our neighbourhood. The story is long, but the result is plain: a serious accident during one of the training sessions led me to a knee injury when I was nine or ten years old, and I was expelled from the team. Back then, trainers defined their mindset as “professional”: if my body was not good enough to qualify for competitive tournaments, I was no longer welcome in any training team. The consequences of this stigma were broad in my life — being a professional became synonymous with being cold-hearted or mean, failure converted into a lurking fear, and any weather change transformed into a reminiscing pain in my knee.

In other words, the hurting knee works as an index of failure in my life. And my academic self is well aware that this story could be recounted as trauma, randomness, opportunity for change, a life lesson, a phantasmic narrative that points to poor adaptive behaviour that should be reassessed and scaled down in

³¹ In Anglophone Foucauldian scholarship, the word “descent” is the usual translation for the French *provenance*, which I consider a slightly bothersome choice. The term “provenance” exists unchanged in English and with a meaning akin to the French. Moreover, “descent” seems to narrate a tale of origin that Foucault overtly tried to resist in his seminal work *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* (Foucault, 1977).

its subjective value to produce a better-functioning self, and so on. Yet, experience does not always bend to reframing. There are movable bits in this hysterical remembrance that escape objectification. And each time I retell my story, it shifts and allows for new meanings and novel points of tension. Verily, when I see myself on my “good days,” the hurting knee might simply appear as an exotic weather forecaster or a reminder to carry an umbrella or an extra coat. There is no possible mental health literacy for this experience, as the hurt comes not from an objectifiable diagnosis but from the marks of history on my body. Some histories, after all, do not merely pass through us; they stay, layering themselves onto flesh. My knee holds one of these histories — not just as a trace of past injury, but as something that continues to press itself into the present. An embodied experience that finds widespread convergence, from provenance as a living archive of descent (Foucault, 1977) to the idea that the body — down to its biological imprints — quite literally keeps the score (van der Kolk, 2014). But none of this mattered when I was a kid, falling on the ground and hearing my father repeat his usual catchphrase: “pain is psychological.” He seemed to have a point, but probably not the one he meant when he used the catchphrase.

The moving bits of this story (and please allow the meaning of “moving” to blur here...) reappear in many other personal tales since then. They show some of their colours when I refuse to create a more “professional” curriculum or when I recount the fall that seriously hurt my left knee, weeks before moving to New Zealand. My decision to leave medical school functions equally, infusing the imbalance of power in neoliberalism with personal meaning or adding importance to the public tender I passed after minimally reorganising my

academic pathways. Still, there is no teleological, procedural learning involved in reminiscing. I do not dismiss the possibility that some sort of working-through³² (Freud, 1914/2011) might be feasible, but this process is in no way similar to learning. In their stubbornness to resist ultimate meaning, these memories are probably better understood as events (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

*

The word “event” has been mentioned a handful of times in this trapizonga so far. Later in this section, I will expand on what I mean by event and how I am connecting events to failure. But, before advancing, I must untie³³ the plateau of expectations for a moment because three terms recurrently appear in work produced at this level of understanding — namely, in discussions where failure is conceptualised in relation to therapeutic outcomes and institutional expectations — and they are still to be examined in this segment. *Efficacy*, *effectiveness*, and *efficiency* are watchwords expected (!) to express three specific facets of success re-cognition when the range of possible therapeutic outcomes is taken in a linear, discrete opposition. Considering that expression is only one of the axes of assemblages — involving non-representational utterances — it does not come as a surprise that these terms are used in diverse manners in distinct

³² In the German original, the word used is *Durcharbeiten*, which literally translates to English as *work through*. However, this is a problematic translation, as *Durcharbeiten* means “work without a break.” Contrarily, *work through* immediately lends value to experience, as it implies “dealing well with something hard.” So, I kept the usual translation, but I would prefer to reinforce the “work without a break” meaning, as it reconnects relentless remembrance and acting out.

³³ As the spelling checker of MS Word ardently insists that the verb here should be “unite” and not “untie,” I am also reminded of the impossibility of fully defining the movements I am proposing in this section. The untying of the fabric in the resist-dyeing process is also a space of hue contamination and pattern uncertainty, creating the perception of a unified design.

spaces and related to intermingling bodies that are both disparate and ever-differing.

For instance, Zidane and Olsson (2017) reviewed hundreds of articles on business management to offer more deterministic, stable meanings to the three terms after recognising they are used in different ways in various contexts. And in the health realm, efficacy, effectiveness, and efficiency have broadly accepted meanings imported from clinical trials of vaccines and medications. Work dissecting the emergence of this majoritarian pharmacological usage is not easy to encounter, especially as the type of practice aligned with these meanings is averse to producing history. I lost track of this thread in Anglophone scholarship in Cochrane's (1972) reflections on effectiveness and efficiency. Still, I am not convinced I got sufficiently far in the past to see an old enough presentation of this discourse, as the usage seems established well in his work, implying strong prior agreement in conceptualisation. Since we are following a level of analysis with important molar political lines, I will follow the current naturalised meanings given to these terms, which also acknowledges that medical discourses significantly influence the psy fields.

Ahead of moving on to the duo efficacy and effectiveness, I will quickly inspect *efficiency*, as it runs alone in the trio. An outcome will be considered efficient when accomplished with the least waste (Burches & Burches, 2020). And waste is the ratio between outputs — either health services or health outcomes — and inputs — whether physical or financial. So, efficiency is notably a variable of economy. Of course, the word “economy” is used in broad terms in this case and includes issues of time, effort, finance, etc. But it is hard to ignore

the capitalistic co-optation that immediately tints such a conceptualisation. In its contemporary usage, efficiency is connected to the commodification of practices, allowing more profit (Olbrisch, 1979), enhancing the throughput of professionals and those looking for therapy (Bower & Gilbody, 2005), and mainly focusing on the expenses of governments, donors, and stakeholders (Burches & Burches, 2020). In fact, efficiency is sometimes mindlessly calculated as if it were a synonym for less psychological effort, less financial expense, less elapsed time, and so on. Again, I must stress that reification is still the scale here. So, any treatment is pursued as a “cure,” oriented toward an ideal illness-free existence, which might vary amongst different practices but mainly considers that unwanted psychological phenomena are problems that will only allow therapeutic success through their extermination or at least containment.

Alternative frameworks often challenge this commodified logic of efficiency, even if still within a capitalistic framework. For instance, recovery-oriented and consumer perspectives reject rigid binaries of health and illness, instead conceptualising distress along continuums rather than as inherently pathological states (Barker & Buchanan-Barker, 2005). Emerging alongside deinstitutionalisation, the recovery model redefined therapeutic expectations, shifting from institutional control toward models of self-management and community integration (Anthony, 1993). This approach broadened possibilities for care, resisting the idea that psychological suffering must be fully eradicated. Yet, even as it distances itself from psychiatric institutionalisation, it remains entangled with processes of normalisation (Foucault, 1977) — subtly reinforcing expectations of functionality, self-regulation, and productive adaptation.

Recovery does not demand the elimination of symptoms, but it still orients individuals toward a legible form of well-being — one that, even in its non-linearity, remains closely connected to ideals of adjustment and coherence (Crowe, 2022). And, crucially, it does not escape the logic of efficiency, as recovery-based interventions are increasingly evaluated in terms of measurable success, funding viability, and outcome-driven effectiveness (Bee et al., 2014; McCollister et al., 2013).

This emphasis on measurable success extends beyond efficiency and into broader evaluations of therapeutic practices. While outcome-driven effectiveness is central to these evaluations, efficacy and effectiveness are taken as linked concepts, serving as measures of the success of a given practice — may it be a vaccine, a treatment scheme, a prevention strategy, a rehabilitation protocol, and so on. In this trapizonga, I previously compared this type of measurement to a computer on-off switch that produces percentages or rates of the desired outcomes. Despite their surface-level similarity and their shared role in the polarising stratum, these terms are often placed in binary opposition — even as some efforts attempt to frame them as a continuum (Thorpe et al., 2009).

On the one hand, *efficacy* concerns success in ideal, controlled environments (Thomas & Hersen, 2011) — such as the type of success pursued in explanatory randomised controlled trials, histopathological examinations, or any other practice considered a scientific benchmark. On the other hand, *effectiveness* refers to success achieved outside research laboratories or other artificially purified interactions, even if reached in less rigidly controlled trials (Thomas & Hersen, 2011) — what one could call “real-world” studies, research on daily

clinical activity, or any other work focused on pragmatic applicability. And the charm of this differentiation is that efficacy rates do not always translate directly into equivalent effectiveness, often degrading numerically as conditions shift from highly controlled to less confined settings. Yet, both terms remain central to discussions of therapeutic success, particularly as they intersect with questions of validity — the next layer of this measurement apparatus.

Issues of internal and external validity in research leading to the measurement of these two types of successful outcomes spark prolific discussion (Glasgow et al., 2003; Porzsolt et al., 2015; Thomas & Hersen, 2011), with a tense consensus stating that efficacy studies virtually allow for higher internal validity (authorising causal claims) while effectiveness studies' results are more connected to external validity (encouraging generalisability claims). Yet, studies initiated outside the laboratory are often considered less systematic, irretrievably biased, or even worthless when informing daily routine — reinforcing the entrenched assumption that real-world outcomes are always lesser, more eroded versions of their controlled counterparts (Anderson et al., 1999; Mook, 1983). And yet, this same framing ignores the possibility that effectiveness may exist without ever translating into efficacy. The paradigm implied in this type of logic is one of purity, in which interferences and contamination of practices are always framed as “bad” or undesirable. This focus on purity may hold some significance when considering the need to single out the success rate of specific pharmacological interventions. But this sanitary ideal of sterilisation quickly loses importance — and feasibility — in psychological therapeutic settings, where practices necessarily involve unavoidably local

assemblages that are neither easily controllable nor replicable. So, the so-called crisis of replicability in psychology — a long and complex topic I will not openly pursue in this trapizonga — also seems related to local epistemologies and ontologies (Wiggins & Christopherson, 2019), rendering clinical studies of efficacy in psychology somewhat mythical, despite the historical importance placed on “clean” causal results.

Considerations about ecological validity add even more (and welcomed) complexity to the issue of local epistemologies and ontologies. Despite still being bound by a dualism between individual and environment, this subtype of external validity recognises a key limitation: measurement that attests validity independently of variability in the general population is, on its own, insufficient to validate a result set in non-controlled situations. Instead, ecological validity has historically focused on how motley, yet comparable, stimuli might change the outcomes of an interaction (Lewkowicz, 2001). Ecological validity is, then, an informed judgement about how appropriately an instrument (protocol, treatment, etc.) might function in the everyday lives of specific populations (Andrade, 2018). So, even research traditions that historically benefitted from artificially purified designs — such as classical cognitivist and behaviourist studies — were eventually pressured to consider subjective sense-making and situated meaning in their evaluations, as ecological validity introduced a judicative sphere beyond measurement (Lewkowicz, 2001). Indeed, the concept of ecological validity has blurred boundaries, as it relies heavily on subjective evaluation — a feature that does not sit well with contemporary empirical ideals. However, the main point here is that it is now considered good practice to

scrutinise the design of trials beyond methodological aspects. It has become essential to produce knowledge that holds significance within communities or, at the very least, to provide evidence of how an artificially purified lab interaction maintains relevance for different populations.

Beyond internal, external, and ecological validities (which are types of experimental validity), discussions about validating calculated success rates proliferate, feeding an ever-budding machine of classifications. One could say this trend begins with broad concerns such as research validity and measurement validity (Finger & Rand, 2003), but it quickly mutates into a branching flowchart, incorporating subtypes of validities such as criterion-related validity, construct validity, and content validity (McDonald, 2005), which, in turn, generate even more subtypes. Other conceptualisations though less prominent in formative academic texts, remain significant — ranging from clinical validity (Kendell, 1989) to treatment validity (Hayes, 1988), social validity (Rapoff, 2010), and incremental validity (Haynes & Lench, 2003). Following this trapizonga's intensive tone, it is worth noting that the list I have offered here is by no means exhaustive³⁴.

This never-ending classification process attempts to compensate for an evident insufficiency in psychological knowledge production (and, ultimately, in human knowledge more broadly). In my foraging for an ultimate validity system within sources adhering to the molar model, I encountered a telling snippet that exposes the limitations of the templates we have at hand:

³⁴ A typical research methods book adopted in undergrad courses will list many other subtypes of validity — face validity, concurrent validity, predictive validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and so on (from Jhangiani et al., 2019, *Research methods in psychology*. Kwantlen Polytechnic University).

Any decision that is made on the basis of test scores is situated in a complex space of factual, evidential, and normative concerns. This space is large and complex and this makes the issue of test validity somewhat like a Russian nesting doll, where every answer to a question reveals a new question, so that one may progress ever deeper to arrive at some of the fundamental questions of human inquiry: How does scientific theory relate to the world? What is the referential status of psychological concepts?

What is meaning? (Markus & Borsboom, 2013, pp. 292–293)

Here, this constitutional failure in the validation strategy of mainstream psychological knowledge appears to be entangled with issues that go beyond straightforward and accurate understanding through distinctive verification. And I quickly recall discussions from this and previous sections regarding practices that control access to academic authorship, the arbitration contained in each arbitrary linguistic sign, and the judicative nature of attesting (ecological) validity in research. So, even within this reifying plateau, we still find ourselves trapped in a normative system that (re)produces consensuses beyond factuality and evidence. And, without the ability to build a knowledge validation system that can at least guarantee that successes will succeed and failures will fail, knowledge itself becomes failure.

Imperceptible Failure — Becoming-Failure

If you are starting to read this subsection with a lasting feeling that my preceding sentences in the previous segment were harsh or exaggerated, I must tell you we are somewhat in agreement. Indeed, my earlier argument arrives at a polarising, resounding end that could even be taken out of context to defend

the pursuit of ever more reified validation protocols for knowledge production in a kind of unquestionable naïve realism. But I must contend that this perception arises much more from the overt pursuit of the ultimate Truth implanted in that system of thought than from my very positioning. Instead, it is easier for me to envisage failure in much less obvious forms — such as in highly subjective experiences, like when a chef de cuisine dedicates months to creating the most extraordinary dish, only to hear from a critical gourmand that it lacked a hint of acidity or needed a pinch less of salt to get to the correct taste. In this case, failure, despite still existing in peremptory, calamitous forms, seems more easily present in almost insignificant, hardly detectable expression assemblages. I hope this elucidation helps that last sentence about knowledge becoming failure read differently. And, yearning to adhere to good practice, I will continue this text with more attention to such delicate existences.

Considering my understanding is minimally acceptable, and failure might present itself camouflaged within the contamination of the most mundane experiences, I identify two primary assignments I should accomplish in this segment. Amid other endeavours, I will explain what I mean by “becoming-failure” after exposing the plateau of imperceptibility. To accomplish those tasks, I first need to revisit Markus and Borsboom’s (2013) validation crisis, as some nuances in their three questions could have gone unnoticed even by the sharpest reader, and such hues might be helpful as the arguments continue. Their sequenced questions are defined as foundational, and they emerge from the never-ending search for the ultimate validation procedure in systematic knowledge production in psychology. Departing from scientific theory, passing

through psychological concepts, and finally getting to meaning, the three arrayed interrogations seem to retrace the roots of knowledge production in a sequence moving from the most complex to the simplest form. And, reasonably, the queries start with issues of representation, wondering about the relationship between scientific theories and the natural world. The second and third questions, though, especially spark my curiosity, and I want to take a moment to think with them.

In that second question, not only is psychology paired with concepts instead of theories — which shows care with wording, as in strict natural scientific jargon, a “true” psychological theory might never be produced — but the expression also comes matched with an inconspicuous provocation. In the interrogation, psychological concepts are questioned in their ability to display referential meaning — or the ability to refer to something that exists in the world unequivocally (an extension of the representation problem). By now, it should be evident that this trapizonga does not treasure such essentialist episteme as something to be unthinkingly followed. Yet, the term also reminded me of a phenomenon usually connected to paranoia, called referential thinking. In medical terminology, referential thinking involves interpreting seemingly unimportant stimuli as carrying a specific, personally relevant meaning (Cicero & Kerns, 2011). So, at its extreme, this inquiry challenges the very existence of relevant psychological concepts, conceding they could be nothing more than self-referential appropriations of meaningless occurrences.

It follows that the third question also emerges as a tease. It is the most open question in the triad, only inquiring into meaning, its value, and its nature.

However, in context, it could be read as implying that meaning is nothing more than referential thinking or that it lacks referential meaning. You perhaps recall that, previously, this trapizonga scrutinised the issue of meaning (as expression) with assemblages. And our local solution admitted a relationship between enunciation and bodies that is a constantly shifting two-axis multiplicity with unstable and unfixed symmetric fractal hues of deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations. So, at least locally, the intermingling bodies and the collective expressions are not tied in exclusive enclosed systems. For us, there is no one thing “out there” waiting to be represented, and a unitary existence only emerges as a schematic or accidental pause within one or many series (the molecules, tissues, organs, systems; the body, communities, ecosystems; planet Earth, the solar system, the Milky Way, the universe, ...). Indeed, the third interrogation puts Markus and Borsboom (2013) face to face with the precipice of no sense. And it might be important to underline the subtle difference between the term “no sense” and other terms usually considered similar to it — such as “lack of sense” or “nonsense” — which do not apply, since “no sense” is distinct from both insufficiency and absurdity. However, the naturalised need for sense implied in the terms “lack of sense” and “nonsense” would probably work well with the referential expectations (of meaning and thinking) of the specific strains of thought we have explored so far.

Despite appearing as ordinary synonyms at first glance, the lexical shift I made in the last paragraph from “meaning” to “sense” is also peculiar, as it somewhat reconstructs the empiricist-rationalist schism. “Sense” comes from the Latin *sentire*, or *to feel* — through sensory experience — while “meaning” comes

from the Dutch *meenen* and the German *meinen*, or *to think* — as an act of the mind (Harper, 2001). So, in Markus and Borsboom's (2013) questioning, encountering no sense is also related to being barred from the empiricist ideals of perception through the bodily senses, which in turn creates an infinite loop between empiricist and rationalist insufficiencies. How would meaning be referential if not through the senses? Also, should we trust our senses if they might simply be producing self-centred referential thoughts? In their last form, those fundamental questions expose the establishing failure creating our majoritarian systems of knowledge. Yet, these are systems that we use and sometimes gladly replicate, because they produce — they are production systems.

Verily, in the *imperceptible plateau* neighbouring the unsolvable schism, failure starts to surface as a go-between instead of an outcome. And it is worth noting that the issue of expectation (!) continues to exist despite roaming ever more pulverised in forces instead of forms. So, we are accessing this level through a subtle self-referential system of knowledge production that constructs the figures of failure we recognise in the tie-dyeing process of creating knowledge. The attentive reader might even have noticed this issue suppressed in the prior segment, mainly when I gave the example of mental health literacy, and the echo chambers it creates. But now, reification and commodification no longer seem necessary. Instead, in the imperceptible plateau, failure is a contamination capable of spreading all around, which may produce reified and commodified existences, though not inevitably. So, knowledge production is founded on a specific conformation of failure, but also failing are the

classification systems, the replicability of knowledge, clinical presentations, nosological configurations, therapeutic interventions, the symptoms, meanings, and senses, expectations, relationships, the colonised world, ...³⁵ Within these perceived self-contained existences, failure is constantly acting as a covert risk or an invisible blessing, ready to contaminate the border of any of these experiences. *Becoming-failure* is such a contamination in action. Somewhere, somehow, for any given set of reasons, due to a particular configuration of forces, an existence might emerge as a failure. But it is an overlooked contamination — a becoming-failure — tirelessly and imperceptibly working on the borders of a given existential territory that lets it arise as such.

*

In Western thought, *becoming* is a concept that can be retraced to Heraclitus (Nietzsche, 1889/1998), a Greek pre-Socratic philosopher. And the concept was taken up and reworked by many thinkers throughout Western histories of philosophy, eventually being understood in its connection to immanence — a plateau we have previously linked to molecular lines (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In a previous section of this trapizonga, I pointed out that becomings are not metaphors, which also means that becoming is a singular and concrete reality. A *becoming* is a block of two assemblages that deterritorialise simultaneously (Zourabichvili, 2012). This block of heterogeneous assemblages creates a momentary (yet significant) relationship — an encounter — like D. H. Lawrence and the snake at the Sicilian water trough. So, there is neither

³⁵ This list could go on, but that does not mean becoming-failure is in all that exists. There is no generalisation here, as doing so would reduce the concept to an empty universalism that is not being implied. In this sense, this list seems to become failure itself, but only in relation to my inability to express the concept linguistically, and not by its specific serialising processes.

imitation nor identification at play, and any possible transformation is — at first — exclusively immaterial (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). As such, becoming does not equate to metamorphosing, as in the latter, there is a starting place (an egg), a given number of stages (the caterpillar, the chrysalis), and a goal (an adult butterfly). Becoming-butterfly, otherwise, might occur to the curious student who flutters around academic sources collecting the nectar of knowledge. But not necessarily, as curiosity and willingness to learn do not need to become butterfly to occur in fluttery and pollinating ways. Indeed, within the molecular lines enabling becoming-failure, there is no predetermined moral instance, no pre-established function, no set process, no certain pathway. In its minoritarian existence, becoming-failure might even appear as success (despite not necessarily): failing to kill a critically endangered spider due to arachnophobia, failing to hop up on a bus soon to be involved in a grave accident due to the apathy of a major depression, failing to work like a lifeless capitalistic robot due to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and so on.

Notably, an aspect of the concept of becoming that I consider essential may be lost in the English language. In Romance languages, there is a distinction between two terms: *devenir* and *avenir* — or *porvir*, in Portuguese (Houaiss et al., 2001). In English, “devenir” is *become* and “avenir” is something like the *future*. However, in daily usage, “become” conflates the meanings of both Romance terms at times, as there is no equivalent to “avenir” in English. Occasionally, this conflation might take the attention away from the process the concept tries to explain. *Avenir* occurs over time as finality — or “turning into something,” like the adult butterfly of the metamorphosis, which is an aim or

destination — precisely what the concept of becoming challenges. Instead, becoming is closer to “coming by,” or to getting possession of something (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It is the route — the “how” — that matters in a becoming, as there is no intentionality. Removing the action from the future (and, by extension, from the past) creates a politics of presence, where the now-in-process becomes the privileged focus of attention (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). So, becoming-failure is not measurable or predictable; it manifests as presence and needs ad hoc ethical and political negotiation when attended to.

Supposing we consider my idea fair and admit that at least some negotiation in therapy is makeshift or contingent. In this case, research emerges as insufficient when solely focused on those seeking help and the several existing therapeutic schemes. So, traditionally, research on psychotherapy effectiveness also pays attention to professional practice. Converted into a variable, *therapist effect* is the mainstream name given to the specific subjective unfoldings in therapy that can be traced back to the professionals. In fact, hierarchical linear modelling analyses suggest that up to 8% of therapeutic outcomes can be reliably traced back to therapists; however, the limited type of data in such studies, combined with the complexity of evaluating a situational variable that might be either processual or relational, forces the admission that the percentage may be way higher (Hill & Castonguay, 2017). Indeed, this percentage is highly contestable, with effect sizes for psychodynamic therapy varying significantly across studies, and some meta-analyses reporting effect sizes ballooning to 1.46 standard deviations, while others suggest more modest outcomes (Wampold & Bolt, 2006). This all-encompassing variable tries to combine style of attachment,

flexibility and creativity, technical, conceptual, and relational skills, cultural knowledge, ability to be in the moment, reaction adaptability to situational needs of clients, ... and this is another list that keeps growing, which is revealing in itself. So, when the plateau of imperceptibility, its local unfolding, and its lack of patterns are considered, producing a measurable variable of therapist effect is ultimately unreasoned. And, in time, this trapizonga does not inherently oppose a lack of reason, but it is important to ethically flag a pathos when it is being followed as if it were a logos. Passion can promote knowledge production, but it should be announced as such³⁶.

So, the issue of therapist effect is far from solvable because this reified modelling is entrapped in the reproduction of molar interpretation levels that acquire extra mainstream value when ignoring or hiding their affective drives. For instance, even elegantly designed ongoing outcome questionnaires like the OQ-45.2 only measure a limited number of items, focusing exclusively on perfunctory perceptions of the person looking for treatment: self-reported symptom distress with an emphasis on depression and anxiety, interpersonal relations in daily life, and social roles (Lambert et al., 2004). To be fair, any measuring protocol would be fated to be insufficient, considering the compound local issues involved in a therapeutic setting, independently of its various calculated validities and epistemic lenses. However, if I may reiterate, such a type of questionnaire is routinely used as the metric for client-informed

³⁶ Invoked most clearly in Western history in Aristotelian rhetoric, logos, pathos, and ethos function merely as a façade in the argument presented here. Dialectically, all knowledge integrates these three argumentative natures. The issue seems to be one of acknowledgement — see Aristotle. (1991). *On rhetoric: A theory of civic discourse* (G. A. Kennedy, Trans.). Oxford University Press.

effectiveness in studies on therapist effect (Anderson et al., 2009; Delgadillo et al., 2022; Okiishi et al., 2006). It operates at a level that privileges rigid lines and their imposed objectifications, ignoring issues derived from the imperceptible plateau, which is predominantly documented as a lack of consideration for “depth psychology” (Hill & Castonguay, 2017, p. 327), despite the insufficiency of the term. Back in a polarising cycle, the responsibility of such insufficiency may even fall back onto those seeking help, as people may be evaluated as ill-fitted due to their “aberrant responding” (Conijn et al., 2015, p.513) to such confining evaluation protocols, ignoring the crude simplifications involved in creating an objectifying questionnaire. In a sense, molar cuts like this tend to reify expressions perceived as unfavourable into the *other*, exposing an imbalance of power in the relationship between those who need care and those who offer it, and evincing the ever-changing choices used in the schematic separation within the therapeutic setting between therapist, therapeutic protocol, and the person looking for therapy.

In my unreasonable box of examples, this issue of othering reminds me of Jean-Paul Sartre’s Brazilian journalist character, Garcin, and his famous line in the play *Huis clos*³⁷, generally translated to English as “hell is — other people” (Sartre, 1989, p. 45). Once again, concerns with translation annoy my linguistic self. The original line ends with “les Autres” — “the Others” — the English translator’s early choice was to reify the sentence, turning “the Others” into distinct human figures. But this distinction is significant for a fuller

³⁷ The play’s name is traditionally translated as “No Exit” in English. This is a complex choice of translation, as the expression “huis clos” would probably be better worded as something like “closed session” or “behind closed doors,” which more readily refer to Sartre’s attention to human freedom issues.

understanding of what the character might have expressed with the sentence. While Garcin realises he is in hell with two other people, he also becomes aware of many “others” with them. Inez, the character confronting him and probably partially responsible for Garcin’s concluding insight, even announces that she alone is a crowd. So, the others are more than “people,” as Garcin abruptly understands. There are mutters and mumbles; there are many others beyond the three distinct people talking. Indeed, in this trapizonga, these murmurs or forces recall my discussion of the binary voices of angels and demons disputing who has the right to expect success in therapeutic settings. And Garcin abruptly realises that more than two distinct voices populate his existence and that of his two doomed companions in hell.

In Sartre’s (1989) play, a multitude appears as a crowd in accord (in a chord), accusing Garcin of cowardice. Instead of distinct voices pertaining to individual people, these “others” — and the multitude they create — are probably better understood as pre-individual (Simondon, 1992). In this case, the “pre-” prefix of the term does not mean chronologically before, as Chronos is more clearly an effect of individualisation³⁸ itself. Instead, this specific “before” is Aionic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987): the multitude pre-exists a recognisable individual but is not extinguished by individuation, being co-opted by it as if serving as its substance in an individualisation (even in the English translation of a play). In our local terms, the pre-individual (which we might also conceptualise as trans-individual in this very domain) is a pure plane of

³⁸ Contrasting with Jungian theorisations, there is a difference between individuation and individualisation in Simondon’s work, the latter being a specific process of the former. The perception of a stable unitary existence is, in this case, the individualisation of an individuation.

immanence and its ever-changing machinic and expressive assemblages. So, if we go back to the main argument, these misperceived “others” suggest that becoming-failure also partially relates to processes of individualisation, where the metastability of bodies-in-relation — rendered invisible — ends up conferring an appearance of monolithic unity to certain forces within an individuation process. In this sphere, any given one is many — just as Inez alone is a crowd — but this difference-within might grow in importance until perceived as a distinct (foreign) failure of a supposed enduring individualisation containing lasting (primordial) substance. This matter reconnects to Van Gogh and his earlobe, which illustrated the section on assemblages. Once detached from a recognisable unitary individual, the new expression of a body made of disparate particles — now revisited as a failure in this specific context — produces stories, perceptions, and understandings of its own and can only be reconnected to the previously perceivable individual through a deterritorialised assemblage block — a becoming-failure. Just like an earlobe does not become a sexual gift or an index of psychological distress when seen far from a recognisable Van Gogh, becoming-failure does not emerge as a countable failure in relation to an expected molar outcome without being territorially paired with it.

A particular consequence of the inferences in the last paragraph is important. As a molecular process occurring on the boundaries of existence, failure is not fundamentally different from success in its constitution. For example, in Bugental’s (1988) self-assessment of some of his previous cases, success and failure are perceived as co-existing forces in almost every psychotherapeutic experience, except in the most extreme cases — of death (pure

failure) or art (pure success). Coming from a person-centred background, this evaluation conceptualises success and failure as a continuum instead of two distinct categories. And, on closer examination, even the extreme cases Bugental (1988) lists are arguable, as it is not difficult to imagine glorious deaths and uninspiring art pieces. Thus, by accounting for the imperceptible plateau, failure loses its unambiguous status, exposing the judicative simplifications on the plateau of molar expectations. In Markus and Borsboom's (2013) strikingly honest reflection, such judgments are summoned as "normative concerns" (p.292), with implied power given to the moored clinical categories and their technical representatives.

Before going forward, we must first go back to basics. Please do not read the discussions so far as if I were denying that failures and successes exist — because they do. They can be recognised through their expression, counted, and grouped into organised sets, producing colourful knowledge that might be locally applicable for a certain period, and within a specific consortium of populations. So, when a group from Oslo published the results of structural process research to evaluate therapeutic failure in a naturalistic group within the Norwegian public health system (Lippe et al., 2008), they were not creating a piece of fiction. The research group used a circumplex model for personality and interpersonal functioning called Structural Analysis of Social Behavior to code the interactions between therapists and clients. Therapists were self-declared as either psychodynamically oriented, eclectic, or cognitively oriented. Results supported some hypotheses after coding the interactions in sessions at the beginning, middle, and end of the therapeutic processes of an evenly split group of positive-

change and negative-change (or non-change) therapies. Hostile interactions were good predictors for negative or no changes in therapeutic outcomes and peaked in the middle of the process. Negative and non-change therapies had a higher number of defensive responses from the client to friendly interventions from the therapist. Hostile interactions were higher in number and less resolved inside sessions on negative-change therapies. Yet — as expected, if the imperceptible plateau is considered, which repositions the discussion on efficacy and effectiveness — results had limited generalisability.

At the same time, the overly complex model of the study by Lippe and partners (2008) seems to produce numbers that offer little more insight than common sense. By saying this, I do not intend to discredit common sense, as it is readily available knowledge accessed through simple heuristics; the main issue is that it tends to replicate itself endlessly, with little openness to sometimes needed change. The research also used the fourth edition categories of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) to split the participants into symptom diagnoses, personality disorders, and global functioning categories, which exposes a preference for medical conceptualisations of health/illness. The organisational constraints and overarching political structures were not considered, and social relationships were conceptualised and thus evaluated in a decontextualised, privatised manner, which produces a recursive cycle in which the individual is positioned as the source of interactions that either succeed or fail.

Contrasting with the Oslo research — and equally not producing fantasy — Werbart and colleagues (2015) considered the disparity between self-rated

symptom scores at the termination of treatment (or follow-up) and former patients' lived experience. Using data from the Young Adult Psychotherapy Project in Stockholm, the group of researchers recruited participants who were classified as nonimproved by the Global Severity Index after receiving psychotherapeutic care. DSM diagnoses were used inconsistently to classify participants, and all therapists worked within a psychoanalytic frame of reference. Participants' narratives were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically. A tentative conceptual model was offered, with a core category linking therapy to movement, though not necessarily focused or driven by goals. Discussion about results pointed out that the experience with the therapist was generally positive, with helpful therapeutic activity. However, what was described as a non-confrontational style of psychoanalysis led to difficulties in understanding the therapeutic method and to a sense of relational distance. Also, most participants agreed that therapy generated some improvements yet found it insufficient, as core problems remained. They learned strategies to apply in their lives, and in some cases, their living conditions improved. It is important to note that, within Freudian psychoanalytic theory, concepts such as the negative therapeutic reaction — which refers to a paradoxical worsening of symptoms in response to seemingly effective interventions — illustrate an assumed sense of lack or insufficiency inherent to the psyche (Freud, 1923/2011). Therefore, such conflicting findings do not necessarily indicate poor progression within this theoretical framework. Still, these results could lead to strong yet uninformed interpretations by theorists

from more literal lines of praxis, with little or no understanding of — or theoretical agreement with — such intricacies.

Werbart and associates' (2015) idiographic take on studying failure shows an interest in dissociating numeric scores from lived experiences, which seems wise when considering that the frames through which failure is conceptualised vary across domains, both academically and in daily life — a reality we have linked to the imperceptible plateau and the expressive nature of expectations. Failure was examined in its complexities, respecting the former patients' narratives while acknowledging sites of improvement in several cases after therapy. The thematic analysis was helpful for the researchers' intent of creating a model but also silenced some of the peculiarities in each collected story. Additionally, the narratives gathered were primarily framed as representations of a life unified in the intimacy of its individuality. Themes such as familial backgrounds were considered but explored only in relation to the individuals themselves, rather than within a broader frame of reference.

The works of Lippe and colleagues (2008) and Werbart and partners (2015) are suitable exemplars of systematic knowledge about therapeutic failure because they tie-dye realities whose patterns are built of small failures to control, just as the hues of their findings fail to paint a faultless and complete landscape. In other words, the necessarily provisional and local character of any systematic work on failures in therapy ends up establishing an ever-mutable tendency — a sort of tie-dye trend. Well-informed therapeutic praxis derives from the evident and necessary insufficiency of such material: a makeshift foundation used in a contingent negotiation process. Still, those tie-dyed patterns

of failure are possibly more helpful when connections to becoming-failure and the imperceptibility plateau are overtly acknowledged, lending the stringent leniency of immanence to the processes experienced in therapeutic settings.

An issue of procedure seems to arise, though. In daily praxis (and due to the molecular consistency of the forces involved in a therapeutic process), the effort to allow a presence inclusive of the imperceptible plateau could end up emerging as a perceived monolithic unity, resembling referential thinking or hysterical reminiscence and bearing a negative affective valence at the plateau of expectations. In this case, as success and failure are similarly constituted, both could come to appear indiscriminately in the place of each other, complicating the careful consideration of processes expected in therapy. One possibility for navigating such complexity is to acknowledge events.

Failure despite Success — Events

Earlier in this section, while sharing some of my most prominent osteo-affective remembrances as an attempt to resist restricting protocols in psychology, I promised to consider events more openly in a later segment of this trapizonga. However, before briefly conceiving what events are in the context of this makeshift document, I will stay with the ambience brought by my vow. For Nietzsche (1913/2016), humans are beings that make promises. Once again, avoiding reading these Western ideals as a prêt-à-porter theorisation is probably advantageous, but I will keep following them for now. Because, at least in our Westernised surroundings, a promise leads to debt (as guilt or duty): I now have an obligation. And if I fail to theorise events, this section will be perceived as lacking essential discussion points. Indeed, a promise exists in a shared plateau

of precise calculations, irreproachable disciplines, and exact necessities that build an ideal avenir — an aimed future (Nietzsche, 1913/2016). And such a teleological perspective is both the enabler of a collective memory — inscribing bodies with representations of history (Foucault, 1977) — and the carrier of drastic (and sometimes even dangerous) simplifications. Under these ruling systems, immanent singularity is subsumed by repetitive generalities and classificatory imperatives. So, within this register, producing successful knowledge also somewhat equates to failing — failing to notice or acknowledge a life itself, failing to understand singular processes, failing to accept processual complexity as a condition of existence, and so on (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

In fact, it may be promptly understandable to the alert reader that we are reapproaching the plateau of expectations through the issue of promises. But after following tie-dyed inter-assemblages of failure for some time, something seems to modulate. The processes of reification on the plateau of expectations seem to lose some of their verisimilar certainty after being reconnected to the productive stance of becoming-failure. And now, the forces that materially produce a life reappear as surreptitious elements glimpsed through the cracks of expected knowledge — sometimes as failure, other times as success, and many times as something completely different, whether inspiring affects of joy or sadness. Such a jump is refractory to appearing in writing or language and probably offers a glimpse of what Spinoza considered an idea of singular essence (Deleuze, 1988). In our local terms, what I mean is that when reconnected to intermingling affective bodies in a machinic assemblage, the plateau of expectations tends to accept contextual meanings and non-prescriptive

elaborations more easily, allowing the production of embodied, locally effective knowledge (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). So, a critical effort seems to be continuously accessing and remembering the imperceptibility plateau, which hopefully breaks the monolithic perceptions produced by expectations. This is why considering events might produce some liberation in therapy.

If I were allowed to be rather simplistic and almost non-academic, I would say that events are the glue that binds the plateau of expectations to the imperceptible plateau. Still, instead of a territorialisation, an event is the power allowing — and continuously producing — (re)territorialisations. And just as assemblages are better perceived through the axis of expression, the privileged realm of events is that of sense (Deleuze, 1990). Something materially happens, something is talked about that happening — there is a relationship between these two, but they are not the same. The material reality of what happens is forever lost after its effectuation, and this differs from the possibility of expressing such an encounter — this possibility is the event (Deleuze, 1990). So, the event conveyed when someone says, “my therapy failed,” is miles away from the material therapeutic encounter that produced said sad affections. At the same time, the referred failure is neither a fiction nor a fantasy, as it derives from the marks of history on a body (Foucault, 1977). Nevertheless, instead of a hardcoded factual memory (is this even possible?) or a self-actualisation through a chance meeting (producing self-consciousness and whatnot...), an event would be better understood as a process of *heterogenesis* (Guattari, 2006) — or, in other words, a *becoming-always-other*. Therefore, expressing an event is also noticing what is no longer and what might still be in the future — which similarities and

differences rise to perceptibility after something materially happened, which points appear essential and which seem momentarily unnoteworthy, and so on. In a sense, an event is the unifying becoming of all becomings that create an existence (Badiou, 2006/2007). And, as it happens in the now-in-process, an event might even sometimes work as an affective assessment of a juncture.

If failure functions as an event, then its contours are always contingent, shaped by the assemblages and expectations (!) that sustain it. Each time, rather than assuming failure in psychotherapy is a self-evident category, it only starts making (producing, creating) sense after one examines how it is rendered perceptible, framed, and narrated. In empirical studies, failure is territorialised in many different forms and frameworks, depending on the epistemic principles at play. This type of territorialisation becomes particularly pronounced in interventions aimed at Māori tāngata whaiora, where therapeutic success and failure are often embedded in broader socio-historical formations rather than reduced to individual encounters. Understanding these shifting configurations of failure is particularly relevant when engaging with empirical research. The systematic review of interventions for Indigenous adults by Leske and colleagues (2016) offers a case in point, making visible the difficulty of finding studies that specifically listened to failed experiences in psychotherapy as told by Māori tāngata whaiora.

Among the four studies in Leske and co-authors' (2016) systematic review that included Māori samples struggling with mental or substance abuse disorders, only two focused on psychotherapy. In both cases, failure was not evaluated as an individual event. Instead, the issue of over-representation of

Māori in the health and mental health systems, and the overarching issue of colonialism and its ongoing effects put failure as a systemic, social problem that needs remediation. In the first study, the Hawke's Bay primary mental health initiative achieved high engagement, especially from women, in a tikanga Māori-based programme, over its first 15 months (Abel et al., 2012). The implementation of a holistic, strengths-based therapeutic approach showed greater improvement in standardised metrics than the average population in Aotearoa. The main condition treated was anxiety. On the other hand, the thesis by Bennett (2009) treated individuals diagnosed with depression, some with comorbidities. Bennett's cultural adaptation of a cognitive behavioural therapy treatment programme showed promising results, significantly improving post-treatment Hua Oranga — a brief Māori health and wellness outcome scale based on Te Whare Tapa Wha.

These studies exemplify how therapeutic success and failure are not inherent conditions but shifting assemblages, structured by the epistemic frameworks that render them intelligible. While the Hawke's Bay programme (Abel et al., 2016) engages failure as an embedded systemic force managed collectively, Bennett's (2009) work remains within an individualised framework, reinforcing the plateau of expectations that ties therapy to an ideal of correction, despite acknowledging the same systemic issues. In both cases, the event of therapeutic failure is not an isolated moment but a dynamic process, shaped by the collective assemblages of expression that sustain it — what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might call a machine of enunciation, continuously producing failure as both legible and illegible within the various co-existing epistemes. This

dynamic positioning ultimately justifies the emphasis in both studies on resilience-based approaches: if failure is systemically over-represented among Māori, then it is not merely a therapeutic outcome but an event embedded in an ongoing colonial history, reterritorialised through institutional and psychological mechanisms — an effect of what Guattari and Rolnik (2008) describe as the capitalist semiotic encodings that subsume singularities into prefigured, regulated subject-positions. This tension mirrors the broader tie-dyeing of failure across epistemic structures that shape knowledge production: what is recognised as success or failure in therapy is not just a product of intervention but of the systemic configurations that prefigure its legibility. In this sense, therapy failure might not be an individual breakdown or a systemic defect but a dynamic, emergent event — what Deleuze and Guattari (1983) call a desiring-production enmeshed in affective forces, historical inscriptions, and machinic knowledge assemblages — regulating what can and cannot be perceived as therapeutic success, positioning failure at the intersection of these forces.

Thus, while reading academic products from diverse fields and orientations, a constant shifting of plateaus seems to happen. And, once again, the singular processes tend to be silenced by the reifying tendencies of academic language — supposedly informative, replicable, and technical. This is not an error or a fluke, but a politics of knowledge — a colonising politics, indeed. And it permeates all academic work — including my own exposition of these texts in this trapizonga. So, as this section comes to an end — without forcing an artificial consensus on the conceptualisation of failure in psychotherapies — pressing questions emerge when confronted with such disparate takes on mental

health promotion. For instance, which modes of knowledge production might allow a life to reconnect to becoming-always-other, locally and at each time? Also, why do we continue to produce knowledge protocols that gladly reify and homogenise clusters of singular experiences in inert classifications? What do these protocols really teach us and which processes do they distract us from? How can we acknowledge and privilege singularities in our therapeutic encounters if they remain refractory to theorisation? One point is inevitable: failure is just as productive as the academic frameworks that attempt to contain it. Expectations, hysterias, validation systems, senses, protocols, becomings, affections, debts, ... blotted on a tie-dyed fabric. Hopefully, at least this time, the tie-dyed fabric is an event.

Translating Affections: New Beginnings

I wish, at least once,
 I could have back all the gold I gave to whoever
 Managed to convince me that it was proof of friendship
 If someone took away even what I didn't have.
 — Renato Russo, *Indians*³⁹

The beginning. Starting the process of a PhD research is surrounded by wonders: ignorance, hopes, and happiness. I covered some of my expectations (!) and a few machinic and expressive variations they underwent in my journey toward this written makeshift document in the first section of this trapizonga. There, I started confronting my dream wonderland with the pressing ethico-aesthetic-political matters I experienced as a newcomer immigrant, learning to navigate Aotearoa's academia whilst studying and working. Still, the hybrid collection of diaries I produced throughout the years of study seems to bring a plethora of affects⁴⁰ that failed to be translated into this written work so far. Some of those affections sometimes appear only in passing, almost imperceptible, and other times, the affections simply dissolve in the threading of arguments. After all, it is a well-established practice in majoritarian knowledge production trends to hide most (if not all) affects that emerge in a study process — may they appear as emotions or feelings — and I seem to have absorbed these inclinations

³⁹ Another song snippet from *Legião Urbana* [Urban Legion]. Here, the anger and love in Russo's personal life remind him of the feelings of betrayal brought by the enduring effects of Portuguese colonisation. Such emotions are portrayed while wondering who was civilised during the colonial invasion. The song's title — *Índios* — is how the invaders derogatorily misnamed Brazil's many different indigenous peoples and is used back at them. Despite similar in English, it is not the gentile related to India, which would be *indiano*. Translation is mine, from the original "Quem me dera, ao menos uma vez / Ter de volta todo o ouro que entreguei a quem / Conseguiu me convencer que era prova de amizade / Se alguém levasse embora até o que eu não tinha."

⁴⁰ Affections and affects relate to what we experience as emotions, feelings, and sentiments. Locally, I will mostly use both words interchangeably (as I have been so far), but in the Spinozian tradition, affects are understood as the effectuation of affections (see Deleuze, 1988).

quite well. However, I guess there is something other than such mainstream habits implicated in the specific case of this work's silencing of affects — and this could well be another hysterical reminiscence of mine, which is not an assessment I can make alone. Your input is always welcome. All in all, sharing your perception about any intensive experience presented in this trapizonga is an opportunity to collectivise memories, producing shared reality and allowing psychological untangling. I guess this would propitiate good therapeutic opportunities for both of us, if not also for others.

New beginnings. This incipient connective section depicts added starting points of this trapizonga as a venture to make more of the affects involved in this work visible. I offer these additional ideas because I suppose visiting a territory from diverse access points allows a better understanding of its complexities. The issues presented in this section are possibly not as tightly designed as in the “first” beginning. And they are partial expressions of affects that have populated this work's ethos since its early stages. In fact, there may be minor repetition, but there is much new information in the coming pages. So, the disparate materials I will put side by side include early diary entries that could serve as possible escape routes, conceptualisations that hopefully add consistency to topics already discussed, some threading together of points explored in previous sections, fleeting or persistent feelings, acknowledged tensions, and so on. Failure in psychotherapies seems connected to this difficulty of expressing everything that should be expressed. And as I write these new beginnings, I feel a similar insufficiency in my words while my academic self tries to control them ever more to bend them to my communicational needs. As I struggle to allow my

words to live by themselves, an overarching question seems to impose itself.

Which territorialising procedures connect affects and expressions, creating this perceived insufficiency?

One of the first well-defined angsts I remember going through when I decided to further my academic qualification abroad using English was what I first termed a primary translation issue. While adapting to the new land, I felt *saudade* of my loved ones in Brazil, but I did not find any possible word in English to translate it well. Indeed, there are good approximations in the English language, but they do not suffice. *Saudade* is a single word that expresses the composite feeling of longing, missing someone or something, yearning, nostalgia or hope for future encounters, and fondness⁴¹. And it bogged my mind that maybe — just maybe — English native speakers either did not feel *saudade*, or they simplified this endearing feeling by limiting it with the words we already have available in this language. Or worse, they felt *saudade* just like I do but could not express it without a paragraph of explanations. I also wondered if first-language English speakers had ever noticed that all the emotions composing *saudade* seem to present themselves neighbouring each other agonistically, in tense but mostly indissoluble clusters — at least for me, but I imagine more broadly. All these possibilities seem to reconnect to long-discussed issues of universalism and relativism in language, and distinct understandings about this topic hold significance, verisimilitude, and usability

⁴¹ Each of these words has a correspondent one in Portuguese, expressing their more specific meanings: *anseio* for longing, *sentir falta* for missing someone or something, *anelo* for yearning, *nostalgia* for nostalgia, *desejo de reencontrar* for hope for future encounters, and *carinho* for fondness.

today. I will not particularly follow this thread, though. This trapizonga has enough material about meaning and expression for what I need, at least for now.

Having studied and practised psychology for years in Brazil, my worry about the expression of *saudade* was a special moment in which I deeply and intuitively felt the incongruence between words and feelings outside a traditional therapeutic setting, where those concerns seem to appear much more regularly — at least in my personal experience and, anecdotally, that of many of my peers. Despite being a benign example with plenty of possible partial translations, I was transported back to how reporting an experience sometimes demands many words to explain the tiniest moment, and how language mediates, constrains, and produces a life, participating in defining which stories are possible and which are not (Foucault, 1981). So, the intuition to pursue this work also partially derives from a perception that expressing already-known words does not always suffice, and attempting to explain compound sentiments might be draining or challenging. A demand that arrives with a person looking for help might never be heard because the words for what requires attention might still not exist.

My minoritarian experience as a foreigner alludes to an issue that seems to be significant in the discussion about therapeutic failure. A person needing psychological care, even if they arrive with an exuberant and well-structured demand, may still need to ripen, mature, or minimally define their requests inside of the therapeutic space. And maybe — just maybe — a way of saying what is necessary still needs to emerge. This is not a novel issue. For instance, Roustang (1986) evokes the idea of an *idiolect* to indicate such elaborative need.

This indication implies that, even if referred to a regional dialect or a broader language, any utterance still subscribes to the most subjective experience. Indeed, in addition to examining discourses and sentences and their overarching meanings, those involved in a therapeutic space also pay attention to styles, particular words, and special accents, even in their missing or unspeakable bits, as all those parts (and many more, in each case) create the demand (Guattari, 2006). These considerations are still strictly confined to expressive issues, which do not openly account for machinic assemblages, territorialisation matters, and transversality. Sustaining a space conducive to therapeutic alleviation unfolds across multiple layers of gradual scrutiny, shaped by psychosocial praxes of promotion, attention, care, and rehabilitation — none of which can be ignored or diminished in importance (Guattari, 2015a). Still, those practices do not possess natural rightfulness, and their importance and utility need to be tested through very singular processes, like a translation from — and to — a new idiolect, at all times, even in different parts of the same process.

So, in a sense, a therapeutic demand is also an issue of translation of an idiolect that — by rights and in fact — will invariably differ from that of the professional listening to it. And, considering the nature of linguistic mediation discussed in the previous sections, this need for translation possibly happens even when cultural traces and traditions are shared, or the same native language is spoken. What I mean is that a therapeutic encounter is always a space-time of difference. *Difference*, here, is understood in its more cosmic tense, may it appear personified in two or more different ones, as contrast within oneself, or as infinite disparity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Consequently, when

difference is welcomed in its immanence — and singular processes are not ignored — the expressive reality of therapy is no longer only located in the idiolect of those who need treatment. Thus, the therapist's expressiveness, clothes, and mannerisms, just as the physical spaces, institutions, and neighbourhoods where a therapeutic process happens, and all the sometimes-made-invisible relations of class, race, gender, place of birth, and their interlaced unfolding — the perceptions of all of these and any other noteworthy existences in each case — also enter a sort of translation process.

Indeed, this is a crossroads where singularity meets over-coded shared reality, producing complexity. For example, within the more pacified dimensions of reality, Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal (1992) remind us that rapport is an interplay between therapist and client, where nonverbal attributes intertwine with feelings, attitudes, and the perception and interpretation of the surrounding situation. This understanding departs from a concept of fixed humanness and meaning that is under suspicion in this trapizonga, but it still needs to concede that perceptions and interpretations participate in creating an encounter within the therapeutic space. In this direction, even the therapists who base their practice on strictly metaphysical grounds in an unbreakable realism — or, on another spectrum, those who assume they can silence their subjectivity in the relationship with the demanding other — find themselves in a position of co-announcers of the meanings being produced in the setting. So, as I started pointing out in the last section, an event might need to occur for therapy to happen — which in its limit is to say that therapy also is an event, fractally constructed as an event of events. In fact, when also understood as events,

rapport, therapeutic bond, the relationship between therapist and those seeking treatment, empathy, therapist effect, and so on can be seen as becomings within becomings, unfolding across ever-layering plateaus and connections, ultimately constituting a therapeutic event.

Another entrance point to this issue of translating idiolects or communally composing singularities is to think of encounters — which I previously defined as the momentarily significant relationship between two assemblages creating a block of becoming. And, in the Spinozian tradition, there are good⁴² and bad encounters (Deleuze, 1988), with a simple yet precise definition: good encounters increase the potency to exist, while bad encounters decrease it. This definition is rather interesting because it places good and bad in a localised relation of forces instead of as inner attributes of entities. For example, even if I tend to have good encounters with milk caramel (because *doce de leite* is my favourite sweet flavour), I can get greedy and eat more of this treat than I should on a given day, making me ill, which would turn out to produce a bad encounter. So, choosing good encounters and avoiding bad encounters is one of many possible ways of becoming-always-other; and it also involves locally deciding which encounters might be good each time and their dosages that will produce happy affects/effects (Deleuze, 1988). The alert reader might have noticed that I am extending various arguments presented previously; I told you I would return to the concepts giving consistency to this trapizonga again and again. However, this time, I am not only

⁴² The word “good” in English might contextually refer to two different Latin words, *bene* or *bonus* (Harper, 2001). In this trapizonga, whenever “good” is written in lowercase, it comes from *bonus* and means pleasant or beneficial. With uppercase (and maybe preceded by the article “the”), “Good” is related to a higher moral stance, or *bene*. The Good contrasts with “evil” while good contrasts with “bad.”

attempting to minimally situate how events and their heterogenesis, becomings and their encounters, and machinic affections and their territorialised expressive affects are ultimately connected, but also beginning to outline how they produce lines — hopefully, therapeutic lines in our case — and how such lines are composed of pure immanence or infinite difference.

*

Some deriving thoughts came to mind while proofreading these last paragraphs and noticing the speed of my arguments on paper. Throughout the years, I have met many students and colleagues who defined their take on psychology as “pragmatic” in an implied opposition (and criticism) to a supposedly “theoretical” take. And I admit that this trapizonga has now accumulated many local expressions that are being used in quick succession, which could create a deterritorialising effect like that of the word-repeat game, even possibly producing a perception that such partial concepts are disconnected from praxis. In this trapizonga, a binary opposition between theory and praxis is a logical trap more than a real issue. Indeed, a theory of machines and modes of production like the one presented in this makeshift document is fundamentally pragmatic. It is a theory of ethics in its most primary meaning, connected to its Greek origins as *ethos* — attitude or disposition (Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987). So, as I could explain beforehand, the work I write is not about producing novel protocols derived from such a theory. Instead, it is about producing new ways of being together within each and any procedure we may come to adhere to in our daily (psychological) practice.

Generally, a complication brought up when discussing ethics is its usual connection to a moral stance. This tension is not easily resolved, as ethics and morality are often treated as synonyms in most contexts, yet they must at least be put in perspective. Overall, I take that a collection of ethical prescriptions is a moral system, in the same way that a professional code of ethics should be called a *moral* code of professional ethics. Dissimilarly, ethics alone may still carry judgement, but it is not a preconceived judgement like the type found in manualised (moral) documents. Instead, ethics works locally like a Spinozian encounter, where good and bad encounters can only be inferred as the action develops (Deleuze, 1988). What I mean is that this trapizonga does not intend to propose moral guidelines for psychology. Just the opposite; psychology has its moral codes already written in each society, and any perfecting of these codes is welcome but should be achieved collectively in the proper spheres of decision. In its simplest form — taken as an ethos — I wonder which sort of ethics might be receptive or welcoming enough to produce a good encounter that is therapeutic. And, as there is no prescriptive way of doing so — considering that good and bad encounters are produced singularly — a conjunctive mode of thought and knowledge might need to be instilled in those willing to work therapeutically — a relational and immanent ethos that facilitates the opening of therapies to productive differentiation.

Identification of a need for relational ethics in therapeutic work reminds me of one of my first intensive journal entries: a written self-assessment about the shock of starting in an academic job in Aotearoa New Zealand, after working in Brazilian universities for years and incorporating a particular type of cultural

praxis as if natural, transparent, and objective. In my then open wounds, barriers to translation, disparate colonial histories, and the portrayal of culture through language seem to paint my perception of failure and my will to adapt to the new land. Tensions between my productivity and that expected (!) by institutional ties gain reticent individualistic and ableist hues.

*

I wish English were my native language. This is the obsessive thought I cannot control. While I am reading and marking assignments, while I comment on the margins of the submitted text files... All I can think about is how it would be easier if English were in me like Portuguese is. Inlaid, embedded. Inevitable.

I wish English were my native language. Every new preposition makes me tremble. Every phrasal verb, every grammatical detail. I restructure every sentence at least three times, generally many times more. I try to fool myself into believing this is just my way of being attentive and dedicated.

I wish English were my first language. I fear failing; I feel ashamed. I try to focus on the assignment being read; I need to comment on it, I must keep on marking. I feel like a hoax. Language should not be the main issue — I have important concepts and ideas to portray. And still, English seems like my biggest barrier.

Yes, I also speak the majoritarian language of a coloniser. But even my coloniser is a second-class one. I come from the most beloved colony of Portugal, the “crown jewel,” Brazil. Flame-coloured wood, gold, coffee, and sugar cane. Some 350 years of slavery. A commodity pool for enriching the Iberian Peninsula. I wish my coloniser was the best one. I wish English were my first language.

And, yes, I acknowledge this is a colonising voice in me. One that I struggle with every day since I moved to Aotearoa New Zealand. Here is the paradox: I want to blend in and be perceived for what I can offer, but I happen to be a foreigner. And I look and speak like one. And I think like one. And I write like an outsider. I even cry and suffer like an immigrant. I cannot hear my accent. I simply can't hear it. I kent.

I wish English were me. What a horrible thought I end up thinking. Giving up my history, giving up difference. Admitting I cannot bring up much to the table. "I will comment with my background. Let's empower this difference." That is such a laughable thought! What a steep learning curve! English is more than knowing how to write and speak in English. It is the way things are understood. It is in the icons and signs of encouragement, in the way things are addressed.

Am I just a brute?

Lately, my mother calls me over the Internet daily. She wants to know if I have finished this marking round. She cannot believe I am having difficulties; I am "too good, too dedicated" to struggle. I decide to stop telling her about my daily routine. I silence to be able to continue being. What a tragic decision to be forced into! I keep on working till my eyes cannot put the letters in order anymore. I sleep less, sleeplessly working. "I must be doing something wrong; these are too many hours!" The course coordinator seems to know it, as she writes emails talking about self-care. How much does a body need to stretch to produce the expected amount? I feel incompetent.

I want to focus on the task at hand. I must stop thinking this is something about my own lesser nature. Such a strange thought I had never experienced

before moving here! Even so, I keep fighting to find ways to relate to the culture I still cannot decipher. And I strive to find the words that are acceptable. I feel in between two worlds, I am a fiction. I am an English toddler, learning the ways of a new land. I can't hear my accent.

I must be a brute, then...

I try to find proper advice in my own mind; the type of advice I wish someone had given me when I started studying psychology. I attempt to use the compulsory materials in my teaching comments. Still, my vocabulary is not appreciated — it does not sound English enough. “The student won't understand this word,” is the feedback from the patient colleague training me. Cursed by my vocabulary. The words I know are not relatable.

In a contrasting manner, I also feel strangely happy. Working in New Zealand was a long-lived dream. And deep inside of me I know I can offer useful feedback. However, it still bothers me that I speak a lesser language and have lesser practices. It annoys me that I had to learn different languages to communicate minimally with the ones in charge of the world.

I tell a fellow Brazilian immigrant that I am struggling to give proper feedback on my marking work. In response, she comments that she cannot find a boyfriend because they always end up fighting. Comprehension issues, she says. Why is language so deeply entrenched in us that we grasp life differently? What a strange place, this one I start to explore. A no-one's land. In between cultures, languages, understandings, colonial hurts.

I still need to make sense of it all. I am too tired to be able to have a deeper sense of what is happening to me. It has been more than two years since I moved

to Aotearoa. Many traces of my story that I considered less connected to my first cultural practices have been confronted in that period, and brutally situated in my Brazilian history.

Am I really the brute, then? I indeed can't hear my accent.

I feel compelled to wish English were my native language.

Yet, I am an offspring of academia, I still believe I can learn what I must do. By accepting my beginnings and offering them as an added point of view. By accessing the diverse local practices with my crooked English skills through effort and perseverance. Why do I often feel powerless, then? How do I adjust the snail velocity to the carnivorous process?

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One of the forces encouraging me to share this burgeoning affective diary entry is that it exposes early germinations of many issues that became study demands as the research unfolded — demands I hope you reconnect to the topics, accents, and styles I have been exploring throughout the many sections, but it is okay if not. However, as my body was the primary inscribing medium of those intensive sprouts, every affection felt highly personal at the time. And the conflict between inevitable self-expression — which could also be understood more broadly as the expression of a life (Deleuze, 1997) — and the then-unattainable expected labour standards of a novel landscape created a colonialist and ableist crisis. Felt within as an individual failure, this demand produced a sort of misfit immigrant worker, despite my early efforts to avoid such individualisation. As the entry shows, part of me knew that the issue was far less mine than it appeared to be, yet intimate struggles took over as segmentary

lines slashing the flow of a becoming-academic. So, the customary lines built up in Brazil did not fit the new setting, and more malleable lines needed to arise, reconnecting the process to heterogenetic potency.

At the same time, arriving in any new space is daunting (even therapeutic spaces). When the non-generalisable characteristics of encounters are considered (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), we have that something may work as a compliment in one moment, but it might well be insulting or completely irrelevant in another. Back then, I was clearly lost in translation. Not due to lack of linguistic knowledge — despite having perfected the English language throughout the years in Aotearoa and still having many ways to continue perfecting it, of course — but due to not having words to express the teaching ideas in that specific institutional relationship adequately. This is a similar issue to that of idiolects I was discussing previously. It is not that a language — with its dialects and accents — and a culture — with its colonial allegiances and resistances — are not involved in the pain that presents itself. However, considering Roustang's (1986) contributions, the expression of psychological pain appears to be more fundamentally connected to the singular uses of language. These, in turn, might be more readily assessed ethically within a becoming.

And, as I mention becomings once again, I wonder whether the curious reader might expect this conjunctive section to move toward a methodological issue — one that has been imposing itself by inhabiting this work's borders. If events and their becomings are so crucial to therapy — and co-extensively to a life — how would a professional guarantee that a becoming “occurs” in each therapeutic setting? On the one side, such a question points to a reasonable

assumption that this issue refers to professional responsibility, as it is desirable that the person seeking help feels like themselves as much as possible, without specific worries, pre-established constraints, or procedural apprehensions. On the other hand, considering the nature of encounters, any two existing beings — human and non-human alike — might enter a becoming at any time, regardless of (and despite) any voluntarism or extrinsic provocation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). So, both points considered, potential professional interferences in this direction are not in the realm of control or deliberate proposition but more aligned with attentive waiting and distinguishing openness.

In that sense, the best answers I can offer to a methodological inquiry involving the acknowledgement of becomings are partial and ever-developing. At the same time, I consider it essential to provide partial answers in works like this one, avoiding what I sometimes call the silencing effect of complexity. That is, saying that a matter is “complex” in academic spheres tends to be followed by disengagement and a change of topic. The term serves as a justification to move on and abandon a line of investigation, rather than as a statement of a valid condition deserving systematic scrutiny. A reasonable assumption is that this argumentative withdrawal is linked to the conventional epistemological advocacies for simplification (Bordin, 1965) and control (Paul, 1967). Well, I prefer to stay with the likes of Edgar Morin (2007), with whom I can argue for a complex thought — a com-plexus (or intricate networks of associated elements) — in which science’s deterministic, reductionist, and disjunctive ideals are challenged by the imposition of processual realities, interactions between whole and parts, and distinctive conjunctions. So, I would advise the reader not to take

the partial answer I will offer in the coming paragraphs as *the* answer to the methodological question about becomings in psychotherapy. At the same time, I hope to propose a feasible digressive response that might allow posterior productive unfolding, like on-site development, reflexive scrutiny, applicability questioning, and local praxes changes, to name but a few.

As one of the products⁴³ of an interinstitutional effort to offer insights into the methodological demands of researching complexity, Kastrup (2019) compiled non-prescriptive attentional traces arising from disparate knowledge strands. Two leading topics are investigated in her contribution. Firstly, the very function of attention is confronted in Westernised psychology's usual understandings, as attention is not immediately taken as an informational selector or a recogniser of forms and objects. Instead, value is given to what could be understood as a sort of *lurking attention* (Deleuze et al., 2004)⁴⁴ — a non-focused attentional disposition that captures betimes disjointed and fractured circulating signs and forces. The second point refers to the functioning of attention as a complex process. Instead of offering a classificatory list or a description of modes of attention, an argument is brought up that there are varying configurations and proportions of attentional dispositions in diverse cognitive politics (Kastrup, 2019). So, one might take that attention can be understood in at least four dimensions — selective or fluctuating, focused or not, concentrated or dispersed,

⁴³ The word “product” was long highjacked by capitalistic ideals. Still, I take it as far from “commodity” as possible, much closer to its Latin etymological strength, understood as something that is *carried forward, developed, lengthened, ...* (Harper, 2001).

⁴⁴ *Lurking* is used for the French *aguet*, instead of the customary “lookout” from Charles J. Stivale's translation. Stivale's translation might give a disciplinary tone of supervision or inspection that works against the idea presented by Deleuze (see *A comme Animal*, in Deleuze et al., 2004).

voluntary or otherwise. Even so, attentional dispositions create local political conglomerates: selective concentration, involuntary focus, dispersed fluctuation, etc. After revisiting three majoritarian understandings about attention in Western psychology — selective attention by William James, fluctuating attention by Sigmund Freud, and suspended attention by Edmund Husserl — Kastrup (2019) proposes four varieties of attentional cognitive politics that I am taking as partial responses to the question imposed by my work about lurking around to respond to becomings that might happen in therapeutic settings. These attentional dispositions are *tracking*, *touching*, *landing*, and *attentive recognition*.

Tracking is open and unfocused yet fine-tuned and concentrated (Kastrup, 2019). It is the humble entrance into a field with no fixed target; yet it follows any speed, position, acceleration, and rhythm changes. It also circumvents the production of hierarchies of the figure-background type. That is, this attentional disposition is averse to producing (or embarking on) reified objectifications, unworried about redundancies, and favouring nearby unsystematic exploration. Tracking goes on until this actively receptive disposition is touched by something. *Touching* is a sensation, a quick glimpse into a selective process that operates independently of intentional focus (Kastrup, 2019). That is, something happens that demands attention — not the subjective nature of the attentive one nor an automatic recognition (“oh, this is a sign of ‘that’ malady...”). It is like a cognitive mismatch, producing an immediate, automatic reaction — a reflexive yet unreflective decal. Such a decal is like an unevenness in existing perception — a roughness, rather than a figuration. There are no guarantees for when or

how touching might happen. Still, any process has a multitude of possible entrance points, as a field is multidirectional. As such, tracking is more elementary than touching, and should probably not be rushed or skipped, subverting the mainstream economic ideals of efficiency in Westernised environments — which, in specific contexts, might pose institutional difficulties.

Once touched — a disposition that lends rigour to the methodological effort without giving up the unpredictability of the followed processes — a perception might evolve into a landing gesture. *Landing* is a sort of zoom-in, despite not necessarily focused; a halt or a perceived pause of the processes, producer of (or produced by) a territorialisation (Kastrup, 2019). Thus, the scale of the attention changes, producing a framework, a pregnant delimitation, or a horizon. This demarcation can work in different ways, from hyperfocus, possibly leading to attentional blindness, to varying degrees of openness to multiplicity, comprising varied forms of shared attention and connectedness. The window that reframes the attentional dynamics in a landing is constantly reconfiguring itself, distancing this process from the one of re-cognition. Yet, attentive recognition might be possible once that act of tracking is drawn toward a touch that imposes a reshaping landing. So, to avoid returning to molar re-cognition, partially suspending metaphysical certainties may prove valuable. One way of doing so might be to avoid questions of essence — like “what is this?” — and engage with a productive curiosity — “let’s examine what is happening here ...”. Of course, my last sentence (and all statements that could be read with such intonation) should not be understood as a behavioural prescription but as a localised example of ethico-aesthetic-political presence.

By investigating Bergson's distinction between automatic and attentive recognition, Kastrup (2019) contends that *attentive recognition* takes us back to the surroundings of the object, highlighting its singular contours and actualising a territory at each time. This disposition contrasts with automatic recognition (which I have been calling re-cognition), as the latter distances us from the perceived object, directing us to convenient action, detached from the present experience — just like someone might take their usual bus back home from work, only to realise they had exceptionally driven in the morning and left their car forgotten in the company parking lot. The problem with re-cognition, then, is not lack of attention but extreme attentional simplification, which may make one neglect the slow, arduous process involved in building “hot” knowledge. Therefore, as co-announcers in therapy, therapists might need to challenge their illusion of intelligence brought by re-cognition. Instead, attentive recognition could allow reconnecting to the flows that will enable a territory into existence at a given moment singularly.

Indeed, these clues imply that a therapist is not the one ensuring becomings will happen in a therapeutic setting. Differently, the methodological effort seems to be one of lurking attentively, waiting responsively for such encounters to happen (Kastrup, 2019). At the same time, therapists themselves are not out of the setting and could also (and sometimes do) enter a becoming despite not being the privileged pole of attention. As such, some interpretative keys might modulate when — instead of dealing with a typically representational issue like an oedipal transference — a therapist becomes-parent, for example. And, by saying that, I do not mean the Freudian concept of

transference is a lie or a matter of the past; within specific conformations, a therapeutic relationship might indeed occur archetypally as a resistance to therapy (Freud, 1900/2011) or a pathway to effectuate vital impulses of the person looking for care (Freud, 1912/2011). Still, becoming-parent does not follow the necessary misogynous oedipal script of father-law/mother-love implied in such conceptualisations. A parent may be a sponsor, absent, cringey, and even a helicopter... In this example, it is the impossibility to predict which parent might emerge — and even if a parent will appear — that forces any therapeutic process back into a politics of presence.

In fact, the many cognitive politics of attention emerging from Kastrup's (2019) contribution neither disallow nor diminish the professional need to continually navigate ethical and aesthetic choices. Some consequences of such choices appear in mainstream work as a variable called therapist's self-doubt (or professional self-doubt), and it has been sometimes connected to better outcomes in therapy (Nissen-Lie et al., 2014). Despite its promising connection to positive results, professional self-doubt remains a complicated variable, as it gathers too many issues under a single term: from the self-permission to perform — essential for new therapists, including insecurity problems of an intimate nature or perceived lack of knowledge — to the intricate discernment that a therapist's capacity to change someone's life is limited, requiring them to pursue therapeutic effects through what they can indeed offer... And I risk stating that, in a broader sense, what appears as self-doubt may well be the ultimate ethical awareness deriving from the reflexive presence of the therapist in a therapeutic setting. Even if the "therapist" is a best-seller self-help book, a knitting club, or

an Internet video, its effectiveness will (and should) be questioned. And even if the well-studied professional is a compulsive applier of avant-garde “strictly scientific” protocols, they will need to deal with their occasional failure to care. Hence, self-doubt is not compulsory but possibly a soft forecaster of ethical responsibility and preoccupation.

And the reasoned (and seasoned) reader might be immediately worried that the last paragraph seems to end with a Pollyannaism or a positivity bias toward psy professionals. Despite any interpretation those sentences may allow, I remind you that I am not speaking of motivation. If I may wander a little, ethical responsibility and preoccupation are not exclusive to individuals with unblemished morals when understood as an ethos. It also might happen to the capitalistic professional who strictly dreams of being monetarily valued or to the legalistic therapist who over-worries about their situation with the professional regulatory authority. Independently of the motivations giving consistency to an ethical binding, it is reasonable to suppose an amenable professional will most times (if not always) hope to do their work well enough. This professional inclination is sometimes experienced as self-doubt. And maybe — just maybe — willingness to build a specific idiolect with each person looking for care — a strong desire to understand and be understood — also participates in such positive professional uncertainty.

Action Art

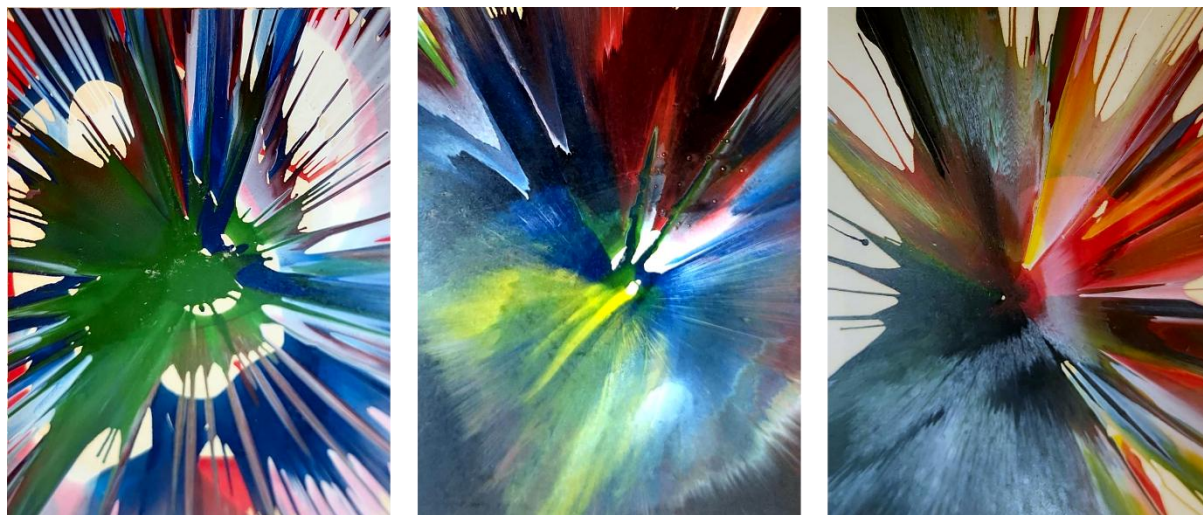
I have fragmented memories from my early childhood of sometimes being taken to a neighbourhood park called Campo de São Bento⁴⁵. It may feel trivial for those who come from areas with lots of greenery, but for an apartment kid of Rio's concrete jungle, visiting that park was a rare opportunity to be surrounded by trees, water fountains, groups playing cards, ducks, herons and geese, bicycles, and even a simple bumper car track. I particularly remember my interest toward a black man with long legs who always stood before an old bandstand with a machine made of tin, which was probably a meter long in each dimension (but it looked enormous to my young eyes), forming a kind of mechanical box. On a shelf attached to the side of it were tubes of paint in all the colours I knew. The handcrafted mechanism had a large hole on the top with a circular spinner, where paper could be attached. The man had a spin art machine and earned his livelihood selling framed spin paintings made on-site by curious children, young couples, and occasional tourists. Seeing that machine at work has always fascinated me. And I recall lingering near that man's art device to have the chance to watch other kids spurting blobs of paint on the paper only to see the colours explode in centrifugal rainbow rays and arborescent psychedelic rings or mix into an indiscernible greyish blue (Figure 4). My then-young, dreamy investigative mind would create all kinds of proto-methodological explanations describing why sometimes the colours stayed separated after spinning and other times not. Still, on the rare occasions I could test those

⁴⁵ A possible translation would be Saint Benedict's Field. I continued visiting the park throughout my life, as it is central in the neighbourhood and turns out to be a fresher way to stores, pharmacies, and banks. So, it eventually became commonplace to me as a passageway and not as a destination.

imaginative principles, all I could verify was that they were insufficient. Not always blatantly wrong, I must say; but insufficient.

Figure 4

A Colourful Walk in a Brazilian Park



Note. Spin art triptych, 1980. Three siblings: ages 2, 5 and 11 years old. Family collection.

Alfons Schilling, a Swiss artist from the 20th century, seems to have used this insufficiency in his favour to achieve his artistic efforts. Echoing the atmosphere of art movements around him, such as tachisme and abstract expressionism, Schilling was not interested in techniques that delivered predictable and reproducible results. Instead, his primary artistic pursuit was to find ways to paint the never-seen-before (Schuler, 2016). So, much earlier than the black man I knew from the city park, Schilling created a type of rotating device to which he attached large circular canvases used in his creations. Having moved away from entirely figurative works, artists like Schilling saw themselves at a crossroads. These artists faced the issue that a painter's intentional gesture could not be the leading maker of strokes on a canvas if they intended to create

genuinely new art. That is, fundamentally, an intentional gesture can only reproduce what one already knows — just as it is impossible to ask someone to think specifically of something they genuinely do not know. In this last example, the supposedly unknown would end up being approached by estimations and approximations of what is known, even if sometimes by contrast or extrapolation. In its limit, for art to be truly original, it must also be new to the artist who created it. And this was Schilling's pursuit. The unpredictability of spin art, which comes from an automated movement external to the painter's desire, produces an expression beyond the figurations known by the artist. By spinning the canvases while working on them, Schilling gave up control over some parts of the creation process — a procedure that intended to expose and highlight the immaterial forces instilled in any artistic undertaking (Schuler, 2016).

So, the different strands of expressionist art intended to be a getaway from imposed figurative reproduction. But Schilling was also dealing with the bits of artistic expression related to invisible forces such as sensations, affects, feelings, intentions, and so on. In a broader sense, one could argue that arts try to make visible the forces that are invisible by themselves (Deleuze, 2003), and expressionist art brings this effort to the fore. Of course, not all expressionist art is achieved by spinning canvases. This was a momentary solution found by a specific artist to answer the issue of originality. Indeed, Schilling himself found some other solutions to this schism by playing with human perception. For instance, in the series *Free Visions*, Schilling created auto-stereograms; to fully “see” the art, the viewer needed to go beyond the depicted patterns, blurring their binocular vision to create an illusion of three dimensions on the flat surface

(Schuler, 2016). Also, later in life, Schilling produced seeing apparatuses in a series called *Sehmaschinen* or *Vision Machines*. In this series, large headpieces — which resembled wearable art but appeared machinic in Schilling's works — served as cyborg mediators to human visual perception, ultimately questioning the constructed nature of images, the machinic mediation of seeing, and the entanglement of embodiment and technology (Beloff, 2013), reconnecting how we envisage the natural world to the very shape, functioning, and physiology of our eyes. So, his work slowly broke the barriers between painting and sculpture, art and science, essential and accidental attributes, humanness and the non-human.

Back to the core of creation was action. In other words, those artists deeply understood that art is processual and beyond its means of expression and moments of fruition (Macrì, 2022). Just like a creation process happens sensory-cognitively in an artist, it also occurs through the materials and techniques used to express art, and eventually, it depends on the experience of whomever the artwork is shared with. Art is not an entity's inner property but a shared phenomenon of surface (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). Yes, it is connected to expressive parts of humanness, which we sometimes define as deep or special. However, a rotating art machine and its owner captured my attention as a young boy simply because an elementary outward process promptly produced art independently of individual ability or artistic prowess. And that device, instead of replicating sameness or propagating uniqueness devaluation — some of the problems brought up by Benjamin (1969) in his seminal work about the mechanical reproduction of art — produced unexpected, singular results each time. Similarly, the local actions solving the issues of processuality in

expression(ism) expose that, more generally, art happens by continually favouring novel beginnings — heterogenesis, becoming-always-other, events. The artist, the materials and techniques, the viewers — these functions are interconnected and circulating: the artist is somewhat a spectator, the viewer co-authors an art piece with their interaction, the techniques partially control connectivity, the materials create meaning, and so on.

It follows that — strictly speaking — every art is action, even those strands that are not as blatant as expressionism. This view starkly contrasts with any narrowly built conceptualisation of art as only figurative or symbolic. Taken as a simple object, a painting hangs on a wall; it stays there. Sometimes, its colours faint, but still maybe bravely resist time — in any case, ignoring whoever gazes at it. But “what can a painting do” (Slifkin, 2011, p. 229), if anything? Well, in a machinic segment of content, a painting is just an intermingling of actions and affections. So much so that spin art kits seem only to be sold as a kid’s toy nowadays as if it were a minor activity, completely disconnected from the inherent aesthetic questioning brought by their early expressionist ties. But for my then-young self, the colourful rays of paint of a spin art machine brought wonders, imagination, and interest, independently of major historical reasoning — just like sometimes small details of nature impose themselves as a source of creative power, or a tiny bit of text (even a word or sigh) can open portals to intensive memories (Deleuze, 1994; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). As soon as a painting becomes art, it stretches the body beyond its prescribed functional organs, making one see sounds, hear the light, taste time, touch aromas, and so on. And I hope we are far enough from this trapizonga’s

first beginning to know that the last sentence is evidently not synesthetic poetry but an expression of becomings.

Thus, just like art is not an inner attribute of the artist, techniques, materials, or viewers, therapeutic alleviation is not within the therapist, professional protocols, clinical settings, or clients. *And, for a therapeutic event to occur, the effort seems to be one of letting the new beginnings brought by encounters happen, locally translating the (good and bad) affections they produce while valuing idiolects and attentively lurking around ongoing processes by giving up some control over them, remembering that therapists are a reflexive presence that co-announces the meanings created on site.* This argument carries the danger of — in its limit — being read as an invitation to dissolve any referential figuration that gives consistency to the matter. This is not what I am trying to imply. Even if I end up failing miserably, the invitation I bear is to infuse our psychological practices with a positive (and productive) professional uncertainty. Of course, I also would not oppose bringing back the kids in the park and their wonder machines to therapeutic spaces. Still, this last reference is not to naiveness or playfulness — although being whimsical is sometimes a wholesome expressive outlet — but to a total surrender to a politics of presence.

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Before I start wrapping up this section, I will follow yet another intensive beginning — that of my academic reading habits and annotations for this work. The daily chores of this research started quite straightforwardly. While paying attention to my surroundings and actively searching for readings that extended my perceptions, I took turns writing an experiential diary and a reading journal.

This artificial split did not last for long, and I ended up having conglomerate diaries with affections, experiences, notes about participation, tips from supervision, points that needed further exploration, deadlines, questions, comments on readings, and annotated citations. I wrote both in Portuguese and in English; in many senses, this unregulated, disciplined practice produced colourful rays and greyish blues like an academic spin art painting.

In fact, it took me a couple of months after beginning my PhD studies to shily start reading English translations of the French texts that have travelled with me since before my Master's degree. It took me even more time to predominantly refer to the English versions, despite sometimes still having to check the Portuguese translations and the French originals. Calling it a resistance of mine is not an exaggeration in this case. And I used to give reasons for resisting the move from one language to another. Looking retrospectively, some justifications seem more legitimate than others, but I will not try to determine which ones were worth it. These reasons were once felt as reality, at least for me, even if reality changed over time.

For instance, the relative proximity of Portuguese to French brings diverse consequences. Despite being further apart from Portuguese than Spanish and Italian, French is also a Romance language. It shares its Latin beginnings with Portuguese, with a handful of similarities in grammar and vocabulary. At the same time, due to geopolitical reasons that remount colonial alignments, Brazilian kids used to study French as a foreign language in school until the 1960s, not Spanish or English as they do today. So, Brazilian translations from French texts tend to be carefully studied and keep many aspects of the original,

with the inevitable changes between languages openly commented on and explained by the translator. Differently, even well-established academic translations from French to English tend to have many more degrees of freedom. In my unpolished understanding of the field of translation, I simplistically take that, as the two languages are further apart, translators face some unique difficulties in the process of portraying French ideas in the English language.

But there must be more to it than only historical linguistic affinity. I suppose there is also a problem with authoring and authority, as translations are necessarily a new take on what was first written. Verily, there seems to be a settled tendency in English translations to provide adaptations that are “domesticated” (Bennett, 2017, p. 222) to reach the average English-speaking reader. Even the most careful translator engages in re-creation of the text they are translating. However, in the process, they deal with more than language structure. They also re-create cultural experiences, rhythms, meanings, and affections (Bezerra, 2012). And, in passing, this point makes me inevitably remember my issues with translating *saudade*. Being a multidirectional re-creation, a translation is indeed a new beginning. At the same time, when a version of a foreign academic text is offered in English, it is reasonable to expect that the version will at least try to portray the ideas brought in the original with some fidelity. And I suppose the word fidelity is a hidden key here, as it comes from the Latin *fides*, which shares its background with the word “faith” (Harper, 2001). So, for a translation to be validated by a reader, the reader needs to inherently take part in the translation’s belief system, which somewhat justifies the domestication claims. Even so, “language is made not to be believed but to be

obeyed, and to compel obedience” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). So, a significant problem brought by my non-Anglophone heritage is that, in the order of discourse, disciplinary truth appears as random, everchanging violence when noticed from the fringes of a majoritarian linguistic structure (Foucault, 1981). Some fitting in had to be produced in me before accepting the versions in English.

Indeed, it took me some time to accept the English translations I was presented with, and I still fight against them. I do not know if this should be on the list of acceptable immigrant academic behaviours, but I did not read these versions before moving out of Brazil. And some bits in the English versions do not immediately resonate with the versions I knew beforehand. So, comments on translation and etymology are everywhere in my writing in English, attesting to my difficulty letting go of nuances that I consider essential in the works used to stitch my ideas to this trapizonga. And what was most impressive to me was the rediscovery that I am not alone in this difficulty. As an example, *dispositif*, one of Foucault’s noteworthy concepts, is known to have been translated to English with diverse nouns (Bennett, 2017) — apparatus, deployment, dispositive, machinery, construction, device, arrangement, and probably many others⁴⁶ — even within single texts. This inconsistency radically changes the original, leading the trusting English reader to ignore a Foucauldian concept, and even the overt connection to Canguilhem’s concept of *dispositif* deteriorates, erasing

⁴⁶ During my early works, I found a sketchy philosophy website that anecdotally counted 13 distinct terms for *dispositif* in principal English translations of Foucault’s works. However, I lost track of that website, and I could never find a more reliable academic source with an extensive list. The ones I listed are a personal collection, taken from the Foucauldian references used in this trapizonga, but only when caught by fluke. I did not get out of my way to find them.

some crucial lines of descent of his work. The word *descent* itself is a disconcerting choice to translate “provenance” — a point I felt necessary to make in a footnote of a previous section. Some translation problems seem less important than others. However, the stubborn academic in me keeps wanting to “go back” to a purer beginning, as if my first contact with those texts were more genuine. This disposition could be confounded with confirmation bias, but I suppose more is at play, rebuilding a connection to the very modes by which one gives meaning to a life.

In the first entry of my reading diary for this work, translation issues already appeared as a deliberate topic of concern. My interest was in inspecting why/how psychological pain fails to be translated within therapeutic settings. In the written account, I briefly consider the loss of communication brought by language and how translation relates not only to meanings but also to serialising possibilities. In the move to language, materiality cedes the central role to expression, solving some issues while creating many others.

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I quickly pull together some texts of Deleuze and Guattari in the original French and the translations in Portuguese and English. I search for the word “translation” in their A Thousand Plateaus (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). That is my topic, more or less, momentarily. I am not too sure, and I will keep this uncertainty for now as a strategy for letting the process flow. However, I already know I will try to write about this multilingual adventure I started not long ago, an adventure I intend to carry on with my studies. The first plateau I bump into is called Apparatus of Capture. There is a kind of imprisonment risk; it must be. I

have goosebumps sitting in the Ph.D. students' room as I start to connect with what I am reading. "Language is made for that, for translation, not for communication" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 430). What does it mean to say that language is not made for communication? The preliminary clues I have for this issue are that language is not exactly a device (*dispositif*) for sharing facts, nor a piece of machinery (*dispositif*) for imparting information.

Instead of trying to decipher how language could relate to information and facts, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest communication is a pathway built materially. A forager bee finds a flower and communicates to receptor bees (in a sort of dance or choreography) where a harvestable flower is. The receptors cannot replicate the dance but can fly to the actual flower. While getting to the concrete source, the receptor bees do not compare notes. They are also not actively checking if the first bee gave correct information, simply following the recruitment dance (Biesmeijer & Seeley, 2005). The receptor bees can only transform into emitter bees like the first one if they have contact with the flower themselves. In those terms, the bees have a common tongue, but not a language. Independently of the specific details of that interaction, the common tongue is based on concreteness, not abstractions. *Communicare*, from the Latin, the act of (materially) connecting (Harper, 2001). Instantly, the word "becoming" comes to mind.

Humans, otherwise, make extensive usage of language. And this ultimately means the flower itself loses importance. As in a game of whispers, signs can pass from one human to another, without necessarily reconnecting to a primitive material source, and the intention to communicate changes into a struggle to translate or interpret. The first connection that comes to mind is de Saussure

(1959/2011) and his rationalist semiotics of signifiers and signifieds — acoustic images and concepts; both hopefully reconnecting to an out-there reality, but most probably not. And I also quickly recall Ricoeur's (1970/2008) hermeneutics of suspicion inspired by the contributions of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. And how, after those three thinkers, the Westernised world repositions understanding as treacherous trouble needing perpetual uncovering. Meanings within meanings — socialised, psychologised or transvalued. Language, then, appears as a somewhat crooked mechanism of transmission necessary to humans, as we do not all share the same tongue. However, this change is not an evolutionary issue, as our communicational ability persists despite not being available to be used willingly (an issue that also reconnects to becomings when therapists cannot overtly create an event). Humans mostly try to achieve communication by using language as a translating trapizonga: it may not be cut to communicate, but it is a transmission system that sometimes allows a (territorialising) glimpse into materiality.

I still read a lot in Portuguese. Do I need to read only in English if I am going to write in English? This question gains other dimensions if I think of language's transmissivity and its split from communication. The three versions of the text — in French, Portuguese, and English — will share most aspects, but none will say the same. Is the French version the correct version? Should one only read texts in their original language? For now, I will keep doing what I have been doing: reading the various versions and thinking about the moments when something seems strange, out of place, or too stretched in its adaptation, as if each version were an idiolect. I suppose this strategy may allow me to expose the communicational difficulty of language, but I could be wrong. Time will tell.

And the issues catching my attention in the versions I am reading seem to describe me right now: strange, out of place, and stretched. The affections produced by the readings now enter a series with my immigrating student relations — meanings within meanings... Is it me or the texts? I wonder how to overcome the feeling of being a bad translation of my once Brazilian-only self. Should I overcome it? Is that feeling a demerit? How can I acknowledge this need to reposition myself without putting myself out of the field or playing the “enlightened” role? (Or the voice that keeps saying, “I shouldn’t change! This complexity composes me, and the work needs my perspective to happen. I will bring new light to those issues.”) Arriving at a new place is intimidating, as my history both allows and halts my experiences right now.

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In this preliminary diary entry, hesitation and indecisiveness took control of the discussion, making me stop pursuing the reading and pausing the entry prematurely. As previously mentioned, the struggle to adapt to a new land was a stubborn, long-lasting tension in my first years in Aotearoa. Still, I am unsure if this should be portrayed as a matter of acculturation. In the series produced by linguistic versions, both the book I was reading and my relationship with the land had imposed domesticated translations. Actually, the choice to pursue knowledge by moving away from my comfort zone into a new country awakened the seeds of both an ethnocentric voice that “knew better” and a colonialist redeemer who supposedly came to “rescue” the ones in need — bits of a well-colonised Brazilian self that I am not proud to disclose. Yet, these perspectives were rapidly dismissed as insufficient. On the contrary, the main feeling was of

personal failure and inability. So, there is a repeated theme here — a stubbornness or a segmented customary line cutting the flow of a becoming-always-other. My thoughts were trapped in a territory that was materially left behind. My mind and my body were in different places, negotiating my (in)action and the roles available to me.

This passage immediately brings me to Lacan's (2002) provocation to the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*: I think where I am not; therefore, I am where I do not think. I have a particular liking for the seminars from which this defiance comes because they were brutally cut by the events of May 1968 in France. Those were times of singular bravery. When Lacan resumed the sessions, he stopped pursuing the issues brought up in those meetings, turning his attention to building a theory of psychoanalytic procedure and leaving those seminars as an anomalous collection of ideas between his prior epistemological discussions and the following thoughts about his concept of the four (five?) types of discourse. So, this "improper" collection sits unresolved in the middle of two crucial Lacanian endeavours, as if nothing had happened (just like typical attempts to underestimate the effects of those seven weeks of Parisian political unrest).

Still, those "failed" seminars deal with the very core tension between translation and communication — or between a being that thinks and one that materially exists — by stretching the Cartesian ideal until its final threshold. Ultimately, the psychoanalytic act confirms the existence of the being at the same time as it challenges their thinking (Lacan, 2002). The analyst becomes a witness when they accept to be there, to be *with* someone, validating their expression. However, the Lacanian provocation introduces that such a

reaffirmation of existence exposes the failure of thinking as a conscious, material, self-governing property — an insufficiency experienced as alienation or intimate foreignness. And, to the individual’s astonishment, the Westernised subjectivity arises through the cracks of the supposed monolith of thought in peculiar dreams, wits⁴⁷, and *failures of performance* (from the German *Fehlleistung*, ordinarily translated as “Freudian slip”). In Lacanian metatheory, these slips of cognition reconnect to a fundamental other⁴⁸, may it be experienced in the apparently lost, the never achieved, the impossible or whatnot. However, this fundamental other relates to an internalised expectation of unitary self that remounts the beginnings of subjectivation (Lacan, 2002). And a curious explanatory “jump” hidden in broad daylight in these ideas is how the premature material experience of noticing that the world does not bend to one’s pleasure demands slowly shifts into an encoded consciousness that hallucinates its (phantasmal) limbs and self-imposed limits.

Yet, this hallucination also creates material life. So, when someone tries to avoid performance failures and attempts to mean what they say, they strive to confer the once-lost communication to language. This is a critical tension with which psychoanalysis deals: the subjectifying supposition that each bit of us is materially ours and should bend to our desires, and an opposing fundamental

⁴⁷ Respecting the etymology of *Witz*, the German word Freud chose to express this phenomenon, I decided to use “wit” instead of “joke” as usual. The German *Witz* reconnects to etymological beginnings that also create *Wissen* (knowledge) and *Wissenschaft* (science; “knowledgeship”).

⁴⁸ The “other” has a centrality throughout Lacan’s oeuvre, which appears in more complex ways than I present here. While Lacan does not systematically enumerate these forms in a single work, at a minimum, one can identify five distinct figures of the other: the imaginary other, the symbolic unconscious Other, the object *a* (or the real cause of the desire), the social-bonding other addressed in the different types of discourse, and the other of the non-phallogocentric feminine jouissance. These figures emerge across his many seminars and writings, and any attempt to consolidate them comprehensively would require an extensive reconstruction of his fragmented theoretical developments — an undertaking beyond the scope of this work.

other that exposes our inability to control the totality of the aspects of a creation process — may it be summoned in nature, society, Oedipean parents, the adaption to a new land, and so on. It was within this tension that — maybe slightly provoked by Austin's (1962) concept of speech act — Lacan (2002) reconnected talk therapy to action in those unique meetings. More than a repeated remembrance producing difference, expression produces oneself in an act. Like in expressionist art, life is a shared phenomenon of surface created in acts one does not fully control.

Colonising forces

Having discussed the early moments of my work in a new land — the effort involved in translating affections, the local ethos in the assessment of encounters, and the productive surrender to life processes — I will now briefly turn to another topic in my writing that demands closer consideration. While concluding this section, I will talk about colonial tensions. The first issues that come to my mind about the long-lasting effects of colonisation are painted with slightly different hues from those I found in Aotearoa. I come from a land with a wilder model of colonisation. The word “wilder” is an insufficient descriptor, but I am not convinced I know a good one. More blatant? Overtly pillaging? ... I remember learning a bizarre categorisation at school: the Portuguese had exploitation colonies, and the English had settlement colonies. This faulty classification used in older history books in Brazil produced a stubborn imaginary gradation of colonisers in my mind, which closely invokes my inadequate early wishes to have been colonised by the “better” English when I started working in New Zealand. I wonder if I came to this land expecting to find

paradise. And in a sense, Aotearoa is indeed the place of my dreams. However, in the ideal country I first landed in, there were no rats or cockroaches, and inequality was absent. Tangata whenua had their rights guaranteed by a respectful treaty, and women did not have to deal with any violence. Looking back at my freshly arrived, wishful-thinking self makes me both embarrassed and willing to fight for a better world. In fact, New Zealand's international advertisement strategies excel in upselling a paradisiacal view of the country. Nevertheless, of course, I cannot dismiss my considerable share of responsibility in that unrealistic take of mine. I suppose I arrived with the fascinated eyes of a tourist, and I was charmed by the possibility of living new experiences. So, it did not instantly occur to me that many of the problems I experienced growing up had distinct beginnings but shared hurts with Aotearoa's colonial past.

While carrying out this study, I continued fine-tuning my perspectival perceptions of Aotearoa while grappling with the colonialist tensions I carried from birth. I cannot say those tensions are settled — quite the opposite. My arrival in Aotearoa feels like the plot of Richard Linklater's 2001 feature animation *Waking Life*: a slightly unsettling experience in which I never go to sleep, yet continually awaken from the last dream, hopeful that I am getting closer to a more definitive understanding of reality. So, there is a personal endeavour in my immigrant experience that transcends this trapizonga's scope. Despite the lack of reiteration in the overt acknowledgement of the forces colonising me (and this work), I do not ignore their existence. I strive to perceive and contend with these colonising forces, freeing myself and this writing a bit

each time I do so. However, I also acknowledge there is no ultimate awakening; this work gathers strength in attentively recognising its points of failure.

From everything that I could write in this makeshift document so far, it must be an easy guess that I come from a very Westernised background. This is how my life unfolded before I learned there were other — minoritarian — possibilities. At the same time, I do not adhere to tokenised decolonising demonstrations. So, I do not take indigeneity as a monolith, and I only write terms when they come from my most embodied understanding. For instance, the choice of being thrifty in my expression in te reo Māori comes from a profound respect for Te Ao Māori and Tikanga Māori, and a realisation that I still need to walk a long personal decolonising pathway in Aotearoa before I can understand the complex effects of colonisation locally. A pathway that also includes other indigeneities and singular hurts — of false stories portraying Brazil as a racial democracy despite the eugenic governmental policies encouraging Italian and German immigration to whiten the population in the early 20th century.

Thus, in spite of the colonising forces emanating from many of the theories I know and use, it is a gross error to assume I gladly talk from the place of the heterosexual white male coloniser. In Brazil, I learned I was not straight enough. And in New Zealand, I discovered I am not sufficiently Caucasian to enter certain cafés alone, and my accent and manners are sometimes icons of expected poverty (economic or epistemic). But these are just the individualised expressions of a more cosmic tense of such difference. Ultimately, this trapizonga's allegiance belongs to singular expressions of pain, which may come clustered in less or more colonised expressions. Indeed, the danger of becoming a

colonising force is not irrelevant in this work and our professional practices; otherwise, I would not need to finish this section this way. This point of complexity connecting singular expression to over-coded shared reality begs for a lurking politics of attention that welcomes the new beginnings produced by the cuts and flows of collectivised living processes. That way, one might reinstate some communicational ability to the idiolects being translated each time. And maybe — just maybe — when one accepts a positive professional uncertainty produced by the unpredictability of encounters, therapeutic alleviation becomes action, as a radical, immanent presence.

Oh, No! Psychology is an Institution! What Now?



— (inspired by) Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé P15 Capa 11*⁴⁹

The word “institution” emerges from an interestingly layered etymology. The most immediate reference is *institutio*, the Latin term for assemblage, custom (as in habitual action), and education. Taking away the noun-producing suffix “-tion,” one arrives at *in-statuo*, which means, in free translation, “as a statue.” Going further, “statuo” is derived from the Latin *status*, which is the word for *place* (Harper, 2001). So, in its most basic lines of descent, an institution is an assemblage, a custom, or an educational norm set up or put in place that seems to stand still like a monolith or a statue. The meaningful history of the word “institution” forces it into many partial synonyms, with terms like academy, corporation, clinic, establishment, organisation, business, association, foundation, organism, culture, company, and enterprise being some of them.

⁴⁹ This schematic rendering is inspired by Hélio Oiticica’s *Parangolé P15 Capa 11*, a performance and wearable artwork first danced by Nildo da Mangueira in 1967. It consists of five rectangular layers: two of braided straw, one of hessian, one of written red padding, and one of green cloth. Oiticica, a Brazilian neo-concrete artist, sought to overcome the institutionalised notion of work of art by blurring the boundaries between art and life. His *parangolés* were pieces of anti-art produced during the Brazilian military dictatorship, designed to be worn, danced, and experienced by the public. The image and the translation on the red pillow are mine, based on the original “incorporo a revolta.” Afro-Brazilian religiosity mixes with civil unrest in this piece.

These terms often have complex layers implying diverse contexts, whether capitalistic, legal, architectural, laboured, moral, spiritual or religious, biological, etc. It is so that defining what an institution is becomes an impossible task, leaving space for contentious debate. For instance, Alesina and Giuliano (2015) strived to propose a conceptualisation separating culture and institutions due to an interest in measuring correlations and posteriorly inferring possible causal effects between them. In that work, the solution was to define culture as the collection of *informal* social customs and to restrict the term institution to *formal* assemblages, such as constitutions and ruling systems. This sort of conceptualisation gatekeeps terms, forcing them to stay inside strict pre-established limits and enforcing artificial separation on their zones of indiscernibility, producing further regimentation. That is, a “culture” of boxing ideas into hard-lined concepts pushed those researchers to “institutionalise” a separation, allowing the sought measurement. Considering Alesina and Giuliano’s (2015) needs and interests, they did not have much choice but to opt for this style of conceptualisation. However, a disconnection between the words and their histories had to be produced beforehand to allow such research interest. Otherwise, the very historical connection between the two terms would suffice as an obvious relationship. Reestablished in their most basic relations, informal and formal social norms evidently inform and supply each other, producing collective life, even if sometimes agonistically.

Nevertheless, the disjunctive expectation in Alesina and Giuliano’s (2015) assumptions interests me, as it reifies a separation between cultures and institutions, creating a supposition that, in principle, those two terms have

nothing to do with each other. Somewhat in their favour, we have that the word “culture” has its straightforward Latin roots in agriculture and cultivation (Harper, 2001), and its usage beyond this strict meaning goes at least as far as the last century BC with Cicero’s (1877/2005) comparison between the cultivation of plants and philosophy as the “culture” of the mind. So, historically, Western understandings of culture either followed or narrowed down Cicero’s ideal that human refinement and sociability need to be cultivated in the psyche. For instance, the German tradition contrasts culture with civilisation; *Kultur* is more often understood as a sincere morality — or the conscious action toward virtuous ends — while *Zivilisation* corresponds to sometimes misleading exterior courtesy — or at least a simple, practical acquisition of manners to allow life together (Elias, 2000). Of course, the German interpretation differs from the less nuanced French and English historical takes, in which the acquisition of “higher” culture is connected to coming from more “advanced” civilisations in a paradigm congruent with colonialist and eugenic undertones of linear progress expectations. In a sense, independently of being understood in more exclusivist ways like the Germans or more encompassing takes like the French and English, culture was historically used to express the “self-consciousness of the West” (Elias, 2000, p. 5). As such, the Anglophone academia slowly refurbished the term in modern social sciences, especially in cultural anthropology, in efforts to gradually move away from Tylor’s (1871/2023) infamous ethnocentric cultural discussions about the “primitive” animism of the Alaskan Tlingit (offensively referred to as Koloshes), the Sámi peoples from Europe (insulted as Lapps), the

two distinct Brazilian ethnic groups of the Baniwa and Coripaco (rudely taken as a single group, the Içannas), and so on.

Verily, culture became a modern anthropological concept in a late colonialist context, and it gained traction through the contrasting comparison of Western hegemonic understandings with the exotic other, invariably taken as “less cultured.” However, at the beginning of the 20th century, immigrant scholars like the Prussian Franz Boas and the Austro-Hungarian Malinowski — despite remaining considerably ethnocentric by today’s standards — became essential assets in Anglophone university circles (Helm, 2001). Their work triggered slow and bumpy shifts that, over time, led to less ethnocentric conceptualisations of culture, such as Geertz’s (1973) interpretative approach, which frames culture as human meaning-making through symbolic systems, urging for thick description and explication. So, considering culture is a performance realising Western ideals, Anglophone scholarship — remarkably U.S. academia — developed a distinctive interest in cultural discussions (Jenks, 2004). Gradually, culture gained a more general (almost generic) meaning — closer to conceptualisations of institution — as a collective assemblage of expression or a custom. Still, this historical reassembly only helps to understand issues like Alesina and Giuliano’s (2015) difficulty conceptually separating culture from institutions. As I began pointing out earlier, an expectation that culture and institutions are two distinct entities stays adrift, presenting itself disconnected from the histories of the terms. This trapizonga is not an exercise of divination, and there is much implied in that expectation (!) that I cannot infer. Therefore, I will follow the surroundings my mind was transported to when I

noticed the expectation of distinctiveness instead. I offer a very tentative line of reasoning as it comes from an intensive reading, and you are welcome to qualify it and expand on it further in your terms.

Something especially calls my attention in this anticipated separation between culture and institutions. Whenever culture is mentioned, a person or group is expected to appear. “Whose culture?” is a question that could easily follow such mention, and it does not cause big bumps or surprises. Sometimes, an ethnic group appears in response. Other times, it evokes a country or a smaller cluster inside a population, like thematic clubs, LGBTQIA+ communities, senior societies, etc. However, as we currently understand, culture should not be confounded with ethnicity, nationality, club membership, sexual orientation, gender identity or age (Niedermüller, 1999; Tskhay & Rule, 2015; White, 1978). So, it is somewhat okay if someone does not adhere to certain social expectations or refuses to be a full member of specific groups in Westernised societies. Still, a sort of branding is established as soon as someone *has* a culture (Karahanna et al., 2005). Unfolding from the understanding that culture is Western self-consciousness, it is commodified, customised, and taken as a strictly personal experience in present times, even if believed to derive from forces external to a self. Instead of *participating in* cultural beliefs and practices — which implies a culture is a dense conglomerate of shared meanings in which one takes part to varying degrees and affiliations — culture is reified as an identity and performed as an individual essence, even if inside a recognisable collective.

Differently, asking “whose institution?” is usually a shock unless its meaning is taken more closely to ownership expectations in capitalist corporations and businesses. On a surface layer, it sounds absurd to ask whose institution the family, the mental health system, the university, or psychology is. Taken as established realities, we acknowledge that these institutions go beyond our existence and do not depend on our allegiance or (un)willing participation to alter and define our lived experiences. Institutions might even seem immutable and ahistorical at first glance, like a monolith or statue — a monumental existence extraneous from subjects. Of course, my inquisitive reader might already have intuited that even if institutions sometimes seem to refute clear subjectification, they function similarly to cultures. Due to this affinity, the codes defining both terms can be easily scrambled. So, cultures might be imposed like institutional standing stones, existing beyond one’s cultural allegiances whilst clearly altering and reasonably defining lived experiences (Lim, 2015). And institutions might also sometimes be noticed as cultural adherence, like when kinship is reified in specific models of familial design, especially apparent when assessed from outside a said “cultural” group (Radcliffe-Brown, 1941). Despite seemingly distinct processes, separating culture from institutions is an ethico-aesthetic-political decision, as both terms currently function as a comprehensive reference to the expression axis of assemblages. However, on the plateau of expectations, while culture appears as disembodied meaning-making, institutions are put in the place of machinic assemblages of bodies as if they were exclusively related to materiality. Regardless of their existence as

expressive assemblages, it is as if cultures were particularly in the place of words and institutions were in the place of things.

I am aware those arguments are insufficient, especially when cultural practices connected to art show evident materiality, and necropolitical institutional discourse mainly presents itself as disembodied power-knowledge. However, the many lines escaping this argument will be kept untouched this time — of course, my invitation to continue the conversation remains. Still, this section's lengthy onset does not intend to clean the uncleanable; as I said earlier, there are many zones of indiscernibility when one tries to define institutions, especially in connection to their many partial synonyms, and I barely scratched the surface of one of these points of dissent. So, this is where I reaffirm that there are many entrances to a trapizonga. By right, I could have used a concept such as culture as an organising line for my conversation about failure in psychotherapies. But this is not my choice, and I have reasons for that.

My initial mention of institutions happened promptly — before the first ambulant section of this makeshift work. In that declaration, I proclaimed that the politics of this trapizonga's hodos-meta is institutional, despite its horror for despotic institutions. Following that trend, I commenced this conjoint walk by disputing the notions and rules that circumscribe the institution of scholarly writing, specifically concerning authoring and authority and their sometimes-concealed relationship to clinical psychological practice. Psychology is undeniably an institution, as is the idea and the diverse performances of failure. The university — with its scholastic, content-focused, and capitalistic territories — is an institution, and a PhD programme is also an instituted entity. Science, arts,

and empiricist and rationalist ideals are all institutions — I will stop before I start obsessively listing topics from other sections, as this is another serialising fissure leading to circularity. The all-encompassing word “institution” dazzles for its ability to fit almost everywhere as much as it hides the complex histories, political negotiations, meaning disputes, under-the-table schemes, and local transformations of the forces for which it serves as a metonymic blanket.

Like a bottomless bag or an infinitely expandable elastic band, the word “institution” seems to accept partial conceptualisations ever more, a capacity that attracts me for its competence to cover the world we continuously build less or more collectively. Of course, dealing with such a convenient idea equally involves countless dangers, some of which I pointed out in the previous paragraphs: reification, depersonalisation, naturalisation, oversimplification, disconnection from history... Yet, similar dangers remain even when one favours adhering to partial synonyms of institution, as exemplified in the case of culture. Failure to conceptualise is unavoidable when adhering to any of these neighbouring terms and can only be hidden by pretending or enforcing a “dressage” through operational definitions, like the one from Alesina and Giuliano’s (2015) study. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, institutions might tolerate radical analysis better than their counterparts because they are predominantly felt as an entity external to individuals.

Some threads leading to institutional analysis will continue to be followed soon. But, before moving on, the meaning of the word “radical” — implanted in the previous paragraph — seems to beg for an explanation beyond its face level. Etymologically, “radical” stems from the genitive case of the Latin *radix*, which

means *plant root* (Harper, 2001). So, while this word sneakily reconnects the argument to (agri)culture, it also risks suggesting unequivocal causality, unmixed hierarchy, binary systems, or unidirectional progress (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). One could say, for instance, “let us get to the root of this problem,” implying that there is an ultimate hidden cause to be reached in any matter. Such an approach would be radical but also perhaps limiting and short-sighted. Regarding this issue, I hope it is already overtly known that this trapizonga does not naively adhere to such arborescent ideals and its premade systems — first, the covert root in the soil, then the visible trunk with its branches, leaves, etc. If anything, this makeshift document places arborescent arrangements alongside rhizomatic ones — it strives to facilitate parrhesiastic transversality.

Indeed, “rhizome” derives from the Greek term for *mass of roots* (Harper, 2001), though in modern botany, it is considered closer to a stem rather than a root system. However, to my foreign eyes, the frisky nature of rhizomes is better captured in their other English name, *rootstalk*. By avoiding referring to rhizomes as only roots or stems, this word possibly better captures the chaotic visual mass formed by the creeping pedicles, clustering with different parts of themselves, turning and returning, either agglomerating or sprouting away, elongating in search of new territories, etc. In this case, being radical is probably closer to a becoming-radicle (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) — a smaller or minoritarian root inevitably coupled to its connective stems. A multiple unit, a multiplicity, an assemblage with its sprouting fractals. So, rhizomatic thought does not lead to unearthing ultimate or primordial answers but to following

movements in understanding whilst they pragmatically convolute their doxastic allegiances. At least in this contextual case, a radical approach might be thoroughgoing, but its regimentations are not extreme; it may seek parrhesiastic liberation, but it is not reformist; it might be immanently essential, but it does not hallucinate an ulteriorly created single-origin.

A Brazilian tells a French chronicle in English

Almost instantly, radical (radicle) bridges lead me to mid-twentieth-century France and the transformational encounter between Jean Oury and François⁵⁰ Tosquelles (Schiavone et al., 2023). This meeting is part of a series of historical processes that eventually resulted in the theory-practice presently called *institutional analysis* (Guattari, 2015a). Many threads compose this singular historical moment, and any recounting of it seems to leave crucial points invisible. So, I follow on without trying to be a completionist — my quick account surely erases countless contributions, even simplifying collective grassroots work by naming individual persons — but I keep an effort (and illusion) of precision guiding my storytelling. One can find this story in many places and spaces, with various characters, intonations and aims. Ultimately, my recounting reintroduces characters who lend meaning to diverse portions of this trapizonga. In our case, it is a chronicle that leads to Guattari and his subsequent collaboration with Deleuze. But it also encompasses other figures — the Oury brothers and Tosquelles — alongside two institutions: the La Borde Clinic and the Saint-Alban Psychiatric Hospital⁵¹.

⁵⁰ Born *Francesc*, his Catalan name, but naturalised *François* after taking refuge in France.

⁵¹ The Saint-Alban Psychiatric Hospital is currently called *Centre Hospitalier François-Tosquelles* as a homage to one of the leading proponents of institutional psychotherapy.

Fernand Oury was a French schoolteacher who devised the practice of institutional pedagogy, which focuses on collaborative learning, democratic decision-making, and active student involvement in shaping educational experiences (Thornton, 2023). It is somewhat difficult to conceive that Fernand could have foreseen the important events that would occur when he professionally connected one of his past students, Félix Guattari, to his younger brother, psychiatrist Jean Oury (Faramelli, 2023). Still, that fruitful encounter led to many years of collaboration. Indeed, Guattari worked with Oury (always Jean from now on...) from the early days of the La Borde Clinic. Founded by Oury and still fully operational in 2024, La Borde is a unique psychiatric clinic engaged in institutional psychotherapy. I will later introduce some processes connected to institutional psychotherapy more attentively. For now, I will keep following Oury's first contacts with it. To recap, our story so far retells that Fernand has presented Guattari to his younger brother, Jean Oury, who founded the La Borde Clinic, where Guattari worked with him, following a theory-practice called institutional psychotherapy. Interestingly, Oury's work in institutional psychotherapy came before his older brother's pedagogical movement, which was openly inspired by the former. However, unlike his older brother who developed institutional pedagogy, Jean Oury did not originate institutional psychotherapy; he was introduced to it while working as a psychiatry intern in the Saint-Alban Psychiatric Hospital (Schivone et al., 2023).

In Saint-Alban, Oury met Tosquelles (and other important figures like Georges Canguilhem and Frantz Fanon). The Catalonia-born psychiatrist and

Marxist activist François Tosquelles found refuge and new citizenship in France after fleeing Franco's dictatorship, which had been installed by the Nationalists — the ruling group after the Spanish Civil War (Robcis, 2016). Historical threads that brought Tosquelles to the psychiatric hospital of Saint-Alban are not totally unmistakable, but they are probably connected to his attention-grabbing work as a psychiatrist — allowed by the camp's commander — in the harsh conditions of the French refugee camp he was placed in (Robcis, 2021). Indeed, he was invited to work in Saint-Alban in the early 1940s, some three years after arriving in France. The dual influence of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Simon's active therapies in Tosquelle's work laid the grounds to what later became known as institutional psychotherapy.

*

A psychotherapy of institutions... I wonder how I shall render this possibility intensively. Part of the effort seems to revolve around reminiscing about Tosquelles' work at Saint-Alban after finding refuge in France, connecting his professional practices to his activism against "occupation" and tyranny, while reconstructing the formative inspiration Saint-Alban's internship brought to Oury's subsequent professional path (Robcis, 2021). However, I suppose there is a preceding task, a more general set of issues that needs addressing. I wonder what bunch of disparate elements it is that we eventually gave the ordinary name psychotherapy. And this inquiry is part of my resistance against a type of academic corpus that could immediately associate said "institutional psychotherapy" with applying a well-algorithmised psychological treatment protocol to an institution rationalised as a company or an organisation.

I could start recalling that “therapeia” is the Greek term for take care of, and curing, healing (Harper, 2001). Considering this basic and evident etymological examination, one can assert that there is an attendance and an attentional disposition in what is therapeutic. Thus, the politics of attention in therapy is not a disinterested act; there is a shared expectation (!) of improvement that is possibly similar to a Spinozian good encounter — from a previous point of strong boundedness to a second spot with greater potency to exist. Westernised knowledge production seems to have repeatedly stumbled on one of the possible dangers brought by this image of thought, in which these changes in potency become representations of a single line of progress(ion), frequently linked to chronological time.

Concerns about progress expectations seem to persist even when we consider, for instance, the biopsychosocial model of health... It turned into one of the most well-known frameworks in healthcare of our time, especially because it is used in the international definition of health, contained in the first principle of the revised Constitution of the World Health Organization (2005). This model, proposed by Engel (1977), was first developed to question the medicocentric and hospital-centric care of the traditional biomedical model. In fact, the biomedical framework still hugely guides mainstream psychiatric knowledge worldwide and has found renewed strength in neuroimaging and related fields in the last few decades, reintroducing the reification of its reductionist viewpoint through brain blood flow localisationism (Tripathi et al., 2019). In contrast, the biopsychosocial model evinces that health cannot be confined to a biological perspective. Engel’s (1977) foundational defence favouring a biopsychosocial paradigm showcased

diabetes and schizophrenia as exemplars of the insufficiency of the biotic markers, even challenging the usual separation between somatic diseases and mental disorders. So, the biopsychosocial model of health was developed as a tentative answer to knowledge oversimplification. It perhaps allowed us all to restructure what we understand as health within the systems we continually build, permitting further sharing of responsibilities inside health teams and privileging more diverse health knowledge styles.

*However, as I mentioned earlier, the biopsychosocial paradigm still eventually falls for the chant of a unified line of progress. In the typical utilisation of that model, the ontological assumptions of psychological knowledge accept and take upon themselves the majoritarian arrangement enforced by the biomedical paradigm — the principles of mainstream Western differential psychology remain implied, with its decontextualising, individualising, and elementarist approaches. So, the expectation of a redemptive holism remains like a carrot offered as dressage to enslave the horse's desires. In the end, the effort in the agglutinative "biopsychosocial" is — if most — multidisciplinary: the biological, the psychological, and the sociological continue irreconcilable despite the imposed ontological "smoothness." It is so that the nomenclature continues being extended, and the classificatory *matheme*⁵² keeps being unfolded into ethno-biopsychosocial (Alladin, 2009), biopsychosocial-spiritual (Sulmasy, 2002), biopsycho-ecological (Stineman & Streim, 2010), and so on. This never-ending unfolding series is mostly perpetuated through dreams of completeness — as if these collectively*

⁵² *Matheme* is a neologism used by Lacan, mixing mathematics — the idealised medium for scientific transmission — with *mytheme* — Lévi-Strauss' elementarist approach to understanding myths (see Lacan, 1998. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*).

imagined dimensions could ultimately be fully listed and accounted for — ignoring creation never ceases to happen (and, to prove this point, I could quickly draft other important dimensions of health, such as historical, gender, and nutritional dimensions...).

Added to this completionist desire and despite being considered holistic, the model has been practised in dimensions replicating an “each one to their own” approach, which generally leads to parallel action (parallel play?) inside health teams, little different from a biomedical institution like the traditional hospital (Benning, 2015). Engel’s (1977) first insight — openly inspired by psychodynamics and psychosomatics — had to be washed down and domesticated to fit in and be more widely accepted. So, knowledge created outside the bio-anatomical-physiological fields still needs to pay a levy, if not by accepting imposed ontological restrictions and simplifications, at least by complying with the role of lesser knowledge — or as “just background” context. In spite of the relentless advocacy of various health practitioners’ boards, the medic still appears as the manager and technical-scientific person responsible for the whole health team in numerous circumstances (Berghout et al., 2017), as if medics were always the most qualified in health matters and the only ones capable of the ultimate rational, informed decisions. So, the biopsychosocial model might be a good step up from the biomedical model, at least theoretically, but unfortunately, it still seems rather insufficient in practice. As it is now, the biopsychosocial model does not challenge mainstream pathologising discourses and serves to silence disharmonious voices, disallowing any loss of protagonism of the biological dimension as the main (or first, preferred or most secure) character of diagnosis.

So, if I may take a step back after considering the example of the biopsychosocial friction, the word “psychotherapy” conjures up conflicting ideas. On one side, a holistic expectation (!) compels therapeutic attention to consider all the conceivable dimensions conducive to a healthy state. Simultaneously, a strict psychological dimension confines practice to an individual self who is primarily submitted to biological embodiment but also secluded from social, cultural, spiritual, ecological, and any other dimensions that could be considered. Historically, then, mainstream Westernised psy practices found solace either in accepting a solipsistic subject who ignores physicality or in an environment with naïve apolitical materiality. In the cognitivist-behaviourist dispute, dimensions appear as confounding agents. At the same time, prescribing attention to all these dimensions might look tokenistic, patch-like, cosmetic, or surface-level. In this case, remembering such dimensions becomes something like an “ostensibly neutral” duty connected to “good practice” protocols — no dimension should be left behind by a completionist. Indeed, hopes for holism are unfulfilled either in the cognitivist-behavioural dispute or the identitarian dimensional analysis.

Instead of pointing to a lack in conceptualisation, what I ultimately intend to indicate is that any given practice of psychotherapy is somewhat captive to a psychotherapeutic institution, entangled with other productive institutions locally — be it the unitary whole self, a belligerent rhetoric of war against an enemy disorder, presumed scientifically-endorsed treatment schemes, the sagacious problem-solving mindset, or even a well-intended holistic model of health like the biopsychosocial paradigm. Such entanglement shows that the institution of psychotherapy is not the reflection of a unison voice and is not solely defined by

psy professionals and academic knowledge producers. These groups might be immediate stakeholders of such institutions and may have had more discretionary power historically. However, other ethical, aesthetic, and political lines are always at play, changing the processes in which psy care is instituted each time. And I recall yet another concern: despite changing over time, institutions are assemblages, customs, and norms presented and perceived as perennial monoliths. So, these institutions are somewhat like a belief system that resists change after being estranged from the people who primarily build them. These very people might suffer from these institutions later when the ethico-aesthetic-political lines producing these institutions disappear as if naturally and organically given.

It is so that even journals strictly interested in psychological “science” (firm followers of the “one” empirical method) feel forced to start paying attention to the surprising effectiveness of paraprofessional psychotherapies, getting to unforeseen conclusions that admit that “professional training and clinical experience may not add to the efficacy of psychotherapy” (Christensen & Jacobson, 1994, p. 10). Thus, while psychotherapy does not exist outside the world and its hard-lined established approaches, it also does not occur strictly within such institutionalised processes. To truly allow care and support for those who suffer, psychotherapeutic praxis is forced to tension its own institutional existence. And my affective memory is transported to very simple spaces when I mention this matter — that of a professional who works to render their own usefulness obsolete, with the success of therapy being its willing disposal as an unnecessary gimmick. It is not a far-fetched stretch to think that a person who gets overly infatuated

with their therapy and its processes could face disastrous outcomes, even dangerous ones⁵³. In this sense, I can assert that psychotherapeutic work succeeds by failing as an institution; yet, simultaneously, it needs some minimal institutional allegiances to tolerate such productive failure. This unsolvable tension between unavoidable institutional captivity and mandatory emancipation to care reassembles the multivocal context in which institutional psychotherapy was established.

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I chose to share this intensive diary entry because it reaffirms the agonistic ethical commitment of psychotherapies in general, justifying the emergence of theory-practices like institutional psychotherapy. As we proceed, I will pick up the historical recounting where we left off. I will then present some fundamental practices of institutional psychotherapy and finally arrive at the two main strands of French institutional analysis, one connected to Guattari and another to Lourau. In our story so far, Tosquelles had fled Franco's dictatorship in Spain by escaping to a refugee camp in France and posteriorly started working as a psychiatrist in Saint-Alban. Oury got in contact with Tosquelles' institutional psychotherapy when he was a psychiatry intern in Saint-Alban and posteriorly opened La Borde, where he continued the work in institutional psychotherapy with Guattari.

⁵³ My hawk-eyed reader might notice that this snippet briefly touches on psychotherapeutic transference. However, it does not focus solely on the subjects involved in therapy. While much has been discussed about transference toward a psychoanalyst — emphasising the centrality of the subject and the need for therapeutic handling — far less attention has been given to neurotic transference toward the therapeutic institution itself. My intuition suggests that this is an avenue ready for further exploration.

Something might have gone unnoticed in my recount of Tosquelles' escape to France. Mentioning that someone fled a dictatorship might suggest the decontextualised idea of a move toward idyllic freedom. However, Tosquelles arrived in a France that was soon under Vichy rule — a fascist Catholic state during World War II, aligned with Nazi Germany (Robcis, 2021). So, just like we are seeing authoritarianism escalate globally in the first quarter of the 21st century, Franco's dictatorship was not isolated or exceptional. It made sense in a context beyond the predefined borders of Spain. Indeed, tyranny spreads in a contagion as a *Zeitgeist*, a collective desire. The authoritarian figure is the institutional monolith of the fascist forces within each of us. In line with this perception, Foucault observes in his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus* that we must eradicate the fascism within us, especially the ones of us who are progressive and social justice activists (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983).

So, when Tosquelles walked into Saint-Alban, he came across the remnants of a stereotypical asylum — no basic sanitation, haystacks that doubled as beds and latrines, no electricity or heating, no medications, no visitors, no medical assistance, ignored outcries, stench, and death. The “asylum inmates” had been historically submitted to a “politics of madness” (Robcis, 2021, p. 3) in accordance with the prominent fascist ideologies at the time. Indeed, Vichy France rulers did not engage in overt eugenics policies like their German occupiers. Still, the regime silently approved fascist ideals by purposefully withholding support and resources, engineering the gradual eradication by inaction of the “undesired” ones — such as the institutionalised persons in mental health asylums. At the same time, when Tosquelles started

working in Saint-Alban, it had officially transitioned from an asylum to a psychiatric hospital in 1937. So, Tosquelles arrived in a space requiring a less punitive future. And it also urgently needed to be distanced from its 1914 tragic fire and 1936 typhoid epidemic. Due to its distinctive internal context, Saint-Alban was perfectly set up to become a privileged space of resistance against the Vichy regime (Robcis, 2021).

This resistance to occupation — both against a fascist dictatorship and the tyrant forces within each of us enabling oppressive regimes in our many relationships — is the excentric⁵⁴ principle of institutional psychotherapy. So, forces of decentralisation mark this theory-practice in Saint-Alban, such as transversal participation in management committees and open dialogue, the building of a (therapeutic) community, engagement in social and artistic activities, and integration with the surrounding neighbourhood (Robcis, 2021). I apologise, as I realise these practices tend to deflate in ethical fortitude when written as a simplistic list. So much so that these routines were transformed into empty clichés that label capitalistic management of enterprises and justify stretching ethics for profit (Laasch et al., 2020). In institutional psychotherapy, these processes are not platitudes — and I suppose there always is a “radicle” non-dichotomic confrontation between *being a platitude* and *becoming plateau*. In my understanding, this struggle depicts the tension of psychotherapeutic work on a more cosmic level. Thus, institutional psychotherapeutic practices are never prescriptions. The list I offered only makes sense contextually, as it

⁵⁴ Eccentric could evoke something like the meaning of this term and yet it does not quite, so it is spelled so as to emphasise the lines of flight from centralism/centricity that force becomings into Being.

exemplifies ways the Saint-Alban folk democratically built resistance to oppressiveness locally and historically. And this profound contextual reality necessary for the success of such practices is what tightly binds them to theorisation.

So, Saint-Alban's renewed general practices point to what one could more broadly call a *theory of liberation*. Because, of course, if institutions are collectively built, overarching power disparities will tend to be replicated within their assemblages and posteriorly estranged from their original political allegiances as if they were a perennial monolith. And, in Saint-Alban, the “unwanted” ones — the “mentally ill,” but also nurses, cooks, caretakers, security guards, and cleaning personnel — historically suffered from a disenfranchised placement within that medicocentric institution. In that sense, re-establishing transversality — the third, non-necessary axis of assemblages — worked as a dispositif to break the rigidity of vertical and horizontal⁵⁵ structures, scrambling disciplinary codes and opening collective life to unpredictable opportunities (Guattari, 2006). Indeed, the self-effacing gesture of staying firmly open to dialogue might be enough to inspire and foster such transversal lines, especially if encouraged by those in higher vertical positions in a given perceived power structure (Guattari, 2015a). At Saint-Alban, health professionals, patients, and general personnel all participated in general meetings. These meetings had clear therapeutic intentions but also served as management reunions and janitorial

⁵⁵ Vertical and horizontal structures, as discussed here, are distinct from the horizontal and vertical axes of assemblages. Despite their textual proximity to transversality, there is no intention to conflate these concepts. In this context, vertical and horizontal structures refer to molar lines: well-institutionalised topoi of power, where equality and inequality are manifested differently. This conceptualisation is possibly closer to, for instance, Bourdieu's (1984/1979) ideas of social hierarchy in his seminal work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

gatherings — spaces where social and psychic issues became irreversibly intertwined (Robcis, 2021).

This theoretical-practical shift hints at a transmutation of psychotherapy. Within the collectivised space created by transversality, individual case studies continued to exist, but they lost individualistic centrality. The engagement in building the institution itself became a shared task, scrutinising its harmful capacity to hurt and exclude, as well as its potential to heal and integrate. The physical walls surrounding Saint-Alban's buildings were demolished (Robcis, 2021). However, a broader, continuous effort was required to break down the barriers both between Saint-Alban and the world, and within its own internal relationships. Paying attention to the institution meant immediately attending to the needs of all the subjects within and around it, overflowing psychological care from unitary to deeply connective bases.

La Borde was inaugurated with such decentralising ethos in mind. Considering the relative proximity and association between Saint-Alban and La Borde, it is understandable that the excentric principles of institutional psychotherapy appeared in somewhat familiar ways with Oury and Guattari, compared to Tosquelles' undertaking. However, practices at La Borde were never copied from Saint-Alban like an applied protocol. For instance, beyond transversal committees, (dis)organisation at La Borde was achieved with *la grille* — or the grid — which was a roster list with a timetable and rotating daily duties for all employees of the institution (Robcis, 2021). *La grille* produced a wandering structure where psychiatrists cooked, nurses did some gardening, security guards cleaned toilets, and so on. The intention was to disrupt static

institutionalised identities fixed on personal identifiers like gender and profession, reintroducing less individualistic domains of engagement into the institution's daily experiences. This chaos-instilling procedure was complemented by regularly scheduled forums, where staff articulated their emotions and concerns through thorough investigation of all their activities and social connections (Robcis, 2021).

Here, again, caution is advisable: rushed or naïve interpretations of this setup could destroy its ethical potency. Indeed, institutions seem to sit between “change and stability, agency and structure” (Bouilloud et al., 2020, p. 1). So, it would probably seem anachronic and unanchored from reality to dream of la grille as an all-encompassing institutional “tool” to be applied in any institutionalised spaces as, for instance, a challenge to capitalism in its current, specialised demands. On the contrary, I can even envision la grille being exploited as a tactic for profit, over-reducing personnel and enforcing domination upon the remaining staff, all under the guise of “equity” through ableist discourses. Practices at La Borde only worked because they were humble in their situatedness and built collectively in constant interpretative openness. In this case, once again, theory and practice only make sense as a cluster. This theory-practice demands the establishment of a sort of “groupality” to be enacted rightfully. In places like Saint-Alban and La Borde, hospitals and health clinics, a group of people — producers and products of these institutions — is easily identified. Institutional psychotherapeutic theory-practices benefit these obvious collectives, potentially unsettling *subjugated groups* — driven by external forces and fear of extinction — and opening transversal movements toward *subject*

group dynamics, where structures and limits are continually interrogated rather than passively endured (Guattari, 2015a). In other words, by adhering to rigorous transversality, institutional psychotherapy can allow groups to regain a degree of autonomy, enabling active participation in constructing an institution. In this sense, transversality builds a *group mode of subjectivity* — a groupality — that helps reclaim control from external forces, reducing passivity and enhancing collective empowerment.

Instead of given dimensions outside of the self needing external attendance, groupality is both self-in-relation and multivocal oneness (Nietzsche, 1872/2016). Still, despite restoring the social to the psychic, a becoming-groupality immediately disrupts totality expectations, dismissing ambitions of idealised holism. Such a stance sharply contrasts with completionist ideals like Wagner's (1849/1895) *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which envisioned the ultimate staging of an opera as a comprehensively unified total work of art — a vision that, while alluring, also echoed Romanticist-Nationalist tendencies later co-opted by the very totalitarian regimes resisted against in this French chronicle⁵⁶. The oneness of a groupality, then, has a different ethos: it is collective and everchanging (Guattari, 2006). It accepts its processuality, and is localised, dynamic, and akin to persistent analysis by all its participants. Nothing lacks in a groupality, despite the many points of analysis that do not take part in its processes. Subjugation still appears as a great danger, like psychotherapy's struggle between institutional captivity and failure that could lead to an unfeeling

⁵⁶ For more on Wagner's ideals and their historical allure, see Nietzsche, F. (1888). *The Case of Wagner, Nietzsche Contra Wagner, and Selected Aphorisms*. Wagner's ideals were so compelling that King Ludwig II of Bavaria built the monumental Neuschwanstein Castle using themes from his operas. This extravagant, fairytale-like castle later inspired the iconic castle at Disneyland.

replication of protocols or the dismissal of proper theoretical preparedness. Or, as a more global risk of subjugation, one could consider the censorship to talk one's mind and the fear of the definitive end when transversality slips, even momentarily (Guattari, 2015a). Thus, the assertion of a groupality — or the existential glimpse of a subject group — occurs by confronting such phantasmic fears of extinction and meaninglessness, *re-subjectifying* the forces producing an institution at a given moment in time and space.

In the context of institutional psychotherapy, the inextricable embedding of the social within the psychic inevitably resurfaces. At Saint-Alban and La Borde, the notion of resuming the means of institutional production by a groupality is more readily comprehensible because diverse people are involved in the therapeutic process. Still, it seems that institutions' once totalitarian disciplinary moulds have slowly transitioned into swift modulations of control, dismantling institutional brick walls whilst becoming pervasive governmentality (Foucault, 2007). As institutions increasingly lose their visible, statuesque totality in present times, they dissolve into forces felt everywhere: factories developed into service sectors, spanning from monopolistic corporations to precarious service work; schools gave way to never-ending skill-building; sabotage⁵⁷ became decentralised computational piracy (Deleuze, 2017). Institutional architectures — unfolding on the machinic axis of assemblages — no longer require traditional headquarters; the construction of hospitals, schools,

⁵⁷ I cannot resist commenting that “sabotage” has a contentious etymology from the French *sabot*, which means “wooden shoe” in English. This hints at a satisfying anecdotal practice of resistance in which workers threw their shoes into factory machines to disrupt production. This is one of those stories that cannot be proven nor disproven, and it stays in my working-class heart as utopian desire for resistance to exploitation.

prisons, and family houses is no longer sufficiently distinct from a structural standpoint (Valencia, 2020). Instead, institutions intermingle in different bodies and passions on the content axis and are pulverised in social expectations on the expression axis, being performed by persons as a collective assemblage of enunciation. In plain English, institutions persist in our practices; breaking down the walls does not change the underlying ways that keep these institutions machinating.

*

Yes, something persists. While recounting this French chronicle, atomistic institutional experiences were remembered as identitarian holism, the fascist forces within us, and individualistic case studies; and these personified experiences were contrasted with communities of care, collective participation, and group modes of subjectification. Processes of institutional (re)territorialisation are indeed heterogeneous, creating both individualised and collectivised accounts. However, after the walls of total institutions fall, building a groupality derives into ever-differing procedures. And I am aware institutional monoliths still exist and will continue struggling to resist their ultimate end. After all, I write from within what is left (or what was made) of universities. Still, mainstream psychology's individualistic categories play a role in institutionalising experiences of interiority within bio-neurological discrete bodies and cognitivist-behaviourist self-oriented psyches. Such self-centred paradigms neglect both genealogy and archaeological history, erasing the institutional lines that continuously shape these modes of subjectivity. Thus, they ultimately alienate the self from its own role in the ongoing (re)production

of these very material and expressive structures. One of systemic theory's major contributions to the therapeutic field is recognising the significance of relational contexts and the persistence of collective dynamics, offering crucial resistance to this trend towards simplistic individualisation. Yet, as Lampis and colleagues (2019) make clear, systemic approaches often emphasise differentiation of self, which values psychological separation as a synonym of autonomy. This emphasis can sometimes unintentionally support the broader tendency of viewing the self as distinct and separable from its relational systems, especially as institutions fragment and reconfigure. So, despite the precise contribution, the pitfalls of conflating individuation with individualisation persist, reinforcing the view of the self as rigidly distinct from its social contexts.

A point worth noting is that these institutional moves toward privatising the self should not be confounded with linear progression in knowledge production. Rather, they evince epistemic ruptures — telling a linear story requires many detours and shortcuts, as there are repressive and productive powers, and resistances to submission and creation everywhere (Foucault, 2007). So, even as the cohesive, unitarian self becomes a specialised target within modern Westernised psychology, therapy unfolds like an institutional psychotherapeutic forum. Indeed, despite creating a façade of unity, pervasive power fragmentises the individual into a dividual, a composite being who can be split into smaller components and then measured, tracked, algorithmised, and analysed (Deleuze, 2017). In line with this fragmentation, yet taking a different angle, Guattari (2015a) reminds us that “we are all groupuscules” (p. 362), each embodying a multitude of voices, drives, and forces. This multiplicity is not

confined to political critique; it reverberates within the therapeutic process, whether engaged with an unmistakable collective or a dividual. Healing begins with re-subjectifying institutions in a groupality, acknowledging that even in the most solitary therapeutic encounter, the dividual person carries within them assemblages of material and unconscious groupuscles. Therapists and those seeking help navigate these groupuscles together, tracing the pathways of a composite self-in-relation. Indeed, in a broader sense, every therapy is collective.

To reiterate, at least after the institutional shift (and likely even beforehand, though to varying degrees of attention), what might seem like the loneliest therapeutic encounter reveals itself as a negotiation among many voices and forces, unfolding within a transversal therapeutic space that subverts both vertical and horizontal structures. In this context, a more encompassing effort arises. While institutions may require care, they do not always need cure or healing. This distinction broadens the therapeutic effort into an analytical setting, where the focus extends to understanding and dissecting the structures at play, without abandoning the foundations of care. The term “analysis” derives from the Latin and Greek *ana-lysis*, meaning *cutting into parts* (Harper, 2001). Yet, this process is not about returning to a primordial and elementary state. In my unreasonable box of examples, analysis is similar to crumbling a cake. The disposition to analyse arises from confronting something that has been synthesised, much like a statuesque institution in our context. However, just as one cannot unbake a cake and return it to its original ingredients, the elements produced by analysis cannot be reassembled into their former whole. Instead of eggs, flour, sugar, analysis yields crumbs of knowledge that resist being

reconstructed into a unified cake. In this sense, what emerges is a third form of existence. The act of analysis, like breaking apart a cake, creates something new — irreversibly altered from all its previous states. And this basic, almost innocent differentiation introduced by an analytical effort that avoids a reductionist elementarism reintroduces creation into the therapeutic setting; it re-subjectifies institutional forces, displacing alienating influences and demanding the reinstatement of productive ethical, aesthetic, and political dispositions in the unspooling of a life.

Institutional psychotherapy gradually extends its therapeutic practice into an analytical mode. This expansion toward an *institutional analysis* marks a shift in focus rather than a departure: from a theory-practice aimed at transforming conditions within therapeutic institutions to a broader ecopolitical ethos that opens up new ways of engaging with and potentially transforming diverse socio-institutional contexts (Guattari, 2015a). And in the crumbs of knowledge introduced by this reorientation in attentional disposition, the multiple becomes a unit — not a unitary one. Even the smallest of wisdom crumbs arises as an assemblage, a multiple unit that discards the façade of unity in favour of n dimensions minus the unitary one — $n-1$ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). So, the radicle defence of multiplicity goes beyond a preference; it becomes the enabling condition under which therapeutic effects can take shape. Now, dimensions exist only in their relations, as they hold no meaning when taken as detached entities. Instead of a biopsychosocial human being, an ethico-aesthetic-political-eco-collective-techno-affective-molecular-and-so-on life. Indeed, in the Foucauldian ethical spin, it is no coincidence that the plea for practices of care

for the self is closely connected to care for others (Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987). As soon as we de-objectify the forces institutionalising a life, care evolves into productive forces that extend beyond an individual, becoming political.

If it is not clear yet, “politics” comes from the Greek *politiká* which has historically referred to the *collective concerns of the city* (Harper, 2001). This is to say, any matter related to living together is inherently political. Still, it differs somewhat from social concerns, which focus more on the interactions and bonds within a community. The word “social” comes from the Latin *socius*, translating to *friend* or *ally* (Harper, 2001). So, while there is undeniable value in envisioning cooperative communities built on mutual care, the political also engages with the inevitable struggles, tensions, and disagreements that arise in shared spaces, giving voice to those who are often marginalised or excluded in frameworks where only the social is envisioned. In fact, disagreement lies at the heart of the relationship between two significant strands of French institutional analysis. So far, I have predominantly engaged with the strand more closely aligned to Guattari, which later diverged into schizoanalysis through his collaboration alongside Deleuze. Yet, institutional inquiry was developed more broadly, particularly at the Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis — commonly known as Paris VIII — a university founded after the events of May 1968 as a centre for avant-garde and radical thought. At Paris VIII, figures like Lapassade and Lourau approached institutional analysis through a critical psychosociological lens (Rodrigues, 2013). Within this entangled intellectual landscape, the love-hate relationship between Guattari and Lourau is a tale deserving of a dramedy miniseries — a nuanced dance of collaboration and

critique that paints a vivid picture of the intellectual and para-academic tensions of that time. Interestingly, the subtle cues indicating this tension are often obscured in decontextualised readings of their work, making the underlying conflict almost imperceptible.

Despite the unease, many points of convergence can be distinguished between these two traditions, with even some concepts shared between them. If I may admit, though I have typically followed Guattari's work more closely, Lourau's approach to institutional analysis has a calming effect on my more academic side, offering an organised perspective that provides a solid foundation for initiating work. Of course, as I am not obliged to take sides in this French debate — and considering they manifest within overlapping contexts — both strands of institutional analysis can operate quite effectively together. When the psychosociological proposition leans too heavily toward totalitarian inclinations, Guattarian transversality intervenes to introduce some liberation, scrambling codes, reconnecting theory with practice, and emphasising the importance of humble openness to institutional re-subjectification. Simultaneously, when lines of flight risk dissolving into unproductive nothingness, reterritorialising within more prescriptive settings offers the necessary grounding to maintain some momentum. In my view, taking a definitive stance in this debate would undermine the pivotal interweaving of theory and practice. In broad terms, Guattari (2015a) critiqued psychosociology for becoming so absorbed in its regimented theoretical constructs that it distanced itself from practice, eventually transforming into an academicist approach to institutional analysis. Yet, Guattari's own emphasis on the indissociability of theory and practice led

him to conflate academicism with any organised conceptual framework, overlooking how even prefabricated theoretical constructs can contribute productively when thoughtfully interwoven with practice.

Thus, the points of contention that emerged as political in the dispute between Guattari and Lourau are also eminently (immanently) aesthetic. Indeed, aesthetics is the arrangement of the sensible (Rancière, 2000/2004). It defines what can be perceived and how, establishing the territories where political and social practices unfold. So, aesthetics is not about what a piece of art represents or how it links to the world, but rather how it configures what is common to the senses. As such, aesthetics is the organisation of the visible and the sayable (as well as what can be tasted, heard, felt, ...), which is — in a full circle — fundamentally political. By organising the sensible, aesthetics shapes how we perceive reality, influencing not only artistic expression but also our understanding of knowledge and history. As institutions become ever more internalised, the aesthetic landscape is also reconfigured. In this context, life presents itself as increasingly fragmented, with individuals and groupuscules constructing narratives that express this multiplicity, even if desperately striving to enforce a story of totalising coherence. The result is an aesthetic environment where the boundaries between historical facts and storytelling dissolve (Rancière, 2000/2004). At least since Foucault (1977), it has become evident that history has never truly depended on linear, empirical sequences. Instead, history appears intertwined with fiction — and fiction should not be confounded with lies; lies are a different aesthetic that I am not addressing here. As I was saying, history and fiction surface entwined in narratives that are

organised not by pure necessity or plausibility but by arrangements of the sensible, embodying the local political dynamics of perception and expression.

Given this entanglement of politics and aesthetics, institutional analysis must also navigate the ways in which these arrangements of the sensible influence and are influenced by power structures. This is precisely where Lourau's contributions gain significance, particularly through his exploration of a triad: the instituted, the instituting, and institutionalisation (Bouilloud et al., 2020). These dynamics align with the aesthetic tensions described above, where the visible and sayable shape and are shaped by institutional forces, constantly renegotiated through practices of subjectification and resistance. This triad functions within a *dispositif* as concepts that can be mobilised as epistemic constructs, methodological tools, cognitive schemas, dialectic interpretative keys, or even structural topoi, fitting seamlessly into diverse theoretical frameworks. The malleability offered by a *dispositif* allows for this bending of rules while maintaining enough consistency to produce meaningful analysis with tangible implications. In this sense, the three concepts possess a parasitic strength, easily coupling institutional thought with any given reality. And maybe, just maybe, this strength echoes some of Guattari's worries. The conceptual landscape of Lourau's institutional analysis is as compelling and adaptable as the very conceptualisation of institutions themselves, with totalitarian forces always lurking, requiring parrhesiastic effort and constant vigilance.

Even with this complexity, explaining the instituted, the instituting, and institutionalisation begins with straightforward definitions. As the name suggests, the *instituted* is the immediately visible aspect of institutions — their

monolithic manifestation (Kasper et al., 2020). The instituted often leads to the conflation of institutions with an establishment or organisation. This kind of simplification or deceptiveness transcends daily understanding and sometimes even reaches academic circles (Walker, 2017). Despite their undisturbed and statuesque appearance (the traditional family, the pillars of democracy, the justice system, ...), institutions are in constant process; they are machines constructing life. Therefore, the tenacious function of the instituted is constantly confronted by *instituting* forces. The instituting is the perceptive tail of the creative processes that destabilise the institutional status quo (Bouilloud et al., 2020). While not necessarily hidden or hiding, the instituting eludes instituted discourses, even if — from an outsider's perspective — it might appear as part of an obvious relationship that evidently produces life collectively, albeit agonistically. *Institutionalisation* is a connective wheel balancing between adjustment and maintenance, change and stagnation within an institution (Walker, 2017). Depending on how the instituting relates to the instituted, it may result in an institutionalisation that alters the instituted, only to be at the mercy of further change as instituting forces continue to press forward — whether by introducing novel shifts or by reactivating past configurations within newly rearranged power relations.

As I mentioned before, Lourau's three most acclaimed concepts can be accessible points of inspiration in an institutional analysis. Still, they bend too easily to different frameworks and should therefore be handled with care, avoiding their automatic application as a formatting device for engagement. For instance, when interpreted through a Hegelian dialectic lens, the instituted is

similar to a thesis, the instituting takes on the role of a negatively rational antithesis, and institutionalisation functions as the speculative synthesis (Kasper et al., 2020). Within these parameters, the triad emphasises historical development and transformation over time, focusing on progression and unfolding through negation. On the other hand, a structuralist interpretation would approach these concepts through a synchronic analysis, treating the instituted, the instituting, and institutionalisation as *topoi* or fixed points within a structure (Guattari, 2015a). Here, the instituted aligns with the established order of the system, creating antagonistic tension against the provocative forces of the instituting, while institutionalisation acts as an arbiter that shields the system from collapse — resembling a Freudian superego-id-ego dynamics. These examples, I hope, illustrate how Lourau’s work is able to bridge diverse perspectives in practice. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list, as any usage of these concepts should be problematised locally, within concrete cases.

In fact, you might consider this very trapizonga as our own concrete case — one that I hope you, my keen-eyed reader, have already noticed overtly ties into transversally opening some of the wounds in Westernised psychology’s institutional allegiances. Since the earlier sections, non-judicative ethics and an aesthetics of emancipation have been summoned to support this trapizonga’s politics of the narrative. Amid the blurred borders of knowledge, history, and fiction, psychology’s institutional façade has been and, hopefully, will continue being reshuffled — not as an inflexible monolith anymore, but as a living construct in constant flux through collective acts, struggles, and resistances. If you are open to it, this could be my gift to you: reclaiming the ongoing process of

re-subjectifying psychology's institutions as a collective endeavour we share. I hope it serves your needs, even just a little. Perhaps this way, psychology will come closer to our lived experiences, and we will become less captive to our own doings. I will also likely need you to help me remember these things, just as I am doing for you. Possibly, in reclaiming this process, we might find ourselves needing not just a shift but a deliberate swerve that challenges psychology's long-standing medicocentric ties. And maybe it is time to reconsider concepts like, for example, the "clinical" beyond their static confines — not as medical remnants, but as points of divergence that embrace embodied transformation and multiplicity.

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Among the many controversial gifts psychology silently inherited from medicine, clinical practice is one of the most taken for granted. This unquestioning acceptance goes so far that even the simplest inquiry — “what is clinical?” — might meet a puzzled face. Often instead, “clinical” is metonymically understood as clinical psychology, reducing the concept to vocational terms or a mere scope of practice, which obscures the myriad power relations embedded in this choice of terms. Within the institutional convolutions of this trapizonga, the term “clinical” (along with its current and past associated practices) remains particularly difficult to sustain and thus calls for closer examination — not to advocate for its erasure, but to reconnect it with meaningful, collective practices beyond unthinking repetition.

Discussions about the history of clinical psychology are plentiful, dating back to the earliest stages of the practice itself. For instance, Watson (1953)

situates the origins of clinical psychology firmly within psychometrics and differential psychology, while subtly positioning psychodynamics as an external influence — almost an intrusion — that he regards with a tone suggesting ambivalence, despite attempts at an “objective” narrative. Less than three decades later, Sarason (1981) critiqued clinical psychology’s historical focus on individuals, linking it to the profession’s failure to adequately address the post-World War II era, which ultimately led psychological practice to operate under medicine’s shadow in what was still a relatively young and consolidating field. These two accounts merely begin to unpack the institutional issues underpinning our psychological practice. Both agree that early clinical psychology was centred on individual pathology and detached from broader social contexts. Watson’s emphasis on psychometrics and Sarason’s critique of psychology’s inability to address post-war societal needs highlight this focus, reinforcing clinical psychology’s asocial praxis in the Western world, while Sarason (1981) openly considers some political nuances of this shadowy attachment to medicine.

Indeed, the word “clinic” carries several familiar meanings, some less directly tied to the medical field. One of these lone-wolf interpretations is broader: the term “clinic” can refer to any gathering where people address or discuss specific problems, whatever they may be — like the clinic I am currently proposing on the very meaning of “clinical.” When understood in this sense, clinical work can happen anywhere, even within this makeshift document. Yet this broader — and in some ways less bounded — meaning contrasts sharply with the prevailing understanding of “clinic” as the physical apparatus where clinical-therapeutic work occurs. In this majoritarian sense, the clinic merges function with

architecture, while the clinic as a gathering of people maintains only an aspect of attentive care toward an issue, detaching that care from the building. Still, while both meanings differ, neither fully escapes the shadowy attachment to medical history observed by Sarason (1981). As a tentative first step in what could evolve into a broader series of detachment gestures, I will proceed by examining the etymology of the word “clinic.” Hopefully, this strategy will help begin creating some much-needed space for clinical psychology to become freer, asserting its own voice and moving beyond the imported logics of medicine.

Etymologically, the word “clinic” stems from the Greek klīnikós, meaning pertaining to a bed or to incline over (Harper, 2001). These meanings have clear medical provenance, evoking the image of someone bedridden with an illness, requiring support from someone who actively inclines toward them. Psy practices have borrowed this medical jargon to denote care, often functioning as a synonym for work within medical facilities or adapting to fit medical terminology — reflecting how psychology frequently accommodates medicine’s framework, while medicine remains largely unchallenged in its own discourse (Dekker et al., 2023), as if it were the only source of “proper” knowledge. Further, the meaning derived from the usual Greek etymology of “clinic” implies a passive role for those receiving help — a patient person who waits for treatment — whose knowledge pales in comparison to that of the professional offering their less or more evidence-based treatment. Unsurprisingly, psychological practices aligned with this historical understanding struggle to resist medicocentrism, with diagnostic criteria and categorisation often shaped and conditioned by biomedical assemblages.

Interestingly, another etymological possibility for the word “clinic” comes from Latin and is often overlooked due to its subsidiary influence in the term’s history. The Latin clīnāre is a precursor to the word “incline” (Harper, 2001) and is also connected to the term “clinamen” from the Epicurean atomism. Epicurean atomism uses the word “atom” to describe the physical constituents of thoughts, focusing on their movement as movements of thought — a concept distinct from the modern understanding of atoms (Deleuze, 1994). This notion does not aim to challenge physics but instead serves as an image for thought processes, offering a framework that aesthetically reconfigures how thought can be conceptualised. This idea of clinamen has drawn the attention of various French theorists, including Lacan, Derrida, Badiou, and Deleuze. For instance, Derrida (2007) describes clinamen as an oblique swerve that causes the atoms of undifferentiated matter to collide, generating the fabric of reality itself. Before this collision, only parallel atomic trajectories exist, with clinamen emerging as an indeterminate event with far-reaching consequences. Notably, Derrida’s description of clinamen resonates with Guattari’s (1984) notion of transversality, a concept where non-linear connections and disruptive forces generate new realities by unsettling rigidly established orders. Clinamen is also used by Deleuze (1994) to refer to the “multiple and non-localisable connections” (p. 184) that create thought. Within this understanding, the atoms of thought are constantly in clinamen, creating complex differentials where movement itself constitutes the materiality of thought. In this view, clinamen ultimately expresses the interplay of atomic movements within thoughts, which aesthetically actualise as organised sensible composites, eventually becoming territorialised within collective assemblages.

In order to provoke knowledge to differ and untie psychology from its invisible historical and contemporary constraints, it seems fundamental to politically dispute the one-dimensional medical sense of “clinical” in this trapizonga. In this spirit, I hope to open spaces where we reimagine the “clinical” through its kin etymological line of clinamen and beyond, allowing psychological practice to shift from merely inclining over a motionless ill body to instead reestablishing the multiplicity of connections within the body of thoughts — including restoring agency and voice to those in need of care. And perhaps, by re-subjectifying the clinical, we can also reclaim psychology’s institutional production processes more boldly, bringing clinical psychological praxis one step closer to becoming a living, collective construct — less captive to its inherited allegiances and submissions, and more attuned to our embodied experiences.

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This preliminary “rant” was an early addition to this trapizonga, revised and proofread countless times throughout the years. Even after so much reworking, it still feels insufficient, basic, and rushed to me. So, its inclusion in this section is not driven by confidence or a sense of completeness, but by its significance — even if it potentially fails to fully convey its intended message. After all, this work began with the disorienting shock of migration, where titles earned through sweat and tears were suddenly stripped away. No longer recognised as a clinical psychologist, nor even as a psychologist (a title granted through a separate undergraduate diploma in addition to my bachelor’s in psychology), both designations rendered invalid within the new legal context. It was a long time coming into terms with this difference. However, from the

disenfranchised individual experience emerged a persistent certainty: my story is not uniquely mine. Throughout my years of research in Aotearoa, I encountered diverse accounts from local professionals who, like me, found themselves suddenly stripped of their titles, transitioning from psychologists to untitled workers, whether as academics or in various other roles, overnight. Yet, while our experiences resonate in their shared themes of professional disenfranchisement, the stories of these professionals are deeply embedded in the particular social and political landscapes of this land. The institutional barriers they faced arose here, with dynamics that intertwine both globally and uniquely within the fabric of Aotearoa. So, these accounts are not just a series of individual stories; they are a collective narrative shaped by a political issue historically entangled with capitalist market interests, fear-driven professional gatekeeping, and the objectification of subjective processes. These forces erased skilled professionals, reducing their scope of practice to externally imposed, limiting frameworks.

And I hope you, my reader, already understand that this is not a political rally aimed at dismantling professional boards, rules, or systems in place. Nor is this about my potential future pursuit of local accreditation. Instead, it is a matter of addressing the individualisation of pain, where personified issues silence those disadvantaged by political tensions, leading them to retreat from the struggle just to maintain a minimal level of health. Because while the unitary self might be an unwelcome yet sometimes necessary fallacy, we still have bones, struggle for air, and loved ones who need us. In this context, the politics of evasion might feel like the only viable path for those left isolated, as

culture increasingly functions as a refined dressage, masking how power still operates when institutions are framed as external monoliths. This framing strips away our collective, subjective voices, disconnecting us from actively participating in the very systems we help sustain and replicate.

So, I wrap up this section at a crossroads. The coming sections will mark a shift in tone, as this trapizonga opens into a more conversational space with the diverse voices who entrusted me with their stories of failure in psychotherapy. Yet my role is not to dichotomise or decode these personal struggles. Rather, it is about hearing the multitude within each (in)dividual voice, continuously tracing the institutional convergences and tensions in their narratives and articulating how we began re-subjectifying these issues collectively. There is an inherent partiality in all that is shared — failure weaves through every attempt in this makeshift document. But this failure is not about individual or procedural fault; it reflects how psychology's institutional frameworks objectify what is inherently subjective. By treating these frameworks as rigid monoliths, the complex ethico-aesthetic-political dimensions of institutional production are made invisible, reducing vibrant, living practices to static protocols. Perhaps, by re-bridging theory and practice, a broader clinic can emerge as an affirmation of life. Every psychotherapeutic case, in this sense, becomes the clinical case of psychology itself — an opportunity to examine and challenge the institutional assumptions embedded within the discipline through transversality. By embracing transversal connections, new lines of inquiry and points of resistance might be cultivated, helping unsettle the rigidity of established orders while nurturing the rebuilding of productive collectives.

The Making of Psychology's Clinical Case: Institutional Surface-Depth

I am not an intellectual; I write with the body.
 — Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*⁵⁸

This concise passage serves as a prologue to the forthcoming sections, where this trapizonga will more openly collectivise its voice. One could say the upcoming shift in tone includes the analysis of three empirical case studies that bridge this trapizonga's more theoretical bits with real-life scenarios. This and similar accounts offer an easy way to get away with describing what is coming next, and it is not completely untrue — I even sometimes turn to this specific one-liner when explaining my work, particularly when I want to spare words in daily conversations, or when a more detailed description would lead an otherwise productive exchange astray. Nonetheless, now that you are well-acquainted with this trapizonga, you likely (and, in this case, rightly) assume I will fail to deliver on such promises and expectations (!). I hope you still remember that this is not a stylistic preference of mine, but an effort to be — indeed — clinical. That is, I do not intend to incline over submissive, inert words that patiently wait for my (or someone else's) all-encompassing interpretation; rather, I will follow the atomic swerves of collective assemblages of enunciation that were territorialised through individualised stories, minimally displaying in writing some of their differences in potential. The analysis will produce crumbs of knowledge — psy

⁵⁸ Clarice Lispector, a singular voice in 20th-century literature, was a Ukrainian-born Brazilian novelist and journalist whose work defies easy classification. Her writing is marked by profound reflexivity on the banalities of daily life, weaving the inner voices of her characters, and sometimes her own, into a blend that blurs the boundaries between author and persona. This sentence — my translation of “Eu não sou um intelectual, escrevo com o corpo.” — is spoken by the intrusive narrator-character-author of *A Hora da Estrela*, a novel with thirteen provisional titles.

knowledge — which might begin to illuminate how we continually and collectively shape psychology as an institutional practice, with the hope of rebuilding a groupality that consciously reclaims the responsibility for shaping our institution ethically.

This differentiation is of the highest importance in this endeavour. At the heart of this work lies a commitment to what could be termed an emic approach to knowledge production — whether in less or more participatory research contexts — emphasising deep, ongoing community engagement, trust, and the pursuit of transformative social justice outcomes that recognise people as the experts of their own lives and active agents in their liberation (Freire, 1970/2000). There is nothing to dispute in this academically humbling yet communally empowering principle — people deeply understand what they do and how they feel within their more established existential territories. At the same time, this research is ambulant, and it does not always pursue this type of interpretative success but instead follows expressions toward the thresholds of dividual existences, leading to more deterritorialised machinic assemblages that are vulnerable to brute-force reterritorialisation by power-emitting centres (Guattari & Rolnik, 2008). These assemblages, in their vulnerability, form ambiguous spaces where something already is and yet is not, like the fluid mosaics of perceived borders, the diverse energy fields held in the in-between of two structures, and so on. In other words, this study is interested in the ethico-aesthetic-politics of failure. In this research, meanings are in a fight to dispute their molar and molecular enforcers of linguistic and conceptual boundaries, their order-words (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). And, in this trapizonga, such mode

of analysis — one that crumbles, cuts, breaks, “schizoes” — is pursued through its contrary: an overdose of ideas and an over-saturation of institutionalised discourses, at times aesthetically resembling a word-repeat game. We walk, drunk, on the precipice — the edge of an institutional skyscraper — teetering and mumbling... Danger is everywhere.

In this regard, this makeshift document is not qualitative research, as disclosed from the start. The institutionalised disputes between authorship and authority, art and science, theory and practice, positivism and interpretivism, realism and relativism, subjectivity and objectivity, simplification and complexification, and quantitative and qualitative inquiry — along with any other constructed binaries we recognise and sometimes adhere to — lend words to the trapizonga critique but do not constrain, define, or explain it. As previously characterised, parrhesiastic scholarship is stubbornly and courageously done from within, as it loses not only its sense but also its potency if positioned outside the very collective that grants it meaning (Foucault, 2001). A parrhesiast must be recognised within existing structures of power to speak truth effectively; otherwise, they risk being seen merely as the “crazy” or “dismissible” one rather than as an agent of critical insight. As hinted before, such an endeavour is not reformist but micropolitical, adopting and displaying the language of the master, possibly even bridging Foucault’s (1977) insights on productive power-knowledge with La Boétie’s (1942) paradox of the willing servitude. Here, the master’s language could even be that of psychology’s institution itself.

So, revisiting the beginning of this passage, the upcoming participations are not so much three individual empirical cases, but rather a triptych remounting one case — that of psychology's institution. Still, each encounter sets off new beginnings that could indeed have become an event. I do not intend to diminish or underplay any of these singular encounters — as I mentioned, they hold indisputable emic value, speaking truth from the contested borders of the institution itself. At this threshold, their parrhesia confronts both the expectations imposed by instituted arrangements of psychological knowledge and the broader norms shaping their realities, grounding the critique in lived experience and destabilising the boundaries of institutional authority. At the same time, these voices carry over-coded meanings and characterisations, reflecting both the strength of pre-established institutionalisations of interpretations and the reification of a supposed objective truth through the repetition of sameness (Deleuze, 1994). And these issues are no less present in my own writing — perhaps even more so than in the voices of those who have enriched my understanding in this journey. Because, of course, the institution of psychology has been carefully imbued and infused in me, to the extent that prominent theories and psy arguments surface in my discourse as if they had always been my own personal voice — long before I consciously began the academic anthropophagy that permeates this makeshift document.

Guided by this sobering realisation about my own institutionalised voice, I kept the critical intent of my labour by approaching each encounter as more than a simple act of documentation, engaging them as an unfolding territory of layered insights and resistances. Those specific personal recounts shared with

me as this makeshift endeavour is collectively assembled, were not so much tales of a distant past, but the emergence of a shared “*here and now*” (Barthes, 1977, p. 145, emphasis in original). And this presence, actualised in my writing, now invites you to share in its immediacy, lending your own here and now to its unfolding — just like this work’s Information Sheet (Appendix A) invited potential contributions to the trapizonga. While the title was provisional and the invitation framed around a simplified, prescriptive betterment of psychological protocols, these initial formalities provided a starting place for trust. Although institutional box-checking elements were dutifully observed⁵⁹, a tiny spark of reflexivity was already yearning to break free from those constraints. I hope the clash in styles between that initial institutional document and what is now presented as the product of this academic pursuit exposes this makeshift document’s intentions even further. Here and there, the instituting psychological forces continually provoke psychology’s instituted protocols, which, in turn, politically enforce failure by imposing doxastic preferences, as if these prescriptive expressive forms were the true carriers of a plane of content. There, these tensions are purposefully watered down in an eligibility and readiness checklist; here, they are heightened to the extent I can bear.

And I suppose there is also a parallel between my effort in this text to make visible forces that remain invisible by themselves (Deleuze, 2003) and the act of providing a Participant Consent Form (Appendix B) to those interested in retelling their stories. The form serves as both an institutional boundary and a

⁵⁹ This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 19/37.

visible, continuous invitation, offering a strange “signed freedom” — a freedom to engage or withdraw, granted but constrained by institutional expectations. This document carries legal, cultural, and relational implications that go far beyond the mere act of signing a piece of paper. In this sense, its consequential tone both restricts and opens — a gateway for narrative expression, though bounded by the prescriptive forces of the academic institution. Even in cases like this research, where processes are cooperative and carry the best intentions, a pervasive underlying fear taints the prospective relationship with attempts at control. “Control” — a word that horrifies when applied to intimate relationships while also trying to establish a paradigm of Apollonian precision in empirical quantification — has a complex etymological history. Tracing back to the Latin *contrarotulus* — literally meaning *against the tiny wheel* and thought to refer to a small roll used in medieval accounting to verify calculations — it later developed into the Anglo-French *contreroller* with a more expansive, less quantifiable meaning: *to exert authority* (Harper, 2001). Déjà vu, as we find ourselves back to where this trapizonga first tangled with authorship and authority.

Now, if I may continue exploring the topic of authority, this project’s Interview Guide (Appendix C) might initially appear almost naïve in its structure. At first glance, it resembles and works like typical guidelines for in-depth interviews in qualitative research (Britten, 1995). However, its cooperative design aims to decentralise the usual exertion of control, inviting interviewees to navigate their narratives freely and, as much as possible, withholding judgement about the relevance of topics. This exercise in free association should not be

mistaken for a laissez-faire approach; rather than an “anything goes” disposition, it is still anchored by a starting point (Freud, 1916–1917/1953) — in our case, a guiding recollection of failure in psychotherapy. My role, then, is to follow with attentive recognition (Kastrup, 2019) — a gesture toward shared authorship rather than imposed authority. Yet, the guide also resembles a form of elicitation⁶⁰ interview (Vermersch, 2015), which seeks to phenomenologically access detailed memories of lived experiences. In this role, the interviewer provides active guidance, working as a facilitator in the interviewee’s remembrance while striving to avoid imposing content. The inclusion of emotions as pivotal markers of interest builds on Vermersch’s (1994/2007) work, where these moments intensively indicate heightened significance within the memory landscape, orienting me, as the interviewer, towards aspects of the experience that resonate most deeply with the interviewee’s subjective world. In this distributed structure, authority shifts and disperses, circulating through varied roles and inspirations.

Even so, this type of guideline serves only as a tool for overpreparation in anticipation of an encounter. Nothing — absolutely nothing — can truly predict an encounter. And in this research (as in therapy), it is the singularity of the encounter that holds the most significance. So, the anxious researcher studies the impossible — procedures that resist procedure, structures that resist structure — hoping that this “prepared unpreparedness” might open up spaces for an event to emerge. It is, indeed, a positive professional uncertainty. Such an

⁶⁰ Vermersch’s translated works alternate between the terms “explicitation” and “elicitation.” As the latter term appears more benign in English and is found in translations approved by Vermersch himself, I have chosen to use it. In French, however, the term is *explicitation* (cf. Vermersch, 1994/2007).

interview resembles more a cartographic mapping than a conventional inquiry. In an interview with the cartographic ethos (Tedesco et al., 2016), the researcher follows processes — not so much the threads of a story as the threading of it. That is, the researcher stays attentive to which movements shape the weaving, which companionships align side by side, and what surfaces as the enemy; but they also follow which voices speak through the single voice that recounts, which institutions are built, and which are defied or dismantled. Nevertheless, even with the openness of an empathetic adventurer, the instituted forms remain present alongside the interviewer and must be continually negotiated as the encounter unfolds. In that sense, the following sections emerge from my unspoken struggles and partial surrenders. The effort was always to hear rather than “listening for” — to resist the pull of institutionalised order-words, allowing the unpredictable raw vibrations of the encounter to resonate.

The tension does not resolve. With each encounter, I was no longer merely a listener or observer; in a sense, my embodied presence became psychology’s monolithic walls — solid with the weight of institutional power but fissured by the forces of excess that no architecture of containment could control. A paradox follows — each time I found myself before a singular existence, I offered my materiality as a vibrating trim for their pulse to inhabit. Meanwhile, a struggle between instituted forms and instituting forces takes shape in the words, silences, gestures, and movements of both those who shared their stories and my own writing. Each interview that follows vibrates differently — distinct in language, form, and rhythm, though all trace the contours of a single case: the institution of psychology itself. In the sections ahead, surface and depth

converge. The immediate, raw expressions of each contributing voice create resonant layers, exposing fissures and intensities across psychology's institutional body. These sections do not adhere to a prescriptive structure but instead arise from the embodied force of each interaction, revealing the institution's clinical face as something both fragile and inexhaustible. I invite you, my obstinate reader, to step into this unfolding with me, becoming a co-author in tracing the unpredictable pathways that arise from each layered encounter. Shall we?

Giulia — “they didn’t understand what I needed”

Injustice cannot be resolved.
 In the shadow of a flawed world
 you murmured a timid protest.
 But others will come.

— *Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Consolation on the beach*⁶¹

I interviewed Giulia⁶² in mid-November 2019. It turned out to be a 48-minute conversation that took place just a week after I received an email from her, in which she announced her interest in participating in the study. Scheduling was one of those rare, well-tuned processes, where available hours matched perfectly for everyone involved. I remember pushing to prepare myself as much as possible because it was my first time interviewing in English — and I tend to lose fluency when I get anxious. We were going to meet at the Manawatū campus of Massey University, in a small, rectangular room with a typical sand-coloured fibreboard desk with black plastic details and three dark office chairs with wheels. My impression of that type of room is that it looks very corporate, too impersonal, and even a bit deserted in spite of the cluttered furniture. As the interview was approaching, I quickly headed to my office, where I kept a candy jar with assorted sweets, and I brought it along. I also planned to bring glasses and a bottle of fresh water, as it was a relatively warm, dry day, but I ran out of time, leaving this plan unrealised. As I was already in my office — and out of

⁶¹ This is the fifth stanza of the 1945 poem *Consolo na praia*, written by modernist Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade and published in the book *A Rosa do Povo* [The People’s Rose]. The lyrical voice ponders between pain and possibility, finding meaning in the simplest aspects of life. Through blank verse, the poem narrates both personal struggles and the broader societal challenges in Brazil at the close of World War II: “A injustiça não se resolve. / À sombra do mundo errado / murmuraste um protesto tímido. / Mas virão outros.”

⁶² Giulia is a fictional name of Italian origin, meaning *youthful*. Also, drawing inspiration from Giulia Andreani’s painter-researcher artwork, this chapter offers a form of “history painting.”

habit from my time as a therapist — I took a box of facial tissues, completing an incomplete trio of comfort, nurture and support. Neatly arranged on the desk, the candies and the tissues called enough attention to show care while being discreet enough not to become a topic — I reassured myself. I had all the necessary documents in a folder with a working pen, and the recorder was functioning perfectly. Despite my nervous energy and expectation to do a good job, I organised all the elements I recognised I could put in place while opening up to the encounter.

Giulia was available on time, exuding a calm and friendly energy. After reviewing all the necessary research documents with her and ensuring no questions remained unanswered before she signed the consent form, we started the formal interview. I call it a *formal* interview because — abiding by the institutionalised ideal of ethics — I may only use her voice in the first person from the moment I turned on the recorder to the moment I turned it off. However, I suppose that the incorporeal transformations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) necessary to becoming a participant in a study do not occur instantly but through a long, non-definitive expressive process (Guattari, 2006) that also resolves gradually. In that sense, even the very act of providing a formal interview does not, in itself, constitute a becoming-participant. There is an order of affective intermingling in the content segment of such an assemblage (Deleuze, 1988; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that is often overlooked in academic work. I want to acknowledge these affections and make them as noticeable as possible here.

Indeed, I wonder which affective forces ended up pairing with an Information Sheet calling for research participants, allowing for a composition that ultimately created a shared existential territory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and the roles of researcher and researched. Moreover, I recruited participants through trusted peers in diverse spaces, relying on a snowballing process (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), which built on their affective connections with potential participants. These other relationships are mostly concealed in this written trapizonga, which preserves privacy and confidentiality but also erases the more complex connections still present in the (un)spoken expressions and relational gestures that I will inevitably explore. Added to this issue, I do not discount all the exchanged words while the recorder was not yet on — or immediately after it was turned off — as if it were, then, safer to be a less rehearsed version of ourselves. Somehow, these invisible subjectivities, placements and interactions (Guattari, 2006) are all here. I name them so that the diverse participations in the study are not taken as absolute materials, reified constituents, identities, personality types, archetypical classifications, stereotypical conformations (Foucault, 1990) — this-and-not-that.

I was pointing out that becoming-participant is a process that does not occur instantly when I briefly moved on to acknowledge some of the invisible relationships that also compose this trapizonga. So, I will return to the former. Informally, a considerable number of people expressed interest in participating in the study. From my scrawls, they amounted to roughly a dozen, excluding those who ultimately became “full” participants. In a sense, the invitation to participate found resonances and allowed stories of failure to be re-cognised, re-

enacted, and even re-signified. At the same time, as I mentioned, such interest is not enough to move someone from the position of an entertained bystander to that of a participant, despite the neighbouring zones created. Even if I asked Giulia — which I did not — why she decided to participate in the study, her answer would be circumscribed to a specific state of forces shaping the very moment of our interaction. And there would always be choices, restraints, lack of language, difficulties in translating lived experience into symbolic mediators (Guattari, 2006), relationships, guilt or shame or fear (Benedict, 1946), ignorance, and so on. Thus, all subjectivities that I present here are unfinished yet complete.

Giulia seemed quite integrated before, during, and after recording our formal interview. In the *awkward journeys*⁶³ I will present by following snippets of Giulia's voice, I accept that sometimes one must feel stuck in a long, awful ride, locked in with someone who wants to help them but does not really know how. And Giulia indeed helped this work in many ways. For starters, by making me realise I would have to stay with her words for a long time after meeting her, before I *got there* — wherever “there” is, as failure seems to be a possibility at every turn, every question, every word accepted by the text I write.

Awkward Journeys with Giulia

And when I would go to the therapist, she made me feel like a child. You know, I was 14 — I know I was young. ... But yet ... we did a lot of this — ahm, you know — art therapy. So, “if you had to be any animal, what

⁶³ “You know ... The fact that it was such a long drive and so I had to do this awful, awkward car journey with my mother to get there” (Giulia).

animal would you be and, could you draw it?” And I am sitting there, going “I am terrible at art.” You know? I might be creative in some ways, but certainly not in any sense of being artistic. ... She didn’t even ask “can you draw?” or “do you like drawing?” But yet, I am going to tell you to draw something and draw a lot of wild conclusions from what you draw. So, I drew: a bird. ‘Cause that’s about the easiest thing you can potentially draw. And then, all of a sudden, there’s all these — you know — “that’s the signal that you’re feeling vulnerable and fragile, and you’d like to be able to fly away” and I’m kind, kind, “no, that’s absolutely not what this is an indication of!” So, the whole thing just felt silly. You know, it just felt like a performance and a show. (Giulia)

*

I chose to begin understanding Giulia’s account of a failed psychological intervention with this snippet from her interview because it brings together several territorial journeys and disputes, allowing contact with numerous invisible forces she was trying to make visible. In a formalised therapeutic setting, this entire passage would serve as an invitation to a clinic, likely becoming a point to revisit and explore further in future meetings. This type of work would involve negotiating meanings, weighing contextual importance, assessing ongoing needs, allowing for the change of narratives, and so on. By recognising the forces in dispute, some of these territorial journeys would probably perish, vanish, or appear as less important, as the stronger tensions would make themselves appear brighter and more urgent. The way I organised this work allowed for some negotiation during the interview, as I asked for

clarification and returned to words that did not seem sufficiently explored. Still, I mostly took the stories as they were told and did not actively engage in working with the forces at play. So, the narratives were not analysed in “therapeutic” terms but recounted as memories. That is, the meanings and understandings were not disputed or negotiated, and any possible therapeutic effect produced was organically triggered. My access point to the historical struggles and pain are only possible because our encounter actualised the events Giulia had been through, to her best recollection.

Consequently, the analytical exercise brought in this trapizonga is not definitive. Even so, considering my pondering in the last paragraph — and more broadly in this makeshift document — the processual work I offer here could never be definitive anyway. Specifically, such a *schizoanalysis* does not read, decode, or expose identities and hidden correlations; it does not build truths or reveal the Truth. Instead, the job of such analysis is simpler: to *stay with* the complexities of a process and *follow* them as long as possible, especially to their limits — a simple but not easy job (Barros & Passos, 2009). This *and* that *and* that other *and* also that *and*... Such an exercise is not about adding or piling up — this *plus* that *equals*... — nor is it an effort to offer points of view — this *perspective* or that *one*... — but rather staying with the multiplicities as they unfold. Accompanying processes is less about collecting and connecting moments, like quickly sequenced pictures creating an illusion of motion in movies, and more about acknowledging and clustering difference. In my unreasonable little box of examples, I think of it as like eating a bubble-and-squeak brunch for the first time: what seemed to be a simple potato dish suddenly feels like peas

popping, sweet caramelised carrots, or tangy Worcestershire sauce — all at once and different every time. So, more generally, distinct moments still exist; change remains a great part of processes; and notable existences are still recognised. Yet the focus shifts — from *what is* (the obvious inner parts of an existential territory) to *what else* (the brutal invasions to perceived territorial borders).

Such work, then, is *cartographic* (Guattari, 2006), as it is constantly (re)drawing all types of borders that flourish within the existential geopolitical conflict (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Whenever the work of a schizoanalysis looks like a finished map, it is ruined — effectively ending the cartography, though not the process. While avoiding reifying the many lines that create entangled institutionalised threads (or maps) — as they are not themes — the schizoanalyst instead allows the tracing to emerge from within the process, navigating toward the indefinite spaces that create territorial borders. As we now hopefully agree — at least for the scope of this trapizonga — in an assemblage, (existential) territories are made of expressions attached to bodies they do not represent. So, the borders of such territories are disputed, indiscernible spaces. It is precisely on these contested points that a process opens to becoming-always-other (Deleuze, 1995).

*

The awkward journey of feeling like a child. One of the strongest territorial journeys in Giulia's story embodies an institutionalised version of disputed territorial borders while producing an impossible task, halting any possibility of a therapeutic process. Giulia explicitly states that she was 14 years old when she had her first experience with psychotherapy. Her words align with

a fairly agreed-upon “objective reality” that this is still a young age. At the same time, the tone and choice of sentences imply that feeling like a child is a negative experience in the context of what she recounts — distinct from merely being young. I will explore the posited value of this distinction soon, but for now, I will simply follow the image of an adolescent.

Adolescence as a phase of life (or the somewhat similar ideas of teenage years and youth) is an ingrained concept in Western and Westernised societies like New Zealand. Derived from the Latin *adolēscere* (Harper, 2001), meaning *to grow up*, the idea behind this term is accepted without much controversy in daily life. In fact, despite minor variations in how adolescence and its supposed equivalents are defined, it is not a stretch to imagine that many people — even psy professionals — might take adolescence as a natural, normal, and expected maturing process. Contrasting this easy daily acceptance of the idea of adolescence is the “conundrum” (Sawyer et al., 2018, p. 1) of defining it. The concept’s evermore blanketing biological explanation fails to suffice or sustain itself when confronted with the reasoning underpinning its current definition. Indeed, for such a recent concept (just over a century old), it is remarkable how creating a grey zone between childhood and adulthood has served to fill a socioeconomic gap (Baxter, 2011).

In the present time, while often framed as a natural biological process — defined by hormonal puberty and brain development (Sawyer et al., 2018) — adolescence is perhaps better understood as a historically situated construct. The growth of stable, family-centred urban populations — enabled by a massive drop in mortality rates, chiefly due to advances in health technologies — triggered a

demographic transition in Europe and other industrialising regions (Baxter, 2011). At the same time, industrialisation renewed the demand for workers with “higher” qualifications for specialised roles (Fasick, 1994). However, as machinery increasingly replaced human labourers in manual and repetitive tasks, the number of potential workers grew disproportionately to the available jobs, particularly for unskilled labour. The surplus labour intensified competition in the workforce, especially among less-experienced younger workers. These combined factors gradually pushed younger populations out of the workforce and into the schooling system, leading to the widespread establishment of secondary schools as a distinct and formalised phase of education (Fasick, 1994). This shift postponed the now-called adolescents’ overall agency — particularly their economic independence — forcing this segment of the population to rely more heavily on familial support. Far from being a universal or natural “phase” of life, adolescence emerged as a practical response to evolving socioeconomic pressures, placing additional strain on familial units. Its definition continued to shift over time, adapting to the historical and cultural demands of industrial Western societies, and is arguably better understood when not reduced to puberty alone (Baxter, 2011; Fasick, 1994).

In addition to the biological and socio-historical perspectives presented so far, Erikson’s (1959/1994) culturally specific approach to adolescence represents a foundational perspective in Anglophone psy knowledge, shaped by the individualism characteristic of the Western global North. In his critique of Freudian psychoanalysis, Erikson dismissed what he interpreted as a biologically constrained focus in Freud’s proposed psychosexual development,

overlooking how Freud's theory integrated relational and cultural factors. This critique reflects a misconception that has long been resolved, now understood as stemming from complex issues such as poor translation choices for the German term *Trieb*⁶⁴ in English versions of Freud's works (Ricoeur, 1970/2008)⁶⁵, Lacan's delayed reception outside of continental Europe (Fink & Smit, 2013), and the oversimplification of Freud's nuanced view of culture and psyche, which recognised the sociocultural shaping of human drives (Freud, 1913/1950). Yet the limited interpretation persists in the daily discourse of several English-speaking professionals, perpetuated through decades of anecdotal knowledge and prejudiced repetition. Erikson (1959/1994) proposed an influential eight-stage psychosocial model, centred on individual progression through pairs of dialectical polarities at each stage. The model's conceptualisation of "psychosocial" is notably restrictive, oversimplifying the relationship between individual development and a static, externalised view of the social environment. Each stage is characterised by a binary crisis or conflict to be surpassed in chronological order, from infancy to late adulthood.

Erikson was briefly mentored to become a child psychoanalyst by Anna Freud (Ferrer-Wreder & Kroger, 2019) — who famously shifted her focus from her father's interest in the unconscious to the psychology of consciousness across the lifespan. Erikson's developmental model was completed almost 50 years after Freud's psychosexual theory and reflects a restricted consideration of

⁶⁴ I refuse to delve too deeply into this deprecated rabbit hole, but it is important to note that *Trieb* was sometimes translated interchangeably as both "drive" and "instinct" in older English versions. Freud, however, clearly distinguishes these concepts in his work, using *Trieb* for drive and *Instinkt* for instinct — cf. Freud, S. (1955). *Beyond the pleasure principle*. Hogarth Press.

⁶⁵ This is a self-fulfilling citation, as the English translation of Ricoeur's text perpetuates the very issue critiqued in the original: the mistranslation of Freud's "Trieb" as *instinct*.

psychoanalytical metatheory, adapting a more constrained framework aligned with the ego functions studied by his mentor. This is no minor issue, given how Anna Freud (1936/1966) was pivotal in simplifying psychoanalytical theory into more explicitly individualistic terms than her father — a shift that continues to heavily inform psychodynamic theories today (Young-Bruehl, 1988/2008).

Freud's theory has faced both fair and unfair critiques, but it notably avoids over-categorising experience. In his psychosexual development theory (Freud, 1905/2011), puberty plays a significant role, marking the onset of the genital stage where libido is directed outward toward intimacy. Proposed before adolescence became a widespread concept, Freud's work gives minimal attention to adolescents as a distinct phase of life. Conversely, Erikson (1959/1994) explicitly separated adolescence from young adulthood, giving truth status to this now widely accepted life stage. In Erikson's model, adolescence is characterised by a conflict between identity and role confusion.

Identity is a problematic concept, especially in a psychoanalytic context, and it is not a topic of interest in Freud's work. The word "identity" comes from the Latin *identitatem* (Harper, 2001) and means *sameness*. So, paradoxically proposed as a psychodynamic concept, identity negates the core assumption of its field — the processual change within a productive interplay of vital forces. On the contrary, identity as a goal replicates empirical science's demand for predictability and reproducibility, reifying life's processes into a tidy developmental checklist that accepts only orderly, linear flows from one point to another. Such epigenetic theories risk reinforcing institutional norms of linearity and individualism, which obscure the relational, systemic, and collective

dimensions of life. What remains is that — just like Freud and his daughter — Erikson offers a list of ideals reflective of his time and place. Taken as instituted ideals, adolescence and identity survive in the discourses we share, and it is not overreaching to assume Giulia understood both concepts when she was a teenager.

Of course, these colonising/colonised historical and theoretical lines are circumscribed to a way of life that is neither universal nor transtemporal. Yet, such widespread collective changes shape how Westernised societies understand ageing in contemporary terms. To reiterate: historical socioeconomic shifts in Western urban environments significantly influence how we predominantly conceptualise the transition from childhood to adulthood today. Theories like Erikson's psychodynamic model further reinforce these conceptual shifts by imposing binaries, framing adolescence as a distinct stage characterised by identity crises/opportunities, and subtly promoting expectations of fixed roles within rigid developmental sequences. Embedded in Giulia's voice — though not explicitly labelled — is an expectation (!) of what it means to be either a child or an adult. Positioned outside both clear territories, Giulia's only apparent option was to be mistreated or misinterpreted. Caring for Giulia, then, was — at least on the surface — an impossible task. Instead of becoming-other, Giulia felt *othered*: “she made me feel like a child” (Giulia). Knowing she was too young to be considered an adult, Giulia resisted the specific youthful identity imposed upon her.

As hinted earlier, this disagreement also seems to reveal an internalisation of what it means to be an adolescent. Localised historical

conditions enabled major societal shifts that now produce a reified subjectivity: adolescence is felt and embodied as an intrinsic condition. This change is far from trivial. Adolescents belong to a group that resists fixed or categorical descriptors (Sawyer et al., 2018), instead being defined by continual passage — an institutionalised state of non-stop, non-negotiable change — which, arguably, is all there is in a life anyway. Stuck for many years in this grey area — a blurred frontier between childhood and adulthood — feeling adolescence *within oneself* reinforces a specific mode of subjectification. This instituted condition forces teenagers to continuously return to their ageing process from a position marked by varying degrees of disenfranchisement. One could suppose this mode of subjectification is not inherently problematic. However, in this case, subjectification is forcibly stalled by the institutionalised demand to remain “in-between” — neither fully child nor fully adult. This imposed liminality interrupts the process of becoming a subject, transforming it instead into a static, reified identity bound by developmental frameworks. Moreover, adolescence is now converted into a field of physical and psychological development, expected to span a more extended period than ever before, stretching from age 10 to the 26th birthday (Sawyer et al., 2018). In Aotearoa, this accounts for roughly 18% of a person’s average lifespan.

The classification of ageing institutionalises life’s processes, over-coding them to the point of stagnation. Adolescence, then, becomes less about growing up and more about the discomfort of not feeling young enough or old enough. When adolescents perform stereotypically, comparisons to who they no longer are can feel offensive, while being treated like someone they aspire to become

often feels overwhelming. Professional engagement with adolescents caught in such rigid frameworks risks not only reinforcing these stagnant roles but also acting on assumptions that prevent the processual emergence of collective assemblages within the therapeutic encounter, further halting heterogenesis. As I turn to the other awkward journeys in Giulia's story, I find myself ethically wondering how to cooperate with someone stuck in such a non-negotiable experience of self. Giulia's words begin to offer a possible answer: "she didn't even ask" (Giulia). This phrase exposes a deeper tension: why do professionals so often assume answers to unspoken questions — questions that could, and perhaps should, be asked aloud? This tension highlights the impossibility of addressing every question or expressing everything that matters, both in therapeutic settings and in life more broadly. It also reflects the work I do here. My perspectives, experiences, and expectations inevitably intertwine with Giulia's voice, creating new territories that are neither totally mine nor hers but could be restrictively interpreted as my "expertise" or the application of a "proper" technique for treatment. Such relationships, while holding the potential for meaningful collaboration, always risk becoming "a performance and a show" (Giulia).

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The awkward journey of "you know." Despite clearly taking positions during the interview — an activity that demonstrates both knowledge and reflexiveness — Giulia said "I know" only once, a moment captured in the snippet I now examine. In contrast, she said "you know" nearly a hundred times over the course of our 48-minute conversation, five of those in the small fragment

I focus on here. While the well-humoured answer inside my head might have been, “no, I don’t actually *know* your story,” I instead translated my response into a smile and an affirmative nod — a gesture that sought to honour the place her words openly invited me to occupy.

In fact, despite an uneasy feeling, I initially interpreted the expression “you know” as a simple stylistic choice, a mannerism, or even a clichéd way of checking whether I was truly present and listening. While these interpretations seemed valid, there were also occasions when “you know” acted as a moment of pause, a reflective gesture that invited further thought before continuing. At times, it even carried the affective weight of a curious question — not merely Giulia’s curiosity about *me* but an opening to explore something together. Yes, there were many contextual meanings to “you know” in Giulia’s account of her story. However, the more I stayed with the reiterated expression, the more I perceived it as a territorial boundary — an affective marker negotiating the relational space we shared, not an unremarkable coincidence. In this way, “you know” seemed to oscillate between a means of claiming space and a way of building communal bridges, testing whether a shared understanding could emerge through the encounter.

Oddly, Giulia’s expression consistently reminded me of a well-known philosophical equation from the verge of the 16th century: knowledge itself is power⁶⁶ (Bacon, 1597). As a passionate reader of Foucault’s work, this association struck me as unusual, given how it predated the now-influential

⁶⁶ This expression is often quoted “knowledge is power,” though this specific phrasing originates in the later work of Thomas Hobbes, who briefly served as Bacon’s secretary and amanuensis — cf. Hobbes (1845), *The English works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, especially volume III.

Foucauldian articulation of power/knowledge. At first glance, both expressions seem to connect the same two ideas: the art-techne-episteme-science cluster utters authority — or *order-words* that impose majoritarian knowledge forms — which leads to the exertion of *control*⁶⁷ (Deleuze, 2017). However, Bacon and Foucault approach this relationship from seemingly opposite directions. While Foucault examines the effects of power/knowledge relations — how they discipline and constrain subjectification in modern states (and subjectivities) — Bacon envisions a technocratic society enabled by rigid and precise power relations (García, 2001). This association, then, is not mere coincidence. To some extent, the “fruitful” outcomes of Bacon’s ideas set the stage for the critical explorations Foucault undertakes, tracing the ways these early formulations of power continue to shape modern governance and subjectivity.

Jumping approximately 50 years after Bacon’s publication, we arrive at the beheading of King Charles I. This pivotal event of the English Civil War led to a decade-long militaristic interregnum (Gaunt, 2014), coinciding with the publication of *Leviathan* by Bacon’s former secretary Thomas Hobbes (Hobbes & Missner, 2008/2016). In this influential work, Hobbes argued for the restoration of sovereign power through a social contract. However, this “contract” was grounded in a stark expectation: that the commonfolk would hand over all individual liberty in exchange for stability and safety. In this model, society — the “social” component of the contract — consisted of a select few who “orderly” ruled and the many who allowed such power without contest. This historical

⁶⁷ If I were to extrapolate the Foucauldian/Deleuzian contribution, I might suggest that this utterance also leads to *gendered dominance* — connecting to the notion of patriarchy, developed by feminist scholars like Gerda Lerner and Nicola Gavey — or the *spectacle*, as discussed by Guy Debord in relation to the commodification of life.

moment is overloaded with societal tensions that, though nuanced and disguised, persist in various forms today. Having briefly explored a few of the effects born of Bacon's epoch and its *Zeitgeist*, my focus now returns to his work as I continue to follow its traces.

Bacon (1597) envisioned a technocratic society rather than an aristocratic one. As in his secretary's later book, Bacon's writings do not challenge the notion that most people are destined to follow the few who wield institutionalised power. Instead, the leading figure of early English empiricism sought to shift power away from birth and descent, anchoring it instead to a different kind of "merit." In this framework, worthiness was carefully untethered from inheritance and reassembled around the idea of the "learned men" (Bacon, 1597, p. A4). Within this gendered and colonising mindset, the emerging depiction of rulers centred on *experts* and *scholars*. Experts were those who execute — a term whose polysemy becomes troubling, particularly in this contextual application — while scholars were those who judge or censure⁶⁸.

In a Baconian perspective, the idea of discourse aligns closely with oratory and is portrayed as a vessel of ornament, beauty, and hidden self-praise (Bacon, 1597). Spoken and written language, then, are seen as secondary to thought, detached from and less significant than the intellectual process. As a tool for egocentric self-worship, Baconian discourse strategically obscures the self's interests to gain political traction. In this framework, thoughts are exclusive to a select few — the experts and scholars, rather than the nobles and aristocrats.

⁶⁸ Here, I must mention the inevitable anachronistic image that tangentially comes to mind, placing scholarly work in a novel position: piles of students' assignments and exams waiting to be marked, approached under the overwhelming pressures and relentless hustle of a clocked semester's end.

Thus, the ability to use language alone does not suffice to demonstrate intellectual capability. Bacon's (1597) strategy for shifting power relations rested on the assertion that speech is not synonymous with knowledge. To prove one's worth, only specific types of "thoughts" were deemed valuable — selective scholarly thoughts, to be precise.

I must jump back to Giulia's story because there is a form of addressing in her words that connects to what I have been exploring. *Who* knows? "You know" — the researcher, the one holding selective scholarly thoughts; the one drawn by Giulia's voice — a commonfolk voice permitted only to hope for stability and safety. Yet, I concede there is also relational and affective knowledge embedded within this expression, extending beyond the immediate dynamics of its utterance. In our conversation, "giving up" knowledge — and power, to a certain extent — liberated Giulia from the massive task of fully justifying her account of the past. There is even a protective gesture in this expression: if "I" does not know, then "I" can say whatever comes to mind (notably, this was the one rule I asked her to follow when recounting her story). Strangely enough — though perhaps not so strange when considering the lingering Baconian technocratic threads unravelling in Giulia's voice — this liberation from the need to justify herself enabled her to do precisely what she was liberating herself from. Her story emerged positioned, self-aware, and at times even "too perfect"⁶⁹.

⁶⁹ This expression comes from one of my diaries, written during the COVID-19 lockdown while transcribing the interview — a period marked by its own closed borders, perhaps mirrored in what I wrote at that time: "Her stories are just too perfect and tight, and I feel I cannot enter and visit the spaces with her... why is that? I don't like this" (April 2020). This sense of unease about the impenetrability of her otherwise well-structured and clear narrative evolved into the elaborated feeling that now drives my exploration of these "awkward journeys."

In the time that followed our conversation, I had to come to terms with the affect — the relational intensity — derived from Giulia’s neat story before I could really begin hearing her. The repeated “you know” seemed to position me as the researcher in a paradoxical bind, oscillating between the authority of an expert and the uncertainty of an outsider. On the one hand, if I already knew, her account would seem redundant, placing her voice at risk of irrelevance. On the other, if I did not know, the gaps in my understanding would risk omitting critical elements of her narrative. Both scenarios reinforced a discomforting sense of failure — not just mine, but rooted in Baconian ideals of expertise and execution, where the researcher/professional is expected to embody a form of technocratic authority. In our shared space, “you know” operated as both an invitation and a limit, exposing the rigid boundaries imposed by these roles. It highlighted the tension between institutionalised notions of expertise and the lived complexities of encounters. This tension reminded me how the institutionalisation of knowledge often positions the “expert” as one who executes, judges, controls — a power dynamic that risks closing the very relational spaces Giulia and I were seeking to open. As I reflected on this, I found myself recalling the ideas of transference and countertransference (Lacan, 1997), not so much as individual psychological processes but as co-produced intensities that can either constrain or expand the affective dimensions of collaborative work.

In psychoanalytical theory, the concept of transference refers to a relational disposition, typically described as an affective charge that may be positive — akin to love — or negative, manifesting as ambivalence (Lacan, 2019).

Countertransference, in turn, relates to the responsive affect that arises in reaction to transference within the relational dynamic (Lacan, 1997). Put simply, countertransference is a transferential response to transference. Historically, psychoanalytic practice has placed the analyst in the responsive role, with the analysand initiating this affective addressing. Of course, my relationship with Giulia was never intended to be therapeutic, and if transference occurred fleetingly — as seems likely — it was not managed in the structured manner of a traditional clinical setting. Still, transference is part of all meaningful relationships, and in this case, the exchange appeared to emerge organically, revealing relational and affective intensities that unfolded beyond the confinements of traditional psychoanalytic structures.

More than an affect directed at someone, transference is a process through which the other in a relationship is invested with characteristics — perceived and felt as affective intensities — that serve some subjective need (Lacan, 2019). In this dynamic, the subject's assumptions about the other overshadow the other's understanding of their own life. For instance, in an analytical process, the analysand's presumption that the analyst possesses guiding and transformative knowledge creates the affective charge necessary for transference. As Lacan puts it, "as soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere [...] there is transference" (Lacan, 2019, p. 232). Transference, then, is not confined to therapy; it often operates in friendships, where we may imagine our friends understand and support us, and in kinship relations, where we might assume the unconditional love of family members. These projected ideals often shape how we relate to others. In my meeting with Giulia, her repeated "you know"

seemed to create a transference space, where I perceived her as assigning me the characteristics of a Baconian researcher. Reframing this understanding altered not only my interpretation of the expression “you know” but also re-signified my affirmative nods to Giulia. My brief inattention to these processes — and a degree of unfamiliarity, given that the position of researcher does not come as a natural allegiance to me — blinded me to what Giulia was actually doing. Whether or not *I* knew was irrelevant. By positioning me as a Baconian researcher — or so I perceived in my countertransference — Giulia created the space to tell her story in the best way she could. It revealed an opening of the process, rather than closing it off.

Even if the transference could not be fully managed in our one recorded interaction, the end of our conversation stays with me as an ethico-aesthetic hint. In between reciprocal laughs, Giulia said the expression one last time: “you know? Maybe I would like to do some kind of counselling down the line myself with young people, to try and not be that person” (Giulia). This final “you know” felt less like a resolution and more like another beginning. It was provocative and defiant, a gesture toward becoming. Giulia’s voice seemed to claim a space where she could reimagine her role — not as the enforcer of a static, ever-repeating identity, but as part of the immanent processes of life. This final “you know” calls attention to how Giulia’s expression resists any all-encompassing reading. It continually unsettles fixed roles, including my own, and points to the relational multiplicities that we, as participants in this encounter, collectively created.

Central in the two awkward journeys pursued so far, the small snippet of Giulia's story allows numerous other openings — each another potential journey. As with the many entry points in this trapizonga, unhurried scrutiny reveals a myriad of entanglements between Giulia's autobiographical narrative and the molar and molecular institutional lines shaping and constraining its meanings. For instance, Giulia's mention of art invites a reflection on creativity in therapy, while the drawing exercise highlights the lack of synchronisation between over-coded professional meaning-making and singular subjective experiences. Moments of disagreement further expose the power struggles embedded in clinical work, and Giulia's critique of therapy as "a performance and a show" (Giulia) challenges the ways performativity unfolds in therapeutic assemblages. These threads suggest four new beginnings, each hinting at the richness of what remains to be explored.

So, before shifting to other points in Giulia's story, I will sketch out a few brief paragraphs to begin untangling these four awkward journeys. These reflections are neither exhaustive nor definitive; they remain intentionally tentative — gestures toward possibilities — rather than fully realised analyses. Though shorter than the earlier discussions in this section, they share the same provisional nature, each offering a starting point rather than a conclusive account. And, once again, I invite you, my resolute reader, to join me in this process of threading — a conversation that remains open and ready to continue at any moment, if you so wish.

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The awkward journey of art in therapy. Giulia's assessment of her therapist's choice to rely on drawing as a therapeutic tool unfolds into diverse institutional threads. While the precise reasoning behind the therapist's decision in this specific encounter remains elusive, speculative possibilities abound. Perhaps the therapist was simply defaulting to familiar methods, reaching for a tool that felt safe or habitual, or reflecting an instituted reliance on technique standardisation, as if frequentist evaluations were sufficient to justify the protocolisation of the craft of care (Ansmann & Pfaff, 2018; Cutrer & Ehrenfeld, 2017). This choice might also suggest an attempt to simplify the complexity of emotional dynamics into a more manageable process, though at the risk of sacrificing depth of analysis. Alternatively, it could point to a lack of self-examination, underestimating Giulia's adolescent agency, or relying on an unexamined assumption that activities like drawing naturally appeal to younger minds. Such decisions, even when well-meaning, can inadvertently devoid the clinical space of the necessary openness to enable heterogenesis, echoing Giulia's experience that the process "just felt silly" (Giulia).

Building upon the speculative reasoning explored in the previous paragraph, it becomes essential to examine how institutional frameworks might shape the definition and application of "art" within therapeutic settings, standardising art therapy practices and potentially limiting the scope of creative expression, including how materiality is engaged with (Moon, 2010). A clinical intervention using art could possibly move beyond an over-coded expressive expectation — where meanings continuously lead to other meanings through symbolic, metaphorical, and metonymic loops — by reconnecting with the

materiality of creation itself (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). While meaning-making operates within the segment of expression in assemblages, the material act of drawing belongs to a segment of content, which may or may not become territorialised into expression. Attentively recognising that the creative process producing art is not inherently bound to predetermined interpretative frameworks opens up possibilities for a kind of disciplinary freedom, creating space for the materiality of drawing that operates without imposed sense — motor releases, the abrasion between an imprinter and a printing medium, the exploratory play of colour and form, and so on. But it would also allow a more inclusive idea of creativity — a characteristic Giulia perceives in herself — re-establishing a more encompassing understanding of what it means to be artistic. So, there is at least a missed opportunity in this encounter between Giulia and the therapist. And within the hypothetical domain built in this journey, I ponder what might have therapeutically emerged if Giulia's self-perceived creativity had been treated as an invitation to explore, rather than being overlooked and constrained by a restrictive and institutionally over-coded notion of art.

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The awkward journey of drawing easy images while you draw wild conclusions. In the analyses I present, pulling the institutional threads in Giulia's account serves as a procedural device to illuminate some of the layered institutional dynamics in her voice. While these threads are teased apart to show their distinct flows, they remain deeply interwoven, each journey naturally leading into the broader tangle of ethico-political lines within Giulia's story. The previous awkward journey already touched on meaning-making, hinting at how

the diverse actors in a therapeutic setting may conventionally occupy pre-established roles, where different types of “drawing” occur. Here, I consider how such drawings might be imposed by majoritarian symbolic narratives — a risk I acknowledge even as I write these lines — with collective expressions too hastily assigned to an assemblage’s segment of content. This territorialising haste, possibly driven by a kind of diagnostic zeal, seems reminiscent of what Freud (1910/1958) critiqued as *wild analysis*, highlighting the ethical stakes of interpretation. Freud’s contribution serves as a crucial reminder that interpretations, when offered prematurely or without regard for the unique dynamics of those in need of care, risk causing significant harm. In the context of wild analysis, such risks — confusion, resistance, or mistrust — may undermine the therapeutic alliance, with implications possibly extending to the social bond (Freud, 1921/1955). Conversely, interpretations that are built gradually and collectively tend to cultivate something that resembles a transferential synchronisation, where meanings can be more easily shared, accepted, analysed, and transformed.

Jung’s (1952/1973) concept of *synchronicity* — despite being closely tied to metaphysical assumptions that anchor it to transcendental meaning — offers an intriguing provocation: the idea that certain coincidences or resonances defy linear causality, generating over-coded series that escape typical frameworks of understanding. In other words, rather than fitting into straightforward cause-and-effect logic, certain connections between events or ideas may appear random yet are experienced as particularly significant or patterned. In Giulia’s narrative, however, the therapist’s imposition of meaning — the leap from bird to fragility

and escapism — could be taken as an attempt to enact a sort of synchronicity through a prefabricated interpretative mould, collapsing its potential into a reductive causal schema. As with Jung's archetypes, the therapist's likely well-intentioned approach erased the possibility of a collaborative process by relying on stereotypical instituted interpretations, offering conclusions as though they were immutable truths, like an oracle proclaiming prophecy to seekers of wisdom.

So, even if Jung's insight emerges from patterns he identified in his empirical practice, one could argue that it imposes fixed, universal symbolism onto the fluid processes of becoming, thereby limiting the vertical axis of assemblages, disallowing deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations. Stripped of its metaphysical trappings and reconsidered through the lens of immanence, synchronicity — dissolved as synchronisation in the flux of becomings — hints at the productive possibilities of embracing contingency and multiplicity, where meaning is not imposed but unfolds within the negotiated dynamics of the encounter (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). These encounters cannot be reduced into mere cognitive bias, as this concept assumes an "objective" baseline for perception, framing deviations as errors. So-called biases could instead be seen as adaptive heuristics, shaped by context to navigate complexity (Gigerenzer, 2008). Rather, these encounters expose how meaning emerges through the machinic interplay of attention and significance. Like noticing red cars everywhere after mentioning them — a fleeting but familiar instance — these phenomena reflect how assemblages territorialise resonances, making certain elements visible or significant as they are drawn into shifting planes of

consistency (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In that specific interpretative claim, however, the potential meanings of Giulia's drawing were expropriated, leaving no room for her own instituting processes to unfold. Until that point, for her, drawing a bird was simply easy. And yet, I am left wondering which incorporeal transformations might have emerged if easiness itself had become a catalyst, not for the imposition of fixed meanings, but for becoming-always-other.

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The awkward journey of disagreement in therapy. When offered a wild interpretation, Giulia ponders intimately, “no, that’s absolutely not what this is an indication of!” (Giulia). Her strong rejection persists years later in her recount — once unspoken, now exclamatory — exposing a clash between Giulia and the therapist over authority and authorship. Giulia found drawing and painting “childish and, yeah, patronising” (Giulia), but her ability to voice this rejection of the framework imposed upon her was constrained by instituted expectations in therapy, where the authority of an expert professional presupposes compliance from the person looking for treatment. Yet, this compliance is not simply imposed by external forces; beyond her specific disagreement, Giulia carried an intimate, institutionalised hope and trust in the process, assuming that “there’s something about this that’s supposed to work” (Giulia). So, therapy functioned as a disciplinary dispositif (Foucault, 1995), with the modes of subjectivity in that encounter modulated by intersecting institutions — adolescence, adulthood, expertise, art — producing a dividual body, agonistically bound in docility. That is, Giulia’s liminal experience in therapy brought conflicting lines that led to compliance, not because she agreed with the therapist’s procedures or

interpretations, but because of institutionalised roles well-ingrained in her understanding of authority and care.

Soon after recounting her experience of disagreement over the interpretation of her drawings, Giulia reflects on another interaction: “that would make me, make me say things that I just thought I should say to make it less uncomfortable” (Giulia), further exposing how power struggles and the diverse roles in the therapeutic setting shaped her compliance. At the same time, it also reveals how much Giulia wanted the process to succeed, even if this meant adopting a Baconian commonfolk position, where her actions and expressions implicitly reaffirmed the authority of a technocratic therapist and the legitimacy of the therapeutic institution. In this way, Giulia’s compliance also exposes a broader issue: the institutional frameworks structuring therapy often remain closed to scrutiny, presenting their practices and roles as naturally fixed and unquestionable. If these institutions were reclaimed through a groupality — opening a participatory field where pre-coded meanings, roles, and expectations could be negotiated — their productive forces could dissolve into immanence, shifting from rigid monoliths to a creative flux of mutual transformation. This shift into immanence requires something other than structural change; it demands a certain “letting go” of institutional privilege. A therapist, often positioned as the embodiment of institutional authority, occupies a privileged role within the assemblages that territorialise these monoliths, carrying immense potential to subvert them (Guattari, 2015a). By welcoming transversality, the therapeutic space could foster deep negotiations of institutionalised meanings rather than replicating instituted schemas. Yet, this

shift also requires accepting the “failure” of expertise within unequal systems. Giulia’s disagreement already gestures toward this possibility. If her discomfort were embraced rather than dismissed, it might have offered a transversal opening — a fleeting glimpse of what therapy could become.

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The awkward journey of “a performance and a show.” Giulia’s strong remark concludes the snippet we follow, capturing a profound sense of alienation within the therapeutic process. Her critique reveals a discomfort with the artificiality of roles imposed by the setting, where the expectation to comply obscured any space for genuine dialogue. The instituted framing of therapy left her feeling more like a spectator of her own care than an active participant, her voice subsumed under the weight of its predetermined choreography. Relying on protocolised symbolism, the therapist tried to impose the interpretation that Giulia’s bird was a representation of Giulia’s desire — the therapist herself alienated from the effects she produced in that encounter. The very interpretation, reliant on preordained meanings, reflects the instituted attempt to choreograph the unpredictable flows of desire — the very flows that resist institutional capture. The institutionalised staging of therapy, like a show or theatre play, needed to cage Giulia’s bird so that it dreamt of flying away. Desire, otherwise, is not a lack or a longing for something absent (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) — freed as “the easiest thing you can potentially draw” (Giulia), Giulia’s bird emerges as a productive force immanent to life itself. In this sense, desire is not an individualised or internalised drive; it is a machinic process, continually producing relationships, affects, and intensities that defy institutional over-

coding (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Giulia's bird already resists being fixed or captured; it is always in motion, always becoming, unbound by the constraints of representation or preordained meanings.

So, vulnerability and fragility are not markers of an intimate desire “within” Giulia but rather reflect the institutionalised expectations of the adolescent experience in essentialist Western framings. Even if adolescent experiences in Westernised environments frequently resemble vulnerability and fragility, it would be reductive to assume this as universally characteristic. Moreover, experiences and expectations should not be conflated with desire itself, as desire has no pre-established direction or aim, functioning instead as a subversive force that unsettles territorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). A significant risk, then, lies in institutionalised practice treating the prevalence of one meaning as *the* meaning — a presumed objective truth that invalidates other alternatives and the nuanced realities of existence, framing them as deviations or failures. If understood as a factory operating within a machinic logic, desiring-production liberates flows rather than containing them (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). By contrast, the theatrical model imposed in the recounted therapeutic setting sought to stage preordained meanings — roles to be played, outcomes to be interpreted. The factory points toward an alternative — a space where desire is not reduced to representations or symbols but engages in continual creation. However, this ethico-aesthetic change in the image of thought is not a solution in itself and should not be mistaken for a novel protocol. In this sense, the performance Giulia identifies reveals a deeper tension: the therapeutic process operates as both theatre and factory. While its institutional enactment seeks to

choreograph desire into predictable roles, its machinic nature inevitably produces excess — lines of flight that escape representation, unsettling the script and gesturing toward freer possibilities for becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

One cannot help but wonder what Giulia's experience might have been if these two modes — theatre and factory — had been welcomed as rhizomatic forces, transforming the therapeutic process from a staged performance into a shared space of creation. Vulnerability and fragility might have been met with curiosity, while desire — unchoreographed — could have traced its singular lines of flight. Even the awkwardness of the car journeys — dictated by the need to commute to therapy — might have softened, modulating what it meant to experience family time in traffic.

Beyond Awkward: Additional Points of Entrance

A modest snippet of approximately 200 words from my conversation with Giulia tentatively gave rise to six awkward journeys. Yet, I suspect some of my hawk-eyed readers may feel disappointed at the many threads left untouched in those analyses — after all, they are mere crumbs of knowledge marking paths left open. Even so, before closing this section with Giulia, I feel it necessary to move beyond that specific snippet. Focusing too closely on that brief extract risks creating the impression that the institution of psychology rests solely within the therapeutic setting. Giulia's recount reveals many other institutional lines that intersect and modulate the awkward journeys we have followed. Failure in therapy seemed to echo and amplify other failures — familial and existential — while time brought its own institutional solutions, culminating in a self-parenting assemblage. So, we now continue to commute, moving beyond the

previous journeys to introduce new institutional entry points to Giulia's recount of a failed therapeutic experience.

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The entry point of familial entanglements. In Westernised discourse, the notion that family is an institution is both long-standing and pervasive (Bau & Fernández, 2021; Laslett, 1973). Framed as self-evident — unquestioned and naturalised through cultural and religious narratives of kinship and belonging — its implications are easily left unexplored. This institutionalisation of family as coherent and structurally stable obscures the fluid complexities of relational dynamics and the territorial constraints it sometimes produces. Giulia attended therapy while navigating familial borders shaped by the strains of parental separation, the unresolved tensions of blended family dynamics, and idealised notions of kinship. These challenges were entangled with intersections of racialised othering, class-based assumptions, and prescriptive role expectations within Giulia's family unit. I will briefly follow these liminalities in the paragraphs ahead.

In Giulia's recount, the expectation (!) that therapy would work⁷⁰ seemed confined to her mother and stepfather — a concern she described as exclusive to their relationship and left unspoken outside of it. Reflecting on the tension between compliance and guilt in her conversations with her parents, Giulia explained: "I had to say 'yeah, it's going great. I feel a lot better.' Because I was worried for what I had done to the family" (Giulia). I will later explore the

⁷⁰ *Expectation* and *work* are terms used by Giulia herself: "there was this expectation that it would work" (Giulia).

dynamics of what a “working” therapy might have meant in this context and the triggers that led to seeking professional help. For now, I want to highlight the familial component in Giulia’s adherence to therapy, which seemed overshadowed by its individualistic framing of her struggles in our awkward journeys. Indeed, the arrival of a stepfather marked a shift in the family unit. In Giulia’s words, “there was me and my biological mum, and then she had started this new family” (Giulia), as if the dynamics within the relationships had shifted in an instant. So, with the addition of her mother’s new partner and later two half-siblings to the household, Giulia felt that she “had just become... a separate... family” (Giulia).

Already feeling like a separate entity within the kinship assemblage, Giulia’s physical complexion and the roles expected of her within the group seemed to further isolate her. “They all look very alike and I am very clearly quite different looking to the rest of the family” (Giulia). This physical difference occasionally led to Giulia being mistaken for the caregiver of her half-siblings: “Oh, it’s a great idea to bring the au pair on holidays!” (Giulia). While this mistake was received with humour by the rest of the family, it reawakened the overwhelming and possibly unfair expectations placed on Giulia to take on diverse household chores. She saw her role in the family as “a kind of a,... a go-to maid, a child-minder person” (Giulia). Previously framed through a broader socio-historical lens, Giulia’s adolescence can now be repositioned within the instituted practices of her blended family, where it was over-coded by household demands and physical distinctiveness.

Framed as the outsider in an otherwise seemingly cohesive family unit, she was sent to therapy to address what was perceived as her individual shortcomings. As Giulia called out: “You know, I felt like the things that they thought were wrong with me were ‘me.’ You know? It was my individual issues, whereas I felt like, really, the elephant in the room was what was actually happening in the house in terms of the familial structure. But that was just being glossed over” (Giulia). Giulia’s recount highlights a layered contradiction: while the family sought to include her, their practices positioned her as both peripheral and functional, as she was expected to take on caregiving responsibilities for her younger half-siblings. Her lack of resemblance to either parent or sibling reinforced her misidentification as the nanny — a role often associated with assumptions about servitude and otherness, which the family appeared willing to accept in practice, even as it underscored her exclusion.

Giulia’s recount invites reflection on the role of therapy as an institution navigating the tensions between individual and collective portrayals of suffering. The insistence on framing Giulia’s struggles as personal shortcomings not only displaced the familial dynamics at play but also reinforced the very structures that positioned her as peripheral and useful within the household. Even if back then Giulia could not articulate her situation as clearly as she did in the interview, her evocative image of an “elephant in the room” (Giulia) lingers with me. This disjuncture — a tension between what was visible yet overlooked — reveals that a choice was made to ignore a problem that, at least to Giulia, felt both immense and undeniable. This specific perception of Giulia’s makes my mind wander, leaving me to ponder whether the historical therapeutic distancing

from Freudian Oedipal frameworks — an arguably necessary move to escape the reductive universalisation of family dynamics (Olkowski, 2022) — may have inadvertently led to an underestimation of kinship roles in structuring social bonds. While this rejection was supposedly intended to help therapy move beyond overly deterministic narratives, it may also have left familial tensions, such as those Giulia described, outside the scope of certain strands of therapeutic interrogation.

This brings me back to another lingering question: can therapy ever be truly individual when it is always entangled in collective flows? For Giulia, her struggles were framed as personal, yet they were inseparable from the familial roles, exclusions, and expectations shaping her experience. What then could therapy look like if it moved beyond individualising tendencies, recognising the interplay between psychology and family as co-constituting institutions, and opening instead to the multiplicity of relational and desiring flows? This is not a question I can answer alone — it now rests between you, me, and the institutions that shape us all, entangling us in flows already in motion.

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The entry point of life at its limits. Giulia “was prescribed help” (Giulia) soon after a suicide attempt, framing professional support as something externally imposed, much like a medication or treatment. Yet, her reluctance to affirm that she needed this specific support persisted even at the time of our conversation, giving the impression that the help offered remained misaligned with her sense of agency. This enduring resistance caught my attention, particularly as Giulia demonstrates a sustained reflexivity about her own story.

In the majoritarian literature, adolescent suicide attempts are often generalised as efforts to die⁷¹, escape, find relief, or — less frequently — provoke regret in others (Boergers et al., 1998). The less frequent reason stands out for its productive intent — a hyperbolic effort to trigger an expressive incorporeal transformation. By contrast, death, escape, and relief appear as attempts to cut the machinic flux of immanence, marking moments when the intensities of life are felt as overwhelming — when excess becomes too excessive to bear (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). I did not ask Giulia to articulate why she tried to take her own life — it felt both invasive and tangential to our purpose. Yet, the familial lines brought forward in her recount seem strongly connected to a possible reasoning. In the months that followed the interview, I found myself returning to this point, almost obsessively searching for a causal narrative behind the suicide attempt, while also questioning how reductive and illusory the frequentist lists created by aggregate data in mainstream discourse can be. Giulia’s story, after all, could easily fit within any of the reasons described in the literature, even as it resists being fully contained by any of them.

My thoughts also kept returning to the drawn bird and how the “fly away” metaphor aligns with descriptions of escape, a distinctive reason often attributed to adolescent suicide attempts (Boergers et al., 1998). That is, even if the therapist’s suggestion seemed speculative, she could still be objectively recognised as a well-informed professional, in the sense that her wild guess was easily supported by research. Yet, evidence alone was not enough to make that guess therapeutic. Despite Giulia’s refrain to her parents — “it’s going great. I

⁷¹ This tautologic characterisation is very telling...

feel a lot better” (Giulia) — her situation did not improve on a deeper, more intimate level. Giulia had a clear sense that, for therapy to work in her case, it needed to move beyond abstract interpretations and bring about tangible changes in her environment. Therapy would be effective when her mother “didn’t think she had to hide the sharp knives in the house anymore” (Giulia) and when people around her would stop speaking in “hushed-on comfortable voices”⁷² (Giulia) while asking if she was okay. By not automatically fitting into a role within the newly blended family, Giulia was increasingly put on the spot — a discomfort amplified after her suicide attempt and projected onto her as a series of intimate failures, even though the issue itself was relational, shared across the family unit.

The many bodies were failing: Giulia’s failure to halt her individual body reflected the failure of her familial body, which culminated in the clinical body’s failure to create enlivening meanings, further constrained by the failure of its limited literary body. More specifically, Giulia’s threshold experience defies co-optation of its deterritorialised content, exposing a chain of breakdowns where familial, clinical, and epistemic institutions redirect the flux of desire into frameworks that can be recognised, categorised, and processed. This process mirrors the logic of capitalism, which thrives on capturing deterritorialised flows of desire, reterritorialising them into systems of production and control (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; Guattari & Rolnik, 2008). Therapy, in this sense, functions as an extension of this logic — not to free desire, but to redirect it into forms that

⁷² Giulia’s phrasing is retained here, though one might question whether “uncomfortable” would better capture the condescending tone imposed upon her.

are socially intelligible and institutionally manageable, much like the metaphor imposed on Giulia's drawing. Yet, this is not simply a call to replace one therapeutic protocol with another, as if "better" systems of meaning could resolve the issue. The problem is not procedural but political: knowledge itself is not a fixed foundation, only coming to life through its encounters with desire, bodies, and relations. To notice this is to ask whether therapy, as an institution, can resist the urge to impose meaning prematurely and instead sustain spaces where knowledge is created in motion — alive, provisional, and attuned to the flux of life. As participants in these assemblages, staying with what is unformed becomes an ongoing challenge — a challenge of gently resisting the compulsion to define or categorise too soon, and allowing a life to thrive on its own terms.

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The entry point of becoming one's own parent. Despite focusing on the experience of failure that led her to contribute to this trapizonga, Giulia's interview also revealed a delicate note of self-accomplishment. A contrasting tone emerged in her voice as she recounted a successful experience years later: "I couldn't believe how positive it was; and almost immediately" (Giulia). Working collaboratively with a counsellor, Giulia found support in self-parenting techniques. Pollard's (1987) concept of self-parenting involves the conscious engagement in internal dialogues between what he terms the Inner Parent and the Inner Child — two instances that resemble Freudian constructs: the superego as the authoritative, moral parent and the traumatised child as a repository of unresolved formative conflicts (Freud, 1923/2011). There is a disarming clarity in Giulia's relationship with this technique. Having been left to

manage her psychological well-being alone — framed as the sole contributor to her family's adaptation difficulties — Giulia found comfort in a practice subtly grounded in attachment theory. In essence, the technique encourages a sense of safety and emotional connection by reimagining the Inner Parent as a secure attachment figure, providing the care and reassurance often missing in earlier experiences (Pollard, 1987). This approach offered her the space to reinstitutionalise the familial lines that had triggered her suffering in the first place.

In Giulia's narrative, the alliance with her counsellor appeared infused with a deep gratitude for not being left to navigate her struggles alone. While Giulia ultimately embraced the role of self-parenting, the counsellor played a pivotal role in initiating the process, almost as though passing a baton — one that Giulia, in her vulnerability, had first entrusted to her. In the collaborative sessions, the counsellor offered techniques and encouraged Giulia to take ownership of the process: “you're a smart girl, you can figure out what might work or not work for you [...] why don't you try this for a week, see how it fits, come back and we can reassess” (Giulia). This dynamic contrasted starkly with Giulia's earlier therapeutic experience, where she had felt burdened by an expectation to “fix” herself entirely on her own. Instead, this counsellor worked alongside her, momentarily stepping into a role of care and reassurance that allowed Giulia to feel engaged and supported: “it felt like I was involved, you know, that we were in it together” (Giulia). Through this partnership, Giulia found the space to cultivate a self-compassionate inner voice, reclaiming the baton and ultimately embracing self-parenting as an act of care and agency.

The subtlety lies in perceiving how Pollard's technique, with its limited presence in mainstream literature, could be easily dismissed as pop psychology from the 1980s — a self-help strategy lacking empirical evidence, prone to oversimplifying complex issues, risking one-size-fits-all applications, and raising concerns about commercialisation. Yet, in that specific relationship, the counsellor recognised it as an opportunity to care for Giulia. And it worked — not because of the technique's theoretical merits or empirical backing, but because it aligned, in that moment, with Giulia's dividual composition. One might then assume that the practice of self-parenting, as it unfolded in their sessions, was less about schooling Giulia in psychological frameworks and more about fostering a space where she could begin addressing the forces constraining her life. This touches on a core tension in institutional analysis: therapy's dual role as both a site of liberation and a mechanism of institutionalisation (Guattari, 2015a). The person seeking care is rarely interested in mastering the structures of psychological theory; they come seeking tools to navigate and recompose their lives in ways that feel fulfilling. This capacity to shape and redirect desire is both psychology's promise and its risk. That is, psychology, like any institution, holds a potential to redirect desire — to liberate or reterritorialise it. The productive question, then, lies in how we might agonistically orient therapy toward the liberating direction, one that sustains the multiplicity of flows that give life its immanence and potential.

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As I conclude the exercise of threading additional entry points in Giulia's remembrances, I remain certain that the ethico-political work has only just

begun. So, this effort also demands something other than reflection; it calls for putting the therapeutic institution back to work. To do so is to reclaim the institution as something alive — a process, not a monolith. At this point, I hope we agree — at least in the scope of this trapizonga — that institutions are not external entities imposed upon us; they are produced, sustained, and transformed daily through our collective actions. Reclaiming institutions in this way calls for an ethical understanding of the institution as a space of doing — of groupality — where subjectivity and relational forces are always at play.

Working *in* therapy, then, requires more than replicating majoritarian practices or adhering to fixed frameworks. It involves challenging the monolithic appearance of the institution, inhabiting its borders, its grey areas, and its agonistic disputes. Without this reframing, we risk being confined by concepts, applications, and replications — remaining *within* the institution's given form, rather than rethinking how we are collectively (re)producing its very forms. And it is within these borders, these grey areas of the institution, that Giulia's words resonate most sharply — not as abstract critique, but as a personal account of the tensions and dissonances that shaped her experience of failure.

“They didn't know what I needed” (Giulia). I am not certain I know either. Dialogue, openness, reassurance, collaboration? Probably — and Giulia herself wondered if these were what she needed. Yet, after lingering with Giulia's story, I find myself assuming that — more than procedural changes — what was most needed in the many threads of her recount was something my Brazilian side knows as *acolhimento*. Many English terms could serve as partial equivalents — warm welcome, supportive encounter, emotional attunement, sheltering — yet

they circle the concept without quite hitting the mark. Derived from the Latin *acolligere* (Houaiss et al., 2001), *acolhimento* conveys the act of *gathering strongly together*. It holds a profound sense of relational care and attentiveness, offering yet another entry point for reimagining the struggles and possibilities Giulia brought forward. *Acolhimento* is not so much a proposal for procedural shifts or new therapeutic techniques; rather, it suggests an ethos: one of listening without urgency, holding space for vulnerability, and attentively recognising the person as they emerge through and beyond institutional masks. After all, how can therapy care if one is not met?

Nise — “you can’t trust family, friends or strangers... or women”

Words hide me without care.

— *Manoel de Barros, The Book About Nothing*⁷³

When writing, failure often begins long before the words appear. It lingers in the pauses, looming between hesitation and the impulse to erase, shaping what remains unsaid as much as what might be said. For months, I have struggled to form the sentences that should open this section, only to watch them dissolve before they could settle on the page. Instead, the backspace and delete keys bluntly erased my ideas — especially those that felt most sincere (or was I pressing those keys myself?). It was a sort of tug-of-war: one side typing sentences for what should become a thesis, the other erasing every trace of perceived inconsistency, drawn by the molar forces that constrain flows of creation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983), and leaving behind only what looked like null work after many hours of tussle. Nothing seemed academic enough to keep. Of course, I am aware that this agonistic activity is neither new nor uniquely mine. More broadly, such movement could be described as the very struggle of weaving a text, with its urge for extinction that one must somehow tame for one reason or another (“Do not erase anything! Create a file with scrap sentences!” shouts the voice within). I have felt this tension countless times throughout the process of composing this trapizonga, but something particularly pressing begins to surface as I try to write this section — a tension that seems to stem from a

⁷³ Manoel de Barros (1916–2014) — a postmodern poet from Brazil’s interior and one of the country’s most celebrated writers — frequently explored the intersections of language, invention, and the marginalised. This line, from *O Livro Sobre Nada* (1996), suggests the precarious relationship between language and subjectivity. My translation of the original: “As palavras me escondem sem cuidado.”

need to walk respectfully with Nise⁷⁴, the participant whose story shapes this path. Peripatetic care (Lancetti, 2008) takes tentative form here, perhaps already gesturing toward what respect might become, as this section continues.

At this stage of my writing, I hope it does not surprise my reader that I intend to be respectful. The Latin roots of respect, *re-specere* — *to look back at* (Harper, 2001) — hint at some of the movement I describe but fail to capture it fully. In our context, this etymology primarily evokes a scene: someone is looked at, someone is recognised. Yet, this framing alone does not account for all the ethical threads that compel me to write. Respect here demands a thoughtful balance of care and accountability, a recognition that writing itself unfolds as an act of immanence — a relational assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) shaped by Nise’s presence and my own efforts to navigate the ethical obligation to respond, to write with precision and honesty. And this ethos moves me, because — despite sharing a story that could have made distance and guardedness understandable — Nise met me with nothing but consideration and trust during our conversation in the first half of August 2020. Though the lingering pains of the COVID-19 pandemic surrounded us at the time, our exchange unfolded elsewhere — not disconnected from reality, but within a singular existential space, a plateau of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), shaped less by linear progression than by intensities, briefly forming a plane where the pandemic’s weight lifted, if only for a moment.

⁷⁴ Nise (pronounced /'ni.zi/ or NEE-zee) is a fictional name with unclear origins. In Portuguese, it is often understood as an altered anagram of Agnes, meaning *pure*. In French, it is believed to derive from Nissa, meaning *sign*. Here, the name is also inspired by Nise da Silveira, a pioneering psychiatrist who resisted aggressive asylum treatments in Brazil. From Nise da Silveira comes enduring advice: “Live the imagination, because it is our deepest reality.”

So, the work I present in the following pages stems from a long, intense conversation with Nise — one that began with her stories and continues as I engage with her calm voice and lingering presence, striving to remain respectful to her within this trapizonga, while tracing schizoanalytic territories (Guattari, 1989/2013). There is much to say about our meeting, but even more to feel. Indeed, Nise's recollection of failure in therapy was not about one or two isolated moments where treatment plans or diagnoses went wrong; it was an assessment of life itself. Her encounters with diagnostic frameworks, therapy, and care do not stand apart as discrete events but unfold as part of a larger pattern — cycles where instituted practices, far from offering healing, fragment lives under their care. These patterns do not merely happen to individuals; they are embedded in institutionalised structures that reify failure as personal while erasing the collective failures producing it each time (Foucault, 1995). This entanglement extends further: writing this section resists reductive frameworks and instead embraces the ways in which Nise's narrative and my own process knot together, leaving rough edges untouched — a deliberate incompleteness that mirrors the unresolved struggles we explore, resisting the pressure to conform to neat resolutions. Her prolific use of “and... and” (Nise) — a relentless connecting of ideas, layered as if weaving fragments of harm, reclamation, and defiance — feels almost like a pacing that refuses to stop. These loops, whether in her lived experience or in my writing, reflect institutional rhythms that perpetuate harm through their attempts at remedy and repair. To trace these loops is to refuse programmatic closure — to insist instead on ruptures and returns that challenge institutional demands for clarity and an absolute, univocal conclusion (Deleuze

& Guattari, 1987). In doing so, we move toward something different: a becoming that reshapes how care, diagnosis, and the entanglements of lives and institutions might yet be reimagined — not as systems that fix or smooth over but as relations that hold, confront, and navigate the fractures they create.

This opening, then, also serves as a warning: ahead lie *ditches*, *icky stuff*, and *so much pain*⁷⁵. And there is no map to guide us safely, no way to know if “it’s actually the wrong direction” (Nise). Despite decades having passed since the beginning of her life, Nise invites us to ask alongside her: “When do I start living?” (Nise). Her experiences seem caught in a looping struggle, like the fight of writing and erasing a text that resists being written — a struggle that manifests as a symptom but also holds the potential for transformation, with each return pointing toward a difference yet to emerge (Deleuze, 1994). Or, in moments of religious resonance, a life that appears as a mere hurtful rehearsal — not freely chosen, but endured as an act of faith in a future promise that remains just out of reach, connecting the search for rest with an enduring, spiritual resilience. In Nise’s voice, an expectation of ultimate redemption intertwines with a grounded, lived position, where she asserts who she is, how she feels, and which relational practices and discourses might have served her better than those she encountered throughout her life.

Building on an ethos of respect and grappling with the indecisiveness I share with Nise, I found myself — again and again — unable to write the section I felt I was supposed to produce. So, as I attempt to balance this inability to

⁷⁵ “He kind of took me into the trees and in that *ditch* [...] the counselor would talk about the *icky stuff* [...] everything that come off my back was in *so much pain*” (Nise).

conform to traditional academic structures with the mandate to deliver an institutional analysis of Nise's deeply existential account, I am weaving her voice with imagined letters, mostly drawn from entries in my research diary, that I wrote during my struggle to process and respond to the emotional and conceptual weight of her narrative. Some arguments sustain this strategy. For instance, writing is not purely a means of conveying a static representation of knowledge, but an investigative process — the aesthetic rearrangement of words is an act of discovery and relational engagement, unfolding thought in motion (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Furthermore, the act of recording and sharing this process — offering it as a kind of restitution — creates an expansion of the encounter, a space where the implications of our relational engagement can unfold beyond the confines of either her story or my interpretation, blurring the distinctions between knowing and being known, and emphasising research as an active intervention (Barros & Passos, 2009). In this spirit, my imagined letters to Nise are not inert interpretations or attempts to pin down meaning but part of our dialogic process — crafted with her in mind and now extended to you — engaging with her uncapturable narrative and striving to sustain the respectful affective and existential dimensions of her account in my account, while persevering in tracing the institutional analyses demanded by this trapizonga.

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“Yeah, and his his his his motto has always been *persevere*. So, it's what I try to do” (Nise).

*

Bom dia, Nise,

I've been reflecting deeply on our conversation, and I felt compelled to write to you — both to honour what you shared and to continue thinking alongside you as I work through this. When we spoke, I was struck by the way you described your connection to “him,” each man shaping your life in different and often painful ways, and how these memories intertwined with the women who also left marks on your story. You shared so much, and I'm grateful for the trust you placed in me.

You told me about your father, someone who was always busy — how hard he worked, how anti-drugs he was, and how, at one point, he was sent away from the family's farm to live in a caravan park. He was present, yet distant, always tending to something that kept him away from truly being there with you. And then there was the workmate of your father, who became the first abuser when you were just nine years old. He used fear and coercion to assert power, preying on the trust of your childhood and the innocence of your young age, until a truck you had prayed for arrived — interrupting him and saving you, a stroke of luck in that moment of profound helplessness. You spoke about an old school “friend” who betrayed your trust at a toga party — an encounter that crossed boundaries, left you deeply hurt, and ended in a dark ditch, both literally and emotionally. Afterward, this “friend” continued to take advantage of your hope that he cared for you, even resorting to force when you resisted, leaving you with the painful realisation that he had only been (ab)using you. You also told me about your relationship with a man struggling with addiction, during which your daughter was born — a daughter later taken from your care by, as you put it, “the foster

people.”⁷⁶ *But in many ways, all of these men were foster people of another kind — shaping your world in their own ways, leaving scars that you have carried and, somehow, survived.*

It wasn't only men you told me about. You spoke about your mother — a presence that seemed distant and cold, a relationship that never gave you the warmth you longed for. You talked about your friend's mother, who offered you a fleeting moment of care, a refuge from the storm. And then there were the women in the many health institutions you talked about — some who dismissed your voice, some who reinforced the harm — echoing the bullying and exclusion you endured from women growing up. But there were also a few women who truly tried to hear you, offering a stark contrast to those earlier wounds. And I keep thinking of your daughter, who came up in our earlier conversation, her story flowing between these layers — the daughter whose absence lingers even now, even after she's back with you, married and happy. Her presence touching these stories of women with another layer of care and longing. So, your story wasn't only about the failures of men; it was about the instituted layers of harm and care — the ways institutions, through their practices and relationships, reinforced gendered vulnerabilities that echoed across your life and the lives of those around you.

It was in this context that, when you said “his his his his,” I didn't hear hesitation so much as a layering — a pattern of persistence shared by the men who shaped your life, a motto they lived by, even as it was often at your expense.

⁷⁶ “There's this guy who used to be a cop, but now he was a social worker, and he worked for *the foster people*” (Nise).

And yet, in some ways, you carried it forward; this persistence became your own. You per-severed, Nise. You survived every severance, continuing to exist beyond and despite each harm. And you stayed present enough to tell me your story with such care, detail, and candour, choosing to extend our conversation far beyond the time we initially planned — one hour and 38 minutes that carried so much weight, and that I continue to carry with me.

This is a trail I am still learning to walk alongside you. As I reflect on our conversation and attempt to translate it into writing, I find myself pulled into the blurring of boundaries. The roles of the absently present, the abuser, the “friendly” enforcer, the addict — and now the researcher — seem to overlap, as though I, too, risk becoming another “him”: a figure shaped by the gendered dynamics that have marked so many parts of your world. I find myself persevering in the writing, but I worry this comes at the risk of distorting your life — taming your words to align with the shifting agenda imposed by the trapizonga and its now instituted expectations. This tension, both a discomfort and an effort to resist the institutional pull to capture and simplify, shapes how I approach this letter and the section it will be part of.

Early on, I shared how difficult it was for me to write about our encounter — how I erased sentence after sentence, doubting every attempt. Even now, when I look back at the notes I wrote after our meeting, they feel fragmented, scattered — words, not sentences. This feels familiar to me now: the incompleteness, the stops and starts, the looping nature of harm and survival that you carried so vividly. It is as if my writing copies this process, resisting the neat structure demanded by institutions. The materiality of what you shared with me is undeniable, yet the

lived intensity of your experience always exceeds the boundaries of what I can translate onto the page. Perhaps this is part of the persistence you described — the need to continue, even when the words fail. And so, in writing these words, I find myself grappling with the same tension you hinted at — honouring the complexity of what is lived while still moving forward, flawed and incomplete, toward something that might one day produce meaning.

This leaves me with an impossible task: to try to make visible, through words, the invisible currents of what you entrusted to me. I hope to carry this task with respect, knowing it can never be fully realised. Thank you for trusting me, Nise. I write these imagined letters with the hope that they honour, however imperfectly, the courage and depth you brought to our conversation. If nothing else, I hope they hold a small reflection of the strength you have shown and continue to carry forward.

*

Pause.

Reset.

Nise's story constantly forces me to take breaks, as if each long, never-ending sentence carries more weight than I can hold in a single moment. So, please stay with me while I catch my breath as I try to go back to my impossible task in this segment of the trapizonga. Verily, Nise did not ask for breaks in our face-to-face exchange. If someone listened to our conversation, they would notice she talked mostly uninterruptedly, only stopping when I asked for clarification of a term or a passage; when I — not her — needed a pause and a reset. On my side, the subjective experience at that very moment of our meeting was that I did

not know enough English to follow her story — or perhaps, more profoundly, that I needed to unlearn language altogether to truly hear her. My impression was that I had bitten off more than I could chew, by deciding to write a PhD in a language I do not master — which now seems like a silly thought, as I do not master any language, not even the one I natively learned as a child. And, of course, if expression happens in assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), there is nothing truly hidden waiting to be uncovered, nothing to be literally (or literarily) accomplished to fulfil meaning. On the contrary, what I possibly need to undertake now is to challenge language's perceived mastery — to disbelieve it, demote it, even ridicule it. With Nise, I shall un-master language, erase its per-severance, manly whiteness, and colonising powers. Therefore, I ought to fail to privilege clarity and objectivity in writing, embracing instead the multiplicity and ambiguity inherent to inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). And, yes, I am aware some of these intentions could read almost quixotic. But how else can I describe what it feels like to write against the grain of mastery and certainty? Please, stay with me while I catch my breath.

“I think... Well then... I don't know how long it was before I was... I am... was really out of touch with reality and someone I was house... I got out of the caravan park” (Nise).

Roughly, the first eight minutes of my talk with Nise were somewhat psychedelic, and I still feel a spinning head and blurry images forming in front of my eyes every time I try to recall the experience. An accelerating heart, not of joy

or adventure, but a silent angst and worry. This emotional intensity does not fit the external image of our encounter, nor the tone of our conversation. And yet, those intense moments lingered, a sensory overload I can only describe as overwhelming. Perhaps this resonance comes not only from the immediate interaction but also from what Nise would later share about an episode after using psychedelic drugs — a connection that, even now, feels inescapable. Her low, tentative voice and slow-paced, self-aware recounting of memories painted a calm surface, yet the intensity beneath disrupted this façade, amplifying the weight of her words. A shy posture, well-presented with a dignified will to participate, contrasted sharply with the affective intensity that broke through her external composure. My mind kept returning to the same plea: “Please, Nise, drink another sip of water, just a quick sip! This is so much; thank you, but it’s a lot!” — like a prayer for something to intervene and halt whatever was unfolding, as I felt my usual, comfortably framed individuality begin to unravel. Psychology’s instituted forces in me — language and its regime of authority, academia and its territorialising epistemic frame, masculinity and its stratified logic of power (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) — surged to reshape her account into something more palatable, stripped of its raw intensity and unsettling truths, even as those forces threatened the perceived stability of my own carefully constructed self.

Yet, my surprise was not complete until later. While transcribing the interview, I noticed how, in those first minutes of our interaction, Nise’s recorded voice seemed to tell a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. In one of my diary entries, written in the heat of the moment immediately after my

conversation with Nise, I recalled the first flowy person I assisted in therapy, whose fragmented narrative still lingers in my mind. In the Brazilian memory, a disgusting disciplinary feeling: I was the prison guard, holding the key that threatened to imprison her fatally in the dungeon of instituted repetition. With Nise, the feeling was similar but inverted, as though the institutional gaze had already shaped her narrative before it was even spoken (Foucault, 1995), with the dungeon key — the constant threat of diagnostic capture — looming over our encounter. Such a threatening (interpretative) key compels compliance, forcing those in need of care, like Nise, to condense their entire lived experiences into fragments that conform to institutional frameworks (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), even if these frameworks fail to hold the depth of their truths. That is, Nise's recounting might feel fragmented, but she is not producing those fragments unaided. Institutional demands for brevity and diagnostic clarity shape how her narrative unfolds, often making her voice seem fragmented when it is, in fact, responding to organising pressures. Even when the role of institutions in shaping these fragments is ignored, what is seen as “disorder” in her recounting still reflects the instituted expectations (!) as much as her own words. In that sense, Nise seemed to have created a story that fitted within the ten minutes she might have grown accustomed to receiving from a health professional. I cannot ultimately assert this inference, but it seemed like she adapted to speaking what was valued by the institutionalised listener, rapidly chaining together order-words to match standardised diagnostic criteria, ignoring the historical bits inevitably needed to glue the passage together.

So, the more I stayed with her first words after our meeting, the more they resonated with a sense of familiarity, but also of dissonance, echoing through the spaces where language and the institution failed to hold. This double tension — where words fall short, and the institution amplifies this insufficiency (Guattari, 2006) — matters to me in this point. I follow the intensities that cannot be captured in a diagnostic framework, the fragments that resist territorialisation and institutionalisation — and that are sometimes over-coded as failure. I try to show what is present but cannot be seen or heard, a thread woven through the spoken and the unspoken, persistently escaping articulation yet demanding to be felt (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). I trace how mainstream instituted practices keep the threatening dungeon key always visible, blackmailing everyone into compliance within this precarious scene.

*

“I’ve had clinical depression; I’ve had reactive depression; and I’ve had schizoaffective disorder” (Nise).

*

“And, first off, she said ‘there’s nothing wrong with your psyche. You don’t have schizoaffective disorder.’ Said, ‘if anything, it’s C-PTSD’” (Nise).

*

Olá, Nise, como vai?

I hope this imagined letter finds you well. Recently, I’ve been revisiting our conversation, and I catch myself reflecting on the series of diagnoses you’ve been labelled with throughout your life. If you don’t mind, I want to revisit those labels

with you, possibly to think about what they were trying to achieve and to consider some of the unintended consequences they may have triggered.

Have you noticed how all the medical names of the diagnoses you mentioned end with the word “disorder”? Major Depressive Disorder (or clinical depression), Adjustment Disorder (or reactive depression), Schizoaffective Disorder, and Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (or C-PTSD) — each one wraps your experiences in a single, weighty word. But you’ve already told me, in so many ways, how much these labels miss. Diagnoses may have given doctors a way to speak about you, but did they ever truly hear you? When they said “disorder,” was it your life they were describing, or their own sense of what didn’t fit their averaged version of order? This is not a fluke, Nise. These words carry weight, not only in how they describe but in how they demand — demand that your experiences fit into a frame of pathology, of something broken, of a life out of order. And, as they demand, they produce: beyond the label, a way of seeing you that models how others respond and how you are expected to respond in turn. But the way you spoke to me about clinical depression, or reactive depression, suggested you understood how these terms served others’ need to categorise you rather than your need to be met.

This isn’t to say that diagnoses don’t offer a kind of relief or explanation at times. I imagine that having a name to call the unrelenting sadness, the disconnection, and the confusion might feel like a small anchor in an otherwise overwhelming sea. Yet, as we spoke, it became clear to me that these labels have often worked against you — not as tools for care, but as mechanisms that erased the singular moments of your story, fitting them instead into pre-established

moulds that we institute to more easily manage and control lives, as if the labels themselves could contain the messy, layered materiality of our experiences. This paradox becomes sharper when we notice that while these labels claim to explain a condition, they often silence it, turning what you have lived into something distant and emotionless, as if the act of naming alone could ever substitute for spending quality time together. In the act of naming, diagnostic labels simplify; in the act of simplifying, they strip away the intricate connections between memories and meaning that make your experiences your own. Schizoaffective Disorder, for example, might diagnostically describe episodes of mania or depression mixed with hallucinations or delusions, but it doesn't tell the story of your relationships, your struggles with trust, or the systemic betrayals you've endured. It doesn't hold the weight of what it means to lose your daughter or to navigate a world that often feels hostile and unkind. These labels, Nise, seem to ask you to carry their burdens while refusing to carry yours.

And your account questions these diagnoses in their core illusionism. If they claim to understand and label such "disorders" so well, why do they fail to offer a proper "map to get better"⁷⁷? Because, as you said, if you had a map, you could get where you wanted to go⁷⁸. But how to do so if the people that offered you help were generally listening for something else — patterns in your words, fitting symptoms, checklists to fill? For me, as I write this imagined letter, I find myself caught between wanting to critique the institutional forces that continuously shape these labels as if they were definitive, while also longing to hold space for

⁷⁷ "All I really want — wanted — was a *map to get better*, you know?" (Nise)

⁷⁸ "If I have a map, I can get where I want to go. If I have no idea... I, I just exist. And I... I, I just wanna live" (Nise)

the possibility that they brought you some form of understanding. The institutional practices you found throughout your life imposed labels because they knew no other way to see you. Yet, you deserve more than a label, Nise. You deserve the kind of care that holds the fragments of your story without demanding they fit into someone else's design for what care should look like. And as I continue walking alongside you, uncomfortable questions remain: what would it mean to care without categorising? To hear beyond diagnosing, sitting with what resists naming? To hold space for chaos beyond disorder — not as a fault, but as part of the messy, complex, and vibrant fabric of life itself?

I don't have the answers, Nise. But perhaps, in refusing the need to name and control, we might find a way to honour all that you have lived. This is where I leave this letter, for now — not in certainty, but in shared reflection.

*

And he said, “well, you're speaking quite lucidly to me.” He said, “I don't think...” He said, “I think they've got your diagnosis wrong.” And he... He stepped out of his line of normal duty — like, he didn't have to — but he went down to the foster place, and he ripped; ripped into them. She was back in a week. (Nise)

*

Nise's relationship with perseverance also delivered memories of accomplishment amidst the struggles for trust. During her most extreme moment — triggered after realising her preteen daughter would remain indefinitely in foster care despite Nise's dedicated self-work toward being deemed “fit” to reunite with her — a care-ful professional stepped in to advocate

for her daughter's return. Through his relationship with Nise, this professional's actions reflected attentiveness and genuine advocacy; in Nise's assessment, "he's a psychologist; he was amazing" (Nise). This intervention, which she experienced after getting back into therapeutic support during a suicidal episode, marked a turning point in her life and care journey — Nise's daughter was brought back to live with her. Yet, Nise's issue was beyond personal; she acted especially on her daughter's interests. "It was really damaging to my daughter; and they're all doing it 'for' her" (Nise).

There is a subtle but significant distinction in Nise's words. Stepping out of the "line of normal duty" (Nise) is not the same as doing something "for" Nise or her daughter. As Nise pointed out, doing something "for" her daughter often alienated both of them from the process, deepening the harm instead of resolving it. Contrarily, the psychologist's actions disrupted Nise's expectation of institutional care as something confined to a room or bound by rigid, immutable frameworks, extending care beyond the walls of their meeting, stepping out of an over-coded idea of institution — the perception of it as a static and finalised monolith (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) — and into the processual and collective doing of it. The therapeutic setting, in this moment, expanded beyond its usual confines; that psychologist ripped down the fourth wall of the setting in a Brechtian gesture, making the boundaries of institutional care porous and opening the therapeutic institution to life unfolding. Independent of his intentions, the actions of the psychologist positioned him as part of the groupality shaping Nise's institutional experience, engaging with the instituting forces that often go unseen but persistently ask for passage (Guattari, 2006). In

this sense, he was not acting outside his expected role or doing it in someone else's place, "for" them. In that situation, his embeddedness in the collective construction of institutionalised care was made visible by his therapeutic movement, and the relational forces that institutional care so often silences took centre stage in the collaborative solution that emerged through their shared efforts. If I may reiterate, this was not about doing something "for" Nise or her daughter, but about inhabiting the process with a politics of attention to the instituting possibilities and even the risks of dissolution that might challenge the care relationship itself. By radically understanding Nise's needs in what could be termed peripatetic care (Lancetti, 2008) — therapy that moves beyond fixed settings, adapting and walking alongside where it is needed — the psychologist attended to the intertwined dynamics of their institutional engagement. This included Nise's, her daughter's, and possibly even his own processes and relational contributions, transforming therapy into a shared journey rather than a one-sided act of service. In doing so, his intervention showed how care could become active and meaningful when freed from rigid institutional constraints.

At this point, someone in my position might simply say the psychologist effectively worked *with* Nise — a statement that might sound elegant but risks sliding into well-worn grooves of prescriptive terminology (Flecha & Gomez, 2004). While intended to foreground collaboration and shared presence, such shorthand terms risk becoming over-coded — flattened into institutional jargon, losing their transformative potential. For example, Nise's experience of care being done "for" her daughter highlights how relational practices fail when

institutional frameworks treat presence as procedural rather than participatory. When “with” is reduced to a shorthand for relationality, it no longer fosters assemblage-building or opens relational spaces; instead, it becomes a placeholder for an ethos that is absent. Nise’s words — such as her reference to someone that “stepped out of his line of normal duty” (Nise) — point to how institutional care often operates within such hollow relational framings, alienating those, like Nise and her daughter, whom it seeks to support. In this sense, “with” can paradoxically reinforce the very hierarchies it seeks to dismantle, subtly repositioning the instituted part of the institution as the sole arbiter of relational engagement. Here, the term may function like a molar signifier, delimiting the possibilities of care to those prefigured *within* institutional frameworks (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). To reclaim the vitality of relational discourse, we must re-engage with the forces and affects that animate these encounters, resisting their reduction to linguistic codes or institutionalised performances of care. Such a reclamation requires attention to the local, the processual, and the contingent — the kind of peripatetic care that Nise described, where walking side by side with her psychologist transformed therapy into a shared and dynamic journey with meaningful consequences for all involved.

This shared and dynamic journey, however, was not without its missteps, and not all of Nise’s experiences with care followed the same trajectory. Each interaction reflected different dynamics — some moments of genuine advocacy, others marked by miscommunication or dismissal. These latter moments, where care slipped into reframing her pain to fit institutional logics, expose the fractures within the system. Yet, it’s in these jagged edges — the places where

being heard collided with being misunderstood — that her story pulses most vividly. Even the smallest of moments, an ache dismissed or a laugh shared, became sites of tension and transformation, revealing the possibilities within care itself.

*

I had a spider bite behind my ear as well and I said, [...] “it’s really tight behind my jaws” — where, you know, my jaw is connected and stuff. And [my daughter] is in the room; she’s 8 years old. And he just sits me really patiently, “but your jaws are not connected” and we were like... [laughs a lot] “Are you trying to, like, make...” — that’s so... [laughs more] — “How do you chew, if your jaws aren’t connected?” [...] I guess maybe they’re not, [...] I don’t know. Like, it was just really patronising, and, like, I was just trying to explain that I was in so much pain, and they were trivialising it and making out that I was just imagining it all and... (Nise)

*

“It’s like you’ve watched so many movies and you hear characters and it... It’s not like, ‘go and...’ — I don’t know — ‘...assassinate the President.’ [Nise and I laugh freely together]” (Nise).

*

Querida Nise,

Some days are easier to write than others. Today, as I was struggling to start typing words into this imagined letter, I decided to revisit some of our shared moments of laughter. I tend to believe in what is said out there, that laughing is the best medicine. Yet, I can’t help but reflect on the contrast between

two of these shared moments we had. One laugh, born out of frustration, wrapped in layers of patronising gestures, became something more when your daughter joined in. Together, you found humour in the absurdity of the moment, turning what could have been a disparaging story into a shared, defiant act of connection. And then, the other laugh — freeing, unburdened, and deeply human — emerged between us as you joked about the kind of exaggerated understandings about your experience that might come from movies, and feel so distant from your real experience. They were different kinds of laughter, but both felt like moments where something broke through: a bond, a release, perhaps even a quiet resistance.

And I caught myself thinking about how laughter like that might disrupt the power of patronising moments — like the one where you were told your jaw isn't connected. You were trying to explain what you felt, and yet the professional, instead of offering understanding, shifted the burden onto you, treating your words as if they were naïve or unreasonable. It wasn't your jaw that wasn't connected; it was the professional's capacity to truly hear you — a disconnection that seemed all the more obvious in the context of his role. At that moment, his response seemed to place you in an infantile position, undermining your role as another adult in the room. And yet, in a way, being freed from having to maintain a certain image allowed you to share an unguarded connection with your daughter. Instead of this dynamic taking your position as her mum away from you, it seemed to reinforce it. The laughter you shared with her became a subtle defiance of the institutional gaze, a refusal to let the professional's trivialisation define the moment. It's as though the bond between you both turned what could

have been an isolating experience into a small act of solidarity. Still, I wonder about the weight of such gestures — to have your pain minimised and framed as irrational or absurd, even as you shared the laughter. Did the laughter ease the (institutional) sting, or did it simply add another layer to carry?

In these moments, I feel the complexity of what you shared with me. The way you were forced to navigate care that is offered with one hand while it takes with the other — whether through dismissive words, misplaced actions, or the quiet erosion of trust — reflects the weight of what you've endured. The times your existence depended on resisting being framed, even in situations that might seem trivial from the outside, remind me of the striking contrast between those two laughs. At a certain moment of our conversation, you wondered, a little disillusionedly, "how do you explain to somebody how you think?" This exhaustive effort to be made clear by your own words seemed to stand in contrast to the second laugh we shared — free and without worry — a moment where it felt like explanation itself had no hold over us. There wasn't a demand to justify or prove; we collectively built a fleeting space to simply exist. In that shared laugh, we both seemed to acknowledge the absurdity of those exaggerated institutional imaginings, the ones that distort instead of clarifying. It was a release, a recognition of your sharp understanding and resilience, even as the world around you might insist on misreading you. And I keep wondering if laughter itself might have become a kind of tactic — a way to carve out room for your voice, even when the structures surrounding you insist on silencing or interfering with it. That first laugh, shared with your daughter, seems to have done just that — transforming a patronising dismissal into a moment of communal connection and subtle

defiance. And then the second laugh, so different, felt like the kind of free space we so rarely find, where explanation and resistance weren't needed, and you could simply exist as you are. It's a reminder of how you keep finding ways to persevere, Nise — through humour, through connection, and through your determination to genuinely live life, even when institutions and people seem determined to rewrite it for you.

Thank you for sharing those moments with me — the laughter, the frustration, the depth. They stay with me, reminding me of the weight and the lightness that coexist in your story. And I hope, in writing this letter, I've captured even a small part of what those moments meant.

*

Pause, regather.

Trust — how does it endure in a lifeworld that seems determined to erode it? Nise's voice still lingers with me: "you can't trust family, friends or strangers... or women" (Nise). Her words do not offer a foundation to build upon; instead, they trace pathways of rupture, duplicity, and failure of care. Trust, in her story, appears not as a steady ground but as a flickering light — something felt only in its absence or in fleeting, fragile gestures, like her friend's mother holding space for her after a crisis that almost led Nise to hospitalisation — offering hugs, love, and caring for her "like I was her kid or something that needed healing" (Nise). This transient luminosity, possibly resonant with the echoes of laughter in her life — fragile, disruptive, and brimming with the unexpected — ties back to those rare gestures of trust that shimmer briefly in Nise's narrative. Through these fractures, trust does not stand as a foundation

but instead glances into being as a force — tenuous yet persistent — navigating the tangled assemblages of relationships and institutions. Nise’s experiences resist the binary of presence and absence; instead, they suggest a dynamic tension, where trust carries the potential to reconfigure itself through its very failure.

The word “trust,” in its Nordic etymology (Harper, 2001), points to *strength* — a binding physical energy, an assurance rooted in solidity. On one level, this idea offers a useful lens: trust as something firm and enduring, a promise of safety. This notion resonates with the offering of an ideal institution, where solidity appears as the instituted form — an assemblage of norms and structures seemingly unshakeable in its claims to provide stability and protection (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Guattari, 1984). The instituted, in this framing, assumes the form of a dependable foundation, a background of norms and systems expected to uphold trust by default. Yet, when placed within Nise’s story, such structural strength feels distant, its promises overextended and often unfulfilled, spreading an unconvincing illusion of solidity where fragility persists. Her narrative invites a broader reflection, where trust is not only fragmented and fluid but also emerges as contingent on fragile bonds and fleeting gestures. The idea of trust as solid and unwavering may struggle to hold within the tangled assemblages of relationships and failures Nise recounts. Still, it leaves space to wonder how trust might be reimagined in such fractured contexts.

Nise’s assertion that those around her cannot be trusted — whether acquaintances or strangers, of any gender or origin — reflects a scepticism

shaped by a history of ruptures and betrayals. Her guarded stance signals the erosion of trust through repeated experiences of harm, where relationships that might have offered care instead became sites of vulnerability. Yet, her willing participation in the research protocols, her openness to recount her experiences, and even her tentative acceptance of fleeting gestures of care complicate this scepticism. What, then, is trust for Nise? It seems less about faith in steadfast relationships and more about a process of engagement — one that acknowledges fragility and holds limited expectations. Her trust does not emerge as an exchange or a calculated risk but as an act of staying connected within precarious conditions, even when connections fail or disappoint. This stance sharply contrasts with the promises of an idealised institution. While instituted outlines suggest solid frameworks offering standardised security, Nise's lived experiences highlight (dis)trust as something inherently provisional and relational — shaped through partial engagements and often fragile bonds, within the very assemblages that fail to provide. Her posture might also suggest a deeper, implicit understanding: that she, too, contributes to the collective fabric of care. Through her engagement, the assemblages of care are not merely external structures but persist, even as institutional walls collapse, becoming part of what is embodied — reconstituted and continually built through the actions and interactions of those involved (Guattari, 1984). Trust, in Nise's story, resists static systems and becomes a participatory force, shaped within the shifting terrain of relational dynamics — placing the institution itself into a state of therapeutic care. By cautiously engaging with research protocols and

sharing her narrative, Nise becomes, however tentatively, part of the ongoing process of instituting care.

In Nise's case, trust emerges not solely as a reflection of fragility but as an instituting force of care through the tensions it embodies. This movement invites further reflection on how vulnerability itself reshapes the possibilities of collective care. While trust, for Nise, emerges as a participatory force within the shifting terrain of relational dynamics, her story also hints at another layer — a negotiation with the boundaries of language itself. Her fragmented, tentative accounts contrast sharply with the occasional expansiveness of her long, winding sentences — these oscillations between brevity and endlessness capturing the precarious, layered ways in which language itself becomes a site of care and negotiation.

*

So I think I was on that *trip* for about two months and it was, it was terrifying and it was, uh, I can remember going to the back of the farm one day and standing on a stump and I had my arms up in the air and I was saying to God, I was saying, “pick me up, pick me up” and I was just really scared and it was the middle of the night and I'd walk back and there was all these cows and they were just looking at me like, “what are you doing out here?” and I thought there were all these Catholic friends of mine behind the hayshed laughing at me and I was just like “ooh?” and then I baptised myself in the trough and it was like June or July — I was freezing cold — and I thought: “if I lay my head on the ball until it drains out, then I'll get out” and I was just like, well, you know, when you put...

when you press the ball it makes the water come into the trough and so yeah, I would probably not survive that but I decided I got too cold and I went home and freaked mum out because I'm like dripping wet and freezing and she was just like, "what is wrong with you?" (Nise)

*

During the interview, Nise's account included a line-up of drugs: prescription-based ones — paroxetine, olanzapine, diclofenac, and unspecified sleeping tablets — alongside what might be termed the "less formal" roster — marijuana (pot), including its potent derivative marijuana oil, acid (likely LSD), and methamphetamine (referred to as meth and ice). During a time when Nise was deeply entrenched in a routine of smoking marijuana oil, her habitual rhythm was disrupted when her supplier, running out of stock, offered acid trips as the only alternative available. Nise and her daughter were living in the caravan park nearby Nise's father when she decided to try the acid. The one-off experience began with subtle sensations — she wandered through the garden as a light drizzle fell, finding fleeting comfort in the damp coolness of her surroundings. For a brief five minutes, a spark of joy broke through, a quiet moment of "oh, this is quite nice" (Nise). But the high dissipated quickly, leaving her with nothing more than the memory of a fleeting respite, the kind that promises more than it delivers.

After this short-lived pleasant experience, Nise's narrative loses its ability to map what happened in an orderly way. Some unknown time after having that acid, she was "just having the worst, worst trip ever" (Nise). Nise recalls essential bits — that her father growled at her after finding her drug container

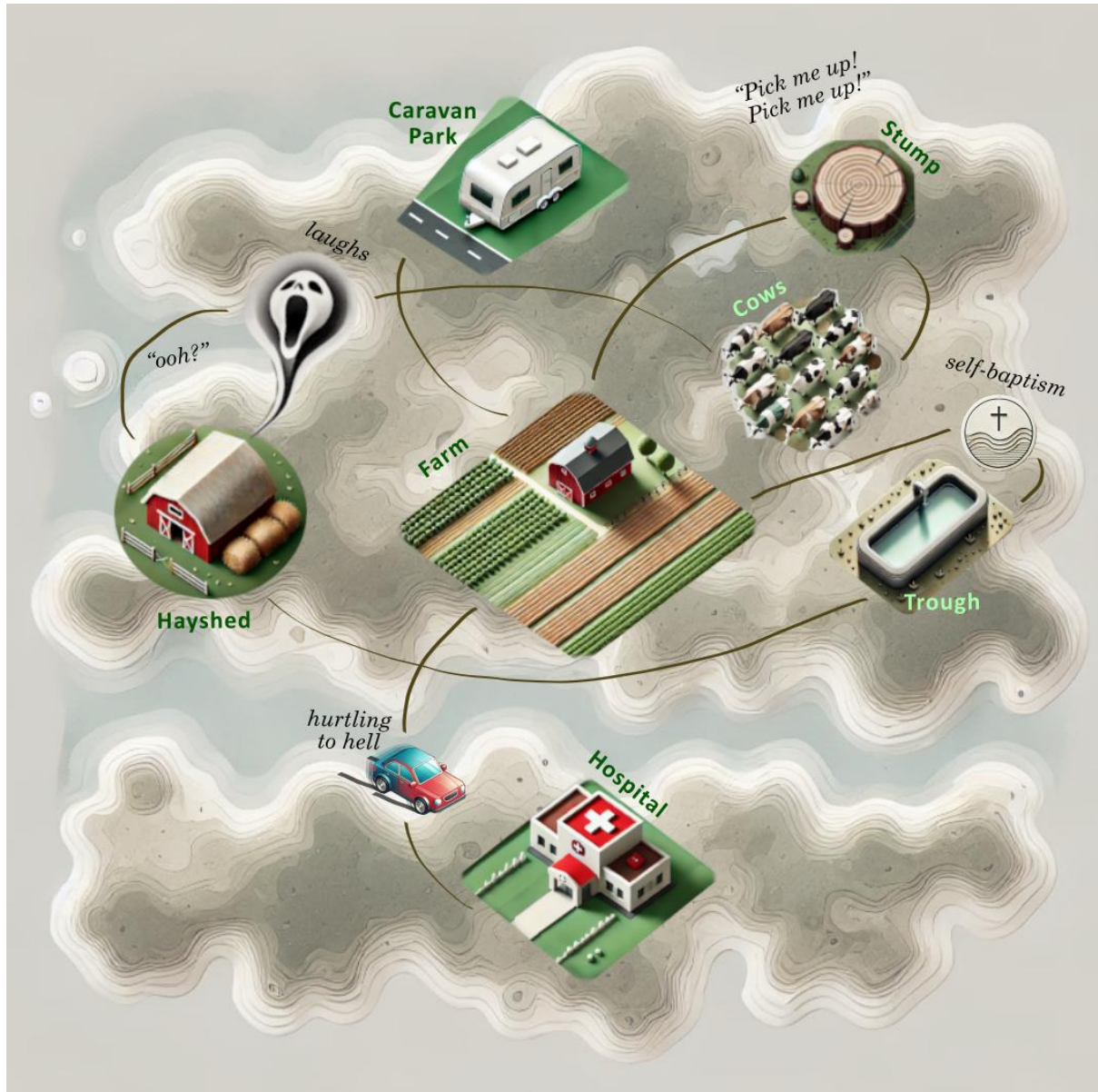
with a big marijuana bud in it, and she was advised by some unspecified person to go back and live with her mother in the farm. “Everything started crumbling” (Nise). In Nise’s crumbs of knowledge from that period, she believes that the one acid she took combined later with her return to the marijuana habit, triggering what she interpreted as the release and intensification of “all the psychoactive stuff in the pot” (Nise), and leading to that terrifying trip. While pharmacological accounts might challenge such claims — noting that LSD is rapidly metabolised (Marta, 2019) and does not remain in the body to “release” other substances’ properties later — her discombobulated experience gestures towards something else: entangled interplays of substances, psychological states, and relational intensities that cannot be taken objectively and simplified into symptomatic descriptors. Whether shaped by the amplification of overlapping drug effects or the weight of unresolved struggles (re)surfacing, her narrative validates and explains her feeling of having inhabited an unmapped existence for an extensive time. Her recounting insists on being experienced rather than conclusively understood, offering instead *understandable connections* (Jaspers, 1963/1997) — chains of precipitating narratives that include events interpreted as significant in the onset of her “psychosis or some kind of drug-altered reality” (Nise).

More than once during our conversation, Nise complained that she did not have a map to guide her in her life. And her experience of a terrifying and long uncharted trip was only halted after a series of events led her to the hospital once more. In the lengthy 227-word sentence opening this segment, Nise narrates the remnants of some of her last moments tripping. Figure 5 traces the story fragments she could recount that morning. The directionless flux diagram

tentatively connects her account with its before and after — from the caravan park to the farm and later to the hospital.

Figure 5

Fragmented Territories of a Night Unmapped



Note. This image collage incorporates AI-generated visuals created using OpenAI’s DALL·E tool. Each of the source images are free from specific copyright claims and have been edited prior to their integration into this project.

A paranoid stream invades me as I write about Nise's terrifying trip. In my mind, I conjure up a type of academic inquirer who would meticulously dissect her story within my words, asking with a wry grin, "What does this flowy story add to your argument?" My imagined inquirer's critique requires adherence to institutional demands for linearity, coherence, and purpose, where every anecdote — as a minoritarian discourse — must navigate inflexible mechanisms of exclusion and control (Foucault, 1981). Such structures enforce the boundaries of what can be said and how it must be articulated, demanding each fragment align with an overarching teleological framework. By these same standards, Nise's account could easily be ignored, deemed unnecessary, or dismissed as a distracting detail. Yet, Nise's unbounded recounting defies such pressures, calling instead for a modality of authoring rooted in relational and affective intensities, circumventing the rigidity of conventional institutionalised authority (Foucault, 1979; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In her disarrayed recounting, we glimpse the kind of truthful experiences that evade categorisation, challenging the epistemological boundaries of what is admissible within reasoned discourse, and reflecting the tension in the unmapped everyday of therapeutic praxis.

Much like the critique posed by my imagined inquirer, daily clinical practice grapples with a similar paradox: the disciplinary imperative to impose categorical order onto the irreducible messiness of lived experiences, selectively deeming parts of a story as either useful or irrelevant. In Nise's story, a trained professional might immediately identify and label what they recognise as positive psychotic signs and symptoms — hallucinations, disorganised thinking,

derealisation, perseveration⁷⁹, and so forth. Yet, these classifications, while arguably useful for guiding certain clinical interventions, do not encapsulate Nise's account. Her story complicates these assessments by occupying a liminal, "frontier" position. Beyond the elements that could be clinically classified as symptomatic, such as disorganised thinking, her narrative simultaneously reflects moments of a highly structured mind, profound insight into her experiences, cohesive reasoning, and the ability to convey her thoughts with remarkable clarity and persuasiveness. This tension between clinical classifications and the lived complexity of psychotic symptoms is well-documented, particularly in relation to schizoaffective disorder (Abrams et al., 2008; Jäger et al., 2011; Wilson et al., 2014). At least in such cases, and likely much more broadly, diagnostic change is a prevalent issue, revealing the complexities of therapeutic processes in contrast to the stability often assumed in theoretical constructs (Florentin et al., 2023; Wood et al., 2021). And yet, despite this recognition, attempts to tame the untameable persist — efforts to force the messiness of human experience into rigid nosological categories, as though control over reality could be secured through classification. These impulses reflect the discomfort of engaging with truths that resist containment, truths that spill over the edges of diagnostic clarity.

⁷⁹ Despite my best efforts to resist classification, my disciplined academic self must clarify this point. Nise was clearly exposed to the idea of perseveration as a clinical sign in the past but subverts it, reclaiming it as "his" perseverance in her recounting. Perseveration refers to the unintentional repetition of a response that is situationally inappropriate. — Crider, A. (1997). Perseveration in schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia bulletin*, 23(1), 63–74.

It is within this frame that I find myself unsurprised when Nise described her mother driving her to the hospital after the terrifying trip at the farm as an experience akin to descending into hell:

I felt like I was hurtling, like... You know how people go to hell, they just... they hurtle, and that's how I felt. I was so scared... I, I felt were going so fast and I felt like I was going to hell. Anyway, I ended up at the hospital, and yeah... (Nise)

From what Nise could share, this was not a metaphor or comparison; the car ride *became* hurtling — a visceral experience of motion and fear, where speed and dread intertwined. Nise's account of the car ride to the hospital epitomises the insufficiency of clinical frameworks in capturing the complexity of lived experience (Gupta et al., 2023). While she later doubts her perception of speed — recognising it as a probable hallucination — the moment retains its visceral truth. For Nise, it was not about whether the car was truly hurtling; it was the overwhelming reality of terror that consumed her, blending the external world with her internal upheaval. This disjunction between what she felt and what she now “knows” illustrates the epistemological rupture her narrative embodies. It defies the simplicity of diagnosis, exposing the inadequacy of categories that rely on neat binaries of true or false, objective or subjective. Instead, it leaves us grappling with the ambiguity of truth in therapeutic praxis — a truth that resists being pinned down within the confines of diagnostic clarity.

So, in arriving at the hospital/hell, the institutionalised responses offered to her and designed to “help” bore the paradoxical imprint of control rather than care. Nise recognises this period in the hospital offered temporary relief, a

fleeting sense of safety secured by the structured rhythms of art classes and routine. Yet this stability was fragile and dismantled abruptly, prematurely in her view, without dialogue or acknowledgment of her relational and situational needs. Nise's abandonment by both parents at different moments after they learned she was using illegal drugs was relived in the institutional abandonment within the hospital. This sense of rejection was sharpened by an unsettling incident with another patient, a man who approached her while intoxicated and asked her to help carry a box to his room. Nise admitted, "I wasn't really, ahm, fully cognisant of what was going on" (Nise), reflecting on the moment with a hint of naivety. Another woman intervened, warning her, "Don't! Come back this way" (Nise), and led Nise to wait in her room instead. In hindsight, it seemed she had not grasped the man's ulterior intentions — something the other woman appeared to recognise immediately. Shortly afterward, Nise was abruptly discharged, an event she speculated was linked to the incident. She believed the man had been prioritised over her and reflected on the loss of stability the hospital had temporarily provided. "I wasn't able to return to do the art classes" (Nise). Echoing the dynamics of abandonment she had experienced with her family, discharge left her feeling even more dislocated and unseen, while adding a distinctly gendered layer to her sense of rejection.

The abruptness of her discharge underscores the dynamics of abandonment that marked Nise's experience in the hospital, as well as a lack of follow-up care that might have addressed her drug use and the broader challenges of her situation. Reflecting on her time within the institution, Nise described how the type of care she received felt fragmented and impersonal,

often dismissive of her lived experiences. “They just made an analysis; they didn’t really talk to me about what I’d experienced” (Nise) — noting how diagnoses seemed to overshadow any meaningful engagement. “It was just basically they were there to give medication, and the counsellor would talk about the icky stuff” (Nise). This fragmented approach — with rigidly prescribed roles dictating how each professional could engage — left her feeling unheard, particularly in relation to what she understands was a misdiagnosis. In such circumstances, the supposed “objectivity” of institutional responses becomes irrelevant; Nise’s experience and sense-making take centrality in her abandonment, especially as she was left to navigate it entirely on her own. “Nobody’s actually listened to my experience — because I got diagnosed with the wrong thing 20 years ago” (Nise). Such practices reflect an institutional structure rooted in compartmentalisation and role separation, sharply contrasting with transversal structures aimed at integrating collective care and breaking static institutional hierarchies (Robcis, 2021).

In the broader institution of mental health, protocols like these risk silencing the relational dynamics underpinning a person’s struggles. By sidelining her drug use and emotional anguish, the hospital’s response functioned more as a regulatory mechanism than a dispositif for engaging with the multiplicity of Nise’s experience. The duality of her narrative — both seeking refuge in institutional care and finding herself alienated by its practices — reveals the dissonance between procedural adherence and the needs of lived lives. Such systems often extend their reach not to “heal” but to organise and normalise, prescribing solutions without addressing the context of pain, and

enabling disciplinary power to seep into and infiltrate the very rules and practices meant to offer care (Foucault, 1976/1990).

*

“Take this and just live sedated forever” (Nise).

*

“No, I can’t function with that stuff in my body!’ [...] It takes you that long the next morning to get going and, like, creativity — gone” (Nise).

*

Pause — reconcile.

Nise’s voice, layered with defiance and exhaustion, underscores her resistance to the way medication was presented to her. Her critique, however, moves beyond personal dissatisfaction, pointing instead to the institutional mechanisms that prescribed these treatments without engaging her lived experience or agency. Nise’s intention during our conversation became clear: she wanted to dismantle the schizoaffective label that had followed her and replace it with something she found more fitting — C-PTSD. Yet, she did not really seek diagnosis from me; nor could I alter her institutional trajectory or interfere with her diagnostic status. Instead, she seemed to recognise me as speaking from a different discursive space, one perhaps less entangled in the rigid confines of clinical authority. This dynamic carried an unspoken tension — the possibility that I might represent change, even as I remained tied to the limits of this research. It is a tension that exposes how insufficient academic interventions can feel when faced with the immediacy and depth of individual experiences. As pointed out earlier, institutions often struggle to engage with the complexities of

care, particularly in how diagnostic frameworks and treatment protocols override lived experience, privileging procedural adherence over relational and situational dynamics. The procedural tendency reduces the multiplicity of life to standardised and manageable forms, bypassing the relational and situational dynamics that shape individual stories (Foucault, 1976/1990). Such frameworks flatten the diversity of lived experiences, overlooking the interplay of local processes central to understanding them. Within this framing, medications often become tools of regulation — means to control symptoms that bypass the multiplicity of suffering. For Nise, this regulatory framing not only bypassed the complexity of her suffering but silenced her enduring question: “When do I start living?” (Nise). Her resistance, then, was not simply to sedation but to the institutional erasure of life’s possibilities beyond the confines of imposed mechanisms. This complex tension speaks as much to her experiences as it does to the systemic challenges institutions face when attempting to move beyond their procedural confines.

The friction of institutional constraints and lived experience is not unique to Nise. International strategies built cooperatively like Participatory Medication Management (PMM)⁸⁰ intend to reconfigure the possibilities of care by addressing not only the use of medications but the power relations embedded in their management. Rather than imposing compliance, PMM fosters collaboration. It seeks to facilitate dialogue among users, families, and

⁸⁰ The original term, Gaining Autonomy & Medication Management (GAM), intends to reflect the framework’s emphasis on user-centred care. However, the translation fails to capture the participatory and dialogic nature of the approach. The term Participatory Medication Management (PMM) is used here to better align with the concept’s ethos of collaboration among users, families, and professionals, as described in del Barrio et al. (2013).

professionals, creating space to explore how medications shape quality of life and align with personal goals (del Barrio et al., 2013). This stands in stark contrast to the rigid, non-conversational one-size-fits-all approaches Nise encountered, where medications were presented as isolated solutions rather than components of a negotiated process. PMM's strength lies in its refusal to dismiss the role of medication while also rejecting its over-coded purpose as a purely regulatory mechanism. Yet, like any framework, it is not without tensions. The ongoing challenges of power imbalances, incomplete implementations, and diverse user needs mean that even PMM cannot fully resolve the contradictions inherent in institutional care. Still, by reimagining treatment as a relational and participatory act, strategies like PMM shift the locus of decision-making. Such practices resonate with transversal structures (Robcis, 2021), which seek to dismantle hierarchies and centre in collective engagement. Respect, in this collectivised way of producing care, is not a passive gesture but an active and ongoing dialogue. It reflects how PMM fosters attentiveness to how medications are intertwined with individual stories and the contexts they inhabit, positioning care as a shared and negotiated process. This style of care could have opened pathways for Nise to reclaim agency rather than enforce sedation, fostering a shift from prescriptive interventions to more dialogic and agreed engagements.

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It's quite hard to actually figure out and have the confidence to go and try something and... And the thing that scares me the most is: what if I try and I get sick again and... Yeah, so I... I just need, you know... that's what all I would have wanted: would have been someone to kind of guide me

into safety — life and safety. You know, not just kind of control symptoms, or just medicate, discriminate, and isolate. Yeah, because that’s all I feel that happened. (Nise)

*

Obrigado, Nise,

Your words, so carefully shared, stay with me — not as echoes of what’s past, but as something alive, weaving into my thinking, my writing, and how I now see the world — shaping not only this work but the care I hope to bring into my future practice. In the fragments of your story, I glimpse not only the ruptures and betrayals you’ve endured but also the courage it takes to trust, even tentatively, in the possibility of being heard. You remind me that truly listening is not a passive act; it is a practice — one that can become a form of care, a movement toward connection that risks itself in every moment.

I’ve been reflecting on what you said, about how “they” just wanted to fix symptoms, isolate, sedate. And I keep returning to your question: When do we start living? It lingers not as a demand for an answer but as a reminder — of what’s at stake when we speak of care, of healing, of life itself. Your question is not only yours; it stretches outward, pressing against the very frameworks that so often fail us. It calls for a care that does not impose, for relationships that can hold our stories without breaking them into pieces.

As I write these concluding words to you, I think about how, at the end of our conversation, all I could say was “I hear you. I hear you. Thank you so much.” I said this because I was moved beyond words, Nise; you touched me in a way I wasn’t prepared for. And as I reflect now, I realise I never could have guided this

section. It was you who led it, your voice shaping every word, every pause. And it feels like this is where I must end this section, too — not with conclusions or certainties, but with gratitude. Gratitude for your trust, your resilience, your perseverance. For the way your story has unsettled and moved me, pushing me to write with greater care, to un-master what I thought I knew.

So, thank you, Nise, for sharing your voice with me. I hope these words carry even a fragment of the respect you deserve. And as I close this letter, I hear you still.

Com carinho,

Jerônimo

René — “it’s wanting to know what is wrong with me, and what is me”

There are days we feel
 Like someone who left or died.
 Did we suddenly stop,
 Or was it the world that grew wide?
 We long to have an active voice,
 To command our own fate.
 But then comes life’s relentless wheel,
 And carries our destiny away.
 — *Chico Buarque, Living Wheel*⁸¹

Ladies, gentlemen, and everyone in between! The lights dim, the curtain rises, and the stage is set for the performance of a life — a spectacle where personal and institutional forces converge, collide, and entangle. Our protagonist, René⁸² — a figure of contradictions, yearning for depth in instituted shallows — takes the spotlight, grappling with diagnostic frameworks that both promise answers and confound, therapeutic encounters that demand vulnerability yet rush toward resolution, and a system that struggles to reconcile efficiency with the complexity of singular lives. Each act to follow delves into these dynamics, not as a linear unfolding but as a *polyphony* — where voices, gestures, and institutional echoes resonate in dissonant harmony, reflecting the multiplicity of lived experience resisting containment (Guattari, 2006). The act(ing) of writing, too, finds itself drawn to the theatre stage, stepping forward

⁸¹ Chico Buarque, one of Brazil’s most influential musicians and writers, gave voice to a generation through his art. “Roda Viva,” first performed in 1967, became an emblem of resistance during Brazil’s military regime, which ultimately censored the song. My translation of the original: “Tem dias que a gente se sente / Como quem partiu ou morreu / A gente estancou de repente / Ou foi o mundo então que cresceu / A gente quer ter voz ativa / No nosso destino mandar / Mas eis que chega a roda-viva / E carrega o destino pra lá.”

⁸² René is a fictional name derived from the Latin *renatus*, meaning *born again*. Traditionally used as a masculine name in its French origin, it is now adopted as gender-neutral in English. The name also nods to René Descartes, whose overconfident dualism of mind and body, and insatiable thirst for certainty, linger as inescapable echoes in how we ask what can be known and what belongs to us.

with its fragments and rhythms, joining the performance — tracing, folding, and reimagining what it seeks to understand, inviting us into the unsettled assemblages of a world still in the making (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

Please take your seats; the show is about to begin.

Opening Scene: “it’s something to do with time or money”

Showbiz. If I were to summarise what endured after my interview with René, this would be the word. It was a term that lingered, capturing the tension and theatricality of our exchange before I even had words to frame it. It took place in mid-August 2021 and left me with an uneasy sense of being cast in an ill-fitting role: the desperate content creator, shuffling through my research documents and jotting notes in the margins, awkwardly trying to streamline the process for someone whose busyness seemed more performed than felt. The awkwardness did not stem from the research interview guidelines themselves — they were open-ended enough and designed to allow improvisation. Instead, it emerged in the way René’s brief, sometimes laconic answers seemed to resist that openness.

His responses initially felt as if they belonged to a different kind of exchange, as though I were a journalist with a set agenda, asking pre-formed, multiple-choice questions to slot his words into a pre-written narrative, even as his answers grew marginally longer over time. This sense of disconnection deepened as I adapted to René’s fragmented rhythm, stepping into the role of a journalist on assignment — recorder ready, waiting as a celebrity flutters between tasks. He granted me fragments of time — enough to keep a story alive but never enough to fully settle into it. This dynamic seemed to reinforce the

performative tension of our interaction, where his moments of hesitation or brevity felt less like barriers and more like deliberate intermissions, becoming part of the evolving narrative shaped by our exchange.

The interview unfolded in three parts: a fleeting 1-minute start, a 29-minute main segment, and a 23-minute conclusion. Two breaks bridged these moments — the first was briefer, the second much longer. Both stretched the total length of our interaction to nearly two hours, as René twice excused himself from the space and asked if I could wait for him to return, far exceeding the recorded segments. I sat through these breaks, pen in hand, as if racing against an unseen deadline, caught in the strange choreography of idly waiting and rushing to conclude — proximity and distance, a slow pace laced with desperation. It all felt suspended in an air of spectacle, as if I had accidentally stepped into a piece of performance art I had not quite anticipated.

At the same time, the show was clearly being performed for me; it demanded to be noticed, with its breaks carrying the weight of a theatrical interlude, as if they too were part of what had to be expressed and understood. So, I surrendered myself, accepting my supporting role as a privileged listener, though it was far from passive. René's initial self-assuredness filled the space. His energy, however, was dynamic and expressive, as if his focus and the foundation of his confidence were constantly shifting. Amidst this dynamism, René sometimes went beyond recounting his story, stepping into the role of a director and crafting a narrative to persuade, as if driven by a hidden agenda. This underlying intention seemed to fuel a restlessness that craved stimulation, often drawing attention to himself as if the recorder were a camera. It was

almost like René himself noted: “you kinda need the rush, the dopamine” (René). Over time, his certainties began to feel overly simplified, his strong opinions giving way to moments of hesitation and long pauses of doubt.

Yet listening to him required spoken effort — not just a volley of questions and responses, but also the occasional “hmm” or “ahm” to nudge him back into speaking, as his answers were often brief, sometimes just a single word. It demanded more than receptive engagement; it required me to meet him in the moment, shaping the exchange as if we were co-performing a scene from a documentary film or a web series. I became the secondary actor who set up the scene for René’s insights to land, each line feeding into the next to keep the narrative alive. In this improvised production, René was unmistakably the main character, while I took my place as his counterpart, adapting not only to his shifting rhythm but also to the different roles he seemed to demand of me, switching between performer, listener, and questioner to sustain the flow.

*

René: Uh... The way I felt is that, like, “you’re fine, aye?” Like, it’s almost trying to convince you that you’re fine, so you don’t say what’s really wrong — so you’ll be fine to just move on, so you don’t need more work with the person.

Jerônimo: Why do you think that is?

René: Money. [A cat meows, perfectly timed.]

*

The interview unfolded amidst mounting tensions, just before New Zealand entered a nationwide Alert Level 4 lockdown in response to the Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2 (“Covid-19 lockdown,” 2021). At the time, collective

anxieties were on the rise: a ship docked in the international port of Tauranga had crew members testing positive for COVID-19 (“Covid 19 coronavirus: 11 infected,” 2021), and several cases linked to students in both schools and universities were making headlines (“Covid 19 coronavirus Delta outbreak,” 2021). Daily updates from the Ministry of Health after lunch had become a ritual of mounting anxiety, particularly as reports emerged of a university student in Auckland who had tested positive for COVID-19, with over 80 close contacts (Morton, 2021). “There’s a constant fear of, like... whenever I get my phone around one o’clock, going, ‘Is it today? Is today another lockdown?’” (René). In response to the escalating dangers of the situation, Massey University’s provost instructed us to cease research activities once again just days after my interview with René, amplifying the pervasive uncertainty about how to continue working safely — an uncertainty that would culminate in the imminent lockdown.

For more than a year, we had adapted to ever-changing mask-wearing policies, long-standing rules of social distancing, and minimising unnecessary outings. Yet, before the Delta variant led to a halt in research activities, calls to resume face-to-face interactions grew louder, despite the persistent health risks. This issue was particularly acute in the tertiary education sector, where debates around balancing economic imperatives with health and safety had been ongoing since the previous year (Tertiary Education Union, 2020) and continued to shape decisions during this period. Economic concerns seemed to overshadow public health priorities, even as a significant portion of New Zealand’s population remained unvaccinated, with the general rollout only beginning in earnest from September 2021 (Witton, 2021).

This shared cauldron of tense, grounded worries — amplified by the moral panic of unfolding events in New Zealand and globally — was anything but a mere backdrop. This visceral, all-encompassing experience permeated my response to René’s performative presence during the interview. His critique of institutional scripts, which tried to convince people to “just move on” (René), felt inseparable from the systemic pressures shaping our interaction and broader societal disputes. René’s frustrations with therapy, where “something to do with time or money” (René) often dictated the reach and rhythm of care, also reflected these dynamics. My sense of urgency, then, was mostly drawn out by the vivid and immediate concern for our health, even as I understood we were still relatively removed from the known epicentres of concern — with social distancing protocols in place and a mask on my face throughout our conversation, despite the negotiable rules countrywide. The pressing need, however, stood in stark contrast to my initial intentions — to slow down, calmly engage, and allow depth to emerge freely. The demands to adapt quickly and deliver efficiently replicated the very institutional forces I had hoped to critique, creating an inescapable, lived contradiction.

In that sense, the exchange with René not only revealed the dynamics between us but also made the weight of institutions shaping our interaction felt. Public health, government policy, and media communication — operating as a multiple unit across national and international flows — normalised anxiety, vigilance, and the moral imperative of a specific understanding of safety (Guattari, 1984). At the same time, psychology was neither separate from nor wholly dependent on these forces; instead, it functioned as part of a wider

assemblage, territorialising subjectivities through its own mechanisms: producing norms for what a “healthy,” “functional” self should look like, while managing deviations from these ideals (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; 1987). René’s polished self-assuredness, at first so dominant, was less important for its origin — whether individual or otherwise — and more for how seamlessly it fit within the expectations produced by the overlapping institutional forces permeating our interaction. His façade of mastery, as it cracked, revealed moments of hesitation and vulnerability that resisted the very ideals of coherence and control perpetuated not only by psychology as a majoritarian institution but also by the broader network of institutional forces at play.

I, too, was caught in these institutional rhythms, performing my own roles: the diligent academic, the productive worker — adjusting to the pressures of maintaining this exchange amid disruptions to time, space, and safety. As a researcher, I was still expected to maintain productivity and uphold the image of competence. With participant engagement and regular routines under constant threat of disruption, fulfilling these expectations became increasingly untenable as the conditions sustaining those roles gradually eroded under the pressures amplified by the pandemic. So, René’s position and my own performance did not unfold merely as individual acts but as interconnected elements within a larger machinic enslavement (Guattari & Rolnik, 2008). That is, neither of us acted as isolated subjects responding solely to external demands, as subjectivities emerge in assemblages. Through these performances, thus, we found ourselves operating as an integrated component within overlapping institutional machines. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified this institutional machinery’s grip, regulating

flows and reshaping roles, diminishing the perceived freedom to act. René's performance, marked by its rehearsed assurance, echoed these dynamics, as did my own — though mine, by contrast, lacked the refinement of his craft.

Act I: The Limits of the Instituted and René's Case for ADHD

Jerônimo: What do you understand a diagnosis is, and why is it important to you?

René: I think, for me, it's wanting to know what is wrong with me and what is me.

*

René is seeking to understand, to distinguish what might be “wrong” from what is intrinsically “him.” He searches for a diagnosis that will bring sense to these uncertainties — to fully explain, expose, and make them explicit without a doubt. My question to him, early in our conversation, marked the first instance I felt the need to intervene, hoping to create a firmer platform for René to tell his story. There was a tone of frustration in his voice as he responded. For a moment, I thought it was directed at my interjection, but it soon became evident that the annoyance stemmed from a deeper, long-standing yearning for understanding and validation — one that went beyond the need for plain explanation. As our interview unfolded, his uneasy effort to untangle the complex interplay of his experiences, relationships, and inner struggles would take centre stage. Before that, though, René's short answers and sharp criticisms to the situation of New Zealand's mental health system caught me off guard.

I had been living in New Zealand for some time when I interviewed René, and my previous contact with critiques of the country's mental health system

(Ainge Roy, 2018; Hutton, 2018; Wright, 2016) had ultimately led me to pursue this research. Therefore, what was unexpected in René's account was not so much the content of his remarks but the way he positioned himself while explaining his perceptions:

There's no one to... investigate. And New Zealand has a huge problem with mental health, so they, they need... They need to take the time, rather than just like, you know,... Actually do proper, um, counselling and therapy rather than just like, "here's a pill; go home." (René)

By referring to "them," René was noticeably talking about the health professionals he had encountered in the country, while also subtly distancing himself from belonging to the broader social reality of New Zealand. This sense of disconnection was reinforced through other remarks he made, as will be discussed later. In René's account, *they* need to take action — he positions himself as an outsider, a bystander to the temporal and financial politics shaping the promotion of mental health in a country he is, at least formally, a part of.

At the same time, calling out the issue from the outside underscores René's sense of loneliness in the process. His inputs and ideas remain alienated from the instituted protocols, excluding his hopes and expectations to such an extent that he feels unable to be part of the proposed collective solutions. "They don't investigate, which makes me want to just go home and go to *doctor Google* and be like, 'Okay, what do I actually have? Those are my symptoms'" (René). This turn to "doctor Google" reflects something other than simple discontent or individualistic self-reliance — it signals a breakdown in the flows of trust and care within the assemblages that compose mental health services. Unable to find

validation or meaningful engagement within instituted clinical structures, René's search for answers becomes a deterritorialised and dangerously reterritorialising process — one where his list of perceived symptoms preferably circulates outside the sanctioned spaces of diagnosis and the molar orderings of institutional authority (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). By *including* himself as *excluded* from and *in opposition* to these systems, René's account exposes the disconnectedness between his expectations (!) for care and the over-coded realities of New Zealand's mental health apparatuses.

At first glance, René's choice to search for his symptoms online might seem like an almost desirable rejection of institutional authoritarianism, particularly in contexts favouring defiance against monolithic systems of authority. Yet, such a move reveals a more intricate set of dynamics — not between critique and complicity as binary opposites, but as entangled tensions both resisting and reproducing mainstream institutional logics. Some of my most rebellious readers might feel a flicker of unease here, as though I am uncomfortably close to a defence of oppressive institutions. This is not going to happen. So let me be clear: this trapizonga does not stand against institutions. However, it strongly resists the unwarranted reification of institutional forms — the moment when instituting processes, brimming with transformative potential, harden into perceived homogenised, static realities that suffocate rather than sustain a life (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). That is, in situations like the one experienced by René — and operating under the guise of individual autonomy and self-interest — institutional forces might hijack instituting movements and redirect them into rigidified forms of instituted realities that do not necessarily

sustain the transformative potential from which they emerged (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Guattari & Rolnik, 2008).

When René decides to search for his symptoms online, it might seem like an act of rejection — a refusal of the instituted majoritarian protocols that fail to address his needs and ultimately constrain his life. And to a certain extent, it is just that. Still, his actions remain readily appropriable by various other pervasive instituted realities, redirecting his refusal into another form of institutional capture — and my mind quickly turns to far too many possibilities (brace yourself!) such as the skewed algorithms of search engines; the commercial interests of pharmaceutical companies; the profit-driven governance of medical advertising; the questionable content moderation policies of social media platforms; the unregulated online self-diagnosis communities; the data-mining practices of tech giants; the follower-driven strategies of wellness influencers; the normalising language of diagnostic tools; the feedback loops of automated symptom-checker apps; the self-perpetuating echo chambers of unsystematic crowdsourced knowledge, to name but a few. In his attempt to reclaim a sense of autonomy denied by a dismissive health system, René's voice became entangled with normalising discourses shaped by an overwhelming overlap of surreptitious institutions controlling the online sphere — instituted forces likely hidden from his immediate consideration.

The diagnostic pursuit stalled (or should I say ended?) with a forced reterritorialisation — a bid to assemble his scattered experiences into a compact formula, a title that could hold it all together. Immersed in online spaces, René became convinced he *has* Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), a

certainty that reframed his search for care as a battle to secure professional validation. “After reading more and more about ADHD, I know! It’s kind of a self-diagnosis” (René). Yet this conviction collided with the institutional scepticism he encountered: “and then when you go to the doctor and say, ‘I might have this,’ they just go, ‘No, you’re fine.’” (René). This dismissal deepened René’s frustration, sharpening the dissonance between his lived experience and the professional refusal to affirm it. The desire to distinguish what was wrong from what was him — instituting words that opened this act and still linger — resurfaces here, no longer as a cry for sense but as a quiet admission of failure.

And yet, this “failure,” produced by the conflation between self and psychological struggle, offered René a sweeping certainty — a belief that all his life’s discomforts could finally be accounted for by what he *has*. This certainty, however, was marked by a profound contradictory tension: René’s insistence on *having* ADHD still carried a refusal to *be* ADHD. In naming the diagnosis, he sought to control it, to keep it at arm’s length, even as the act of naming bound it more closely to his sense of self. That is, in treating ADHD as an ever-present lens for understanding his struggles, he could not fully extricate it from his ongoing production of subjectivity. Now armed with a case to defend, his possibilities of becoming-always-other had substantially narrowed, repeating sameness endlessly (Deleuze, 1994). Through the lens of ADHD symptom narratives, diagnostic lexicon, and normalising interpretations, René’s memories were reconfigured, shaped by the certainty he found in the diagnosis.

Yet, this certainty was not entirely his own. It was also devised by a system that demands clarity — one that does not investigate so much as assign

meaning through pre-formed institutional scripts. The Mental Health (Compulsory Assessment and Treatment) Act (1992) structures how psychiatric care is administered in New Zealand. Despite arguably representing improvements on the previous legislation by focusing on patient rights and cultural alertness (Ramalho et al., 2022), the Act reinforces a logic of intervention that prioritises legibility over inquiry, classification over conversation. René's frustration — “they don't investigate the problem further” (René) — is not incidental; it is a symptom of a system that does not seek engagement, but rather resolution on its own terms. Diagnosis, in this sense, is not just a way of understanding distress — it is an *order-word* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), an institutionalised command that determines what kind of subjectivity is permitted within the frameworks of care. If diagnosis offers certainty, it does so by closing the space of uncertainty — by ensuring that distress is understood in terms that align with institutional viability rather than subjective transformation.

So, René's recounting of his history was infused with the popularised language of ADHD — including neurological terms like dopamine and diagnostic markers that reflected a new vocabulary which, at least to him, felt empowering. Yet his engagement went beyond words; it extended into his actions, where he actively performed the diagnosis he had come to expect. At times, René responded minimally, offering just a few words before falling silent. “Yeah,” he replied when asked if someone supported him, before staring at his phone and remaining quiet until prompted further. These silences, coupled with gestures that might appear inattentive, seemed to dramatise the very symptoms he

described. “You know, when I started reading about ADHD, I realised it wasn’t just me being lazy” (René). This realisation seemed to guide not just his narrative but the way he moved through it, as though to embody and make legible the struggles he attributed to ADHD. At one point, he explained, “there were reasons why things were so hard for me, and I could explain it now” (René), punctuating his words with gestures that reflected the urgency of convincing me, his interviewer. His recounting became not only a telling but a showing, with his pauses and movements reinforcing the coherence of his self-diagnosis.

René’s performance during the interview did not read as an act of dishonesty or misrepresentation. Instead, through both the exchange itself and my sustained engagement with it afterward, what emerges is a sense of his profound reliance on the ADHD diagnosis as a framework through which to navigate and understand his experiences. His examples, from difficulties with shopping and food to challenges with his sexual life and even creative pursuits like drag performance, illustrate how this lens has become intertwined with his self-perception. As René put it, “one thing that I do that I notice is a symptom of it, it’s always that seek for the rush of dopamine” (René), connecting this drive to behaviours like overeating, impulsive shopping, and risky sexual encounters. “It’s that ‘always seeking for the rush’ to make me feel better, but then afterwards you just go like... [makes a descending sound, his hand in a downward motion]. ‘I shouldn’t have done this’” (René). He described moments of indulgence followed by guilt, such as buying clothes or hobbies that consumed him for months only to be abandoned. Even drag, which once gave him “the real high” (René), had shifted in his mind from a source of joy to a craft that “takes

my attention away from other important stuff” (René). These vivid accounts not only underscore René’s conviction in the ADHD framework but also reveal how deeply this possible diagnosis has constrained his understanding of himself and his struggles within the confines of a single narrative.

However, this performative conviction contrasts sharply with how he expressed himself outside the recording. When the recorder was off, René’s demeanour shifted — he engaged fluidly in conversation, showing none of the frequent pauses or redirections that characterised his on-record recounting. My extended time with René — not only immediately before and after the interview but also during the two breaks when I was left waiting for him — offered a glimpse of this duality: on the record, he embodied the ADHD framework through scattered attention and distractibility; off the record, he displayed a different, more grounded interactional style. Ultimately, this stark difference raises questions about the relationship between institutional narratives and the spaces they inhabit, as well as the ways in which institutionalised frameworks of diagnosis are enacted or performed in specific settings due to local conformations of territorialising forces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Foucault, 1995).

In that sense, the striking duality between René’s recorded and unrecorded demeanour is not simply a matter of individual dissonance but speaks to the pressures of living within institutionalised frameworks of intelligibility. Diagnosis — whether formalised within the institutional assemblages of mental health or moulded by the converging forces of online spaces — operates as more than a clinical tool. It territorialises subjectivities, shaping not only how one is perceived by others but how one conforms to these

frames and their expectations. These dynamics unfold in René's case — and perhaps more generally — where diagnostic frameworks participate in the broader machinery of capitalism, with subjectivity becoming a site of production, engineered to conform to molar expectations while constantly undercut by the molecular forces of desire, resistance, and reinvention (Guattari & Rolnik, 2008). Within this context, René's on-record performance could be seen as an enactment of ADHD as an institutionalised mode of being — fulfilling the diagnostic expectations that anchor individual experience to a codified narrative. Meanwhile, his off-record interactions suggest a different configuration of the assemblage, one where the ADHD framework is momentarily loosened, revealing a mode of expression less tightly bound to the institution's gaze.

While diagnostic frameworks territorialise subjectivity and shape assemblages, René's adherence to the ADHD narrative on record exposes a deeper struggle, traversed by the insidious demand for accountability. This demand, fashioned through the consumerist production of *prêt-à-porter* subjectivities, pre-designed to “fit” into systems of categorisation and validation, functions as levers of social control (Guattari & Rolnik, 2008). His contrasting performances, then, reveal a kind of contingent tactical navigation: a semiotic dance between the over-coding power of institutional narratives and the molecular resistance that surfaces when the assemblage loosens. This navigation echoes the pressures imposed by systems of validation, where adherence to diagnostic expectations provides a semblance of stability while off-record gestures hint at a more fluid negotiation of subjectivity. The tensions, however,

do not resolve into liberation; rather, they illustrate how rejecting one instituted framework only reconfigures its constraints within another.

The kind of recursive entrapment that René performs speaks to the broader machinery of institutionalisation, where every line of flight risks being reterritorialised — what fleetingly appears as liberation might become a novel site for capture (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). René's refusal of the mental health system exemplifies this dynamic: his rejection of one instituted framework, encouraged by frustration with a system that dismissed him with pills rather than deeper investigation, did not lead to unequivocal liberation but instead reterritorialised his memories within the unison discourse of ADHD — a framework ultimately adhering to the same logic of box-filling categorisation and control that he sought to resist. The limits of the instituted, then, cannot be mistaken as discrete or surpassable barriers — as though they simply delineate an inside and an outside of the institution — but rather constitute an active and proliferating logic that continuously reshapes subjectification. Offering the illusion of clarity, it sustains cycles of self-perpetuating categorisation and control. René's narrative, in this sense, is less a story of resolution and more an admission that institutional demands entangle even our most intimate efforts to make sense of ourselves. Perhaps the question that lingers, then, is not how to escape the instituted, but what possibilities might emerge when desire continues to move, quietly unsettling and reworking its assemblages, even within the folds of institutionalisation.

Act II: The Timings of Care — Prescription and Substitution

René: I think this is also a thing in New Zealand that they're not sure exactly the right... — at least for me — the right thing, like... What's the difference between therapy and counselling?

Jerônimo: Hmm, and in your mind, what is the difference?

[No answer. The pause extends, unfilled.]

René: [Breathes in, then sighs. The silence continues.]

Jerônimo: Is there a difference?

René: I think there is, I think... Ahm... [Another pause. The moment stretches.] I feel like they think counselling is just like, "I'm going through a rough patch, I just need someone to chat to." Whereas in therapy, for me, it's kind of the same thing, but over a prolonged time, that will actually understand why I'm having that rough patch and trying to fix that. For a long time, not just for a short time.

*

René's hesitation is instructive. His initial certainty — that *they* should know the difference between counselling and therapy — collided with his difficulty articulating what that difference actually was. This difficulty is not unique to René: it performs an institutional ambiguity — one that sustains itself through repetition, its indeterminacy no less effective for its lack of clarity. That is, if the distinction wavers, it is not for lack of policing but because its flexibility serves its function. The line between counselling and therapy does not need to be stable to be operational; its very ambiguity allows institutional forces to mobilise it strategically — regulating access, professional authority, and economic

structures of care (Foucault, 1981). René's certainty fractures not because he lacks knowledge but because the knowledge itself is unstable in this case. So, he hesitates, as if wandering silently through tentative answers, circling the question that now unsettles him: there should be a difference. Two words, framed as belonging to different settings, cannot possibly mean the same thing — can they? The expectation of separation lingers, sustained by the very existence of two distinct terms. And yet, the more he tries to grasp it, the more this difference eludes him — “it's kind of the same thing” (René). The system that provides therapy and counselling — the system he critiques as detached, insufficient — seems to operate under the same uncertainty.

This search for clarity is not new. Attempts to distinguish counselling from psychotherapy have long relied on arbitrary markers, drawing lines where practice itself does not. Osagu and Omolayo (2013) list the usual attempts at distinction, such as: therapy is long-term, counselling is short-term; therapy is deep, counselling is surface-level; therapy is aligned with psychiatry and clinical psychology, while counselling is associated with guidance, education, and social work. But, like René, even academic attempts to pin down these differences struggle to hold them in place, as the same techniques appear across both domains and professionals switch between the two terms without any change in practice — these distinctions often reflect regulatory constraints rather than conceptual ones. The slippages accumulate. Indeed, if the split is hard to articulate, it is because it is not epistemic but institutional and deeply ingrained in the order of discourse — it delineates professional territories, licensing

regimes, and access to care rather than any intrinsic difference in practice (Foucault, 1981).

Yet the need to answer remains. The demand to distinguish, to locate a definitive threshold, operates as a territorialising force: even in René's uncertainty, he does not abandon the assumption that such a difference should exist. The difficulty is in naming it — pinning down a moving target. His attempt to do so, however halting, enacts the very logic that sustains the division. The response itself is a mechanism of institutionalisation. It is not simply that there is no clear distinction between counselling and therapy, but that the very act of articulating one participates in its ongoing fabrication. The system does not need to resolve the ambiguity to function; it only needs it to persist. Like any given molar segmentation, this imposed distinction is neither materially fixed nor truly arbitrary — it operates as a machinic assemblage, drawing lines of stratification that do not describe reality so much as produce it, embedding the distinction itself within regimes of power and organisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

René's tentative classification solidifies this stratifying logic. In firmly demarcating the boundary between therapy and counselling, he inadvertently reifies several political assumptions. Most notably, he equates depth of analysis with chronological time: "I think the kind of therapy I would need is a follow-on that I would actually do at least once a week or every two weeks for a long time" (René). The assumption that duration and frequency guarantee depth reinforces a procedural model of care, where legitimacy is measured not by what interventions do, but by their length and continuity. His classification is further

reinforced by a medicalised framing of therapy, which he aligns with professional credentials: “my understanding would be that, for therapy, you kind of need a psychiatrist to do this therapy. As counselling, it’s just counselling. You don’t really need a medical degree. It’s just talking” (René). Here, therapy becomes authoritative not because of its approach or conceptual grounding, but because of its institutional affiliation — its alignment with medicalised structures, professional titles, and the diagnostic legitimacy supposedly arising from these. Counselling, by contrast, is dismissed as an unqualified practice, lacking the epistemic weight of a “real” intervention.

At its core, this is a question of *status* — a term that, as we have seen, etymologically carries within it the very logic of institutionalisation; it is what is set in place, what stands firm (*in-statu*) in an order of recognition (Harper, 2001). René’s words are not just descriptive but performative, enacted through structures that define what is authoritative and what is peripheral. By insisting on a strict separation between therapy and counselling, René reinforces the institutional weight of these categories through an aesthetic of ordering, aligning legitimacy with the forms of recognition they afford. Still, assuming ill intent would be a mistake. His insistence on classification is not a power play but a response to an institution that has repeatedly failed him, offering categories instead of care. If he reinforces these distinctions, it is not because he needs them to hold, but because the system that often treated him as an afterthought already sorts and stratifies, leaving little room for immanent ambiguity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). In this landscape, classification imposes more than structure — it regulates access, shaping who is heard and what is recognised as legitimate

distress. This becomes evident in his earliest experiences with mental health apparatuses in New Zealand, where diagnosis did not offer understanding but instead configured a field of possibilities that enabled his pathways as much as it constrained them.

René's first encounter with mental health care in New Zealand unfolds akin to an *event* — an operative rupture that was not simply undergone but actively modulated the field of possibilities around him, redistributing his future within institutional coordinates (Deleuze, 1990). "I've been diagnosed with depression and anxiety when I was about 15, but I think I've never really... been properly diagnosed" (René). This uncertainty is not separate from the institution of medical diagnosis; it emerges through its very workings. Indeed, the diagnosis was not an attempt to understand but to process him through a system that operates through categorical shortcuts — "they literally go, 'okay, you need antidepressants; this will make your life better'" (René). To be diagnosed was not to be seen but to be assigned a prefigured pharmacological solution — a mode of care that translates life's complexity into neat neurochemical imbalance (Rose, 2001), framing distress as a narrow problem of brain chemistry to be corrected (Moncrieff, 2008). So, as an event, diagnosis goes beyond a label in this case, operating as a temporal marker — a mechanism that does not just describe but enacts a configuration, foreclosing certain possibilities while opening others.

If diagnosis marked a rupture, initiating a trajectory through institutional coordinates, treatment unfolded as an ongoing modulation — less an attempt to understand than a process of pharmacological substitution (Lakoff, 2006). The structure of René's mental health care was not shaped by sustained therapeutic

engagement but by a sequence of prescribed medications, each acting as a temporary resolution before being reconsidered, replaced, or abandoned. “I started on antidepressants when I was 15... I was on and off it, because I think, being a teenager, I never really took it very seriously. It helped for a bit” (René). In his narrative, medication does not appear as part of a relational approach to care but as the default and episodic institutional response, the thing one is placed on, removed from, switched to, or stabilised by. The names of drugs mark time more clearly than any clinical intervention, each prescription becoming a shorthand for a particular phase — though what moves forward is not a process of recovery but an ongoing drug-based modulation that works through biochemical recalibration (Moncrieff, 2008). Citalopram, one of his earliest medications, came when he was still a teenager, cycling on and off treatment. Amitriptyline appears as a later attempt, one that did not work as intended, prompting yet another shift. Venlafaxine followed when dissatisfaction with previous medications led his GP to prescribe a “stronger” alternative. Fluoxetine reintroduced the possibility of wanting to do things again — until anxiety returned. Escitalopram, perhaps the most striking, flattened his affect entirely, leaving him, in his own words, “like a machine, just moving on” (René).

His care unfolds as a series of prescriptions. Yet, this medicalised sequencing does not indicate neglect in the conventional sense — René was examined by doctors, reassessed, prescribed new medications as it was seen needed. Still, what remains noticeable is how the structure of care is particularly shaped by a logic of substitution (Lakoff, 2006), in which distress is continuously reformulated within a neurochemical framework (Rose, 2001) that uses the

swapping of psychoactive drugs as its main intervention. Instead of a process of sustained inquiry into suffering, treatment becomes a set of chemical adjustments, each framed as a potential solution until it, too, requires revision (Moncrieff, 2008). “I was on amitriptyline for a while... then I told the GP that the different medications didn’t work, and he prescribed me Effexor” (René). Treatment, here, is less about René’s experience and more about managing imbalances, regulating symptoms, calibrating dosages.

A broader institutional logic is illustrated through René’s memories. In the absence of sustained therapeutic engagement, medication becomes the very infrastructure of mental health care — not a tool within a broader intervention but the primary mechanism through which psychological distress is made legible (Lakoff, 2006). René himself internalises this framework, describing his well-being in terms of the effects and side effects of different medications, designing his life with a language of deficit rather than conflict (Ehrenberg, 2009). “With the fluoxetine, I felt... the wanting of... wanting to do more things again, but then the anxiety and the fear came back” (René). The therapeutic horizon is not defined by an ongoing inquiry into distress but by whether the right chemical balance has been achieved (Moncrieff, 2008). And yet, this chemical approach does not function as a straightforward solution. Medications work, until they do not. They stabilise, until they numb. They reduce suffering, until they introduce new forms of constraint. Along these lines, René describes his relationship with escitalopram in a particularly striking way: “I didn’t feel upset. I didn’t feel happy. I was just... I was just like a machine, just moving on” (René). Chemical intervention does more than alleviate distress — it reshapes affects, reorganises

subjectivity, and alters the very texture of experience (Rose, 2001). The institution of care, then, does not just regulate distress — it regulates how distress should be felt, expressed, and treated (Foucault, 1995).

Still, this regulation extends beyond treatment itself — it determines the very rhythms of care, shaping not only what is done but how time is held, given, or withdrawn. René's story is not reducible to misdiagnosis or ineffective treatment; rather, it unfolds in the absence of sustained presence — without someone who stays, who listens, who resists reducing his experience to dosage and adjustment. Ultimately, his yearning is not for a different diagnosis or medication, nor for more frequent sessions — it is for something far more difficult to quantify: a sort of companionship in thought, a collaboration in making sense of his life rather than simply having his distress managed. And yet, within the institutional logic René inhabits, this kind of presence remains elusive. In his yearning, time loses its function as just an administrative resource to be extended or restructured — it becomes an opening, a shared commitment, immeasurable in its effects. René's words keep unfolding with the expectation of care, sustaining a call for a form of relation that exceeds the institutional grammar of substitution and managed time. What it means to seek care under these conditions — what is possible, what is foreclosed — remains suspended, caught between expectation (!) and absence, between the promise of presence and the reality of substitution.

Act III: The Price of Understanding — When Value Replaces Care

The therapy that I've done, they were like, "oh, the problem is just you have no self-confidence. Do you see the way you talk about yourself?"

That's just negative. You just need to be happy and think positive and do three sessions" and that's it. It's, er... It's just like, "ah, the government only gives me money for three sessions, so you'll be fine. Then, you don't need further." (René)

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René seems to know all too well what it feels to be dismissed with shallow interpretations. It is not just that therapy failed — it failed predictably. From what René recounts, his therapist — like many others working within publicly funded mental health services — was primarily bound not by the needs of the person before them, but by the pre-set limits of funding models and service contracts (Ministry of Health, 2016). The rigid timeframes René encountered are not fully arbitrary — they are structured by a system that balances care provision with cost-efficiency, ensuring that most services remain available yet always stretched (Ramalho et al., 2022). The Programme for the Integration of Mental Health Data (PRIMHD) stands as an integrating element within this institutional structuring logic. It does not exist to improve care, nor does it claim to. Under the umbrella term “evidence-based resources and tools,” (Te Pou, n.d.) PRIMHD is a data infrastructure that tracks service usage, making mental health treatment legible for funders, policymakers, and auditors.

Designed to ensure accountability in a system where multiple providers — public, private, and NGO — operate under different contracts, PRIMHD sets parameters for how care is recorded, reported, and in the end, rationed (Te Whatu Ora, 2024, September 26). While framed as a tool for improving service delivery, its primary function is not to enable deeper engagement but to justify

the financial viability of treatment models — an inevitable consequence in a system where funding rigidly dictates possibility. It is not a stretch to think that if therapy is recorded as “completed” once the prescribed number of sessions has been met, the system registers it as a success — irrespective of whether anything meaningful took place. After all, “evidence-based” reporting structures routinely prioritise tallying service completions and contract-driven metrics over assessing the meaningful impact of interventions, often sidelining qualitative dimensions of social outcomes in the process (Gaines, 2016). The pressure to comply, then, tends to fall on frontline health professionals delivering such care — not necessarily because they consider the constraints sufficient, but because the instituted models demand it, pushing them to deliver care that prioritises completion over depth.

New Zealand’s mental health system infrastructure operates within this tension. On one hand, there is a strong commitment to accessible care, with free or subsidised therapy available through Te Whatu Ora and NGO partnerships (Te Whatu Ora, 2024, September 29). On the other, care remains bound by contracts, with funding tied to measurable outputs rather than lived experiences (Ministry of Health, 2016). This creates a paradox: while the system recognises the need for mental health support, its structure discourages meaningful engagement. René’s experience is not an anomaly but a predictable outcome of a system where understanding has a price — a price that, in this case, is measured in constrained chronological time, a resource many are simply not given (Te Hiringa Mahara, 2024). Yet, the cost is not only measured in time. For René, it is also financial.

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I could go and see the psychiatrist for the ADHD myself and get the proper diagnosis. But that's \$600.00 one appointment, and you might need two. So, at the moment, I can't afford that. So, a lot of people could be having a lot of better systems or, like, a better mental health, but I think either they don't talk about it — there's no education or awareness about it — or they can't afford it. (René)

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René assumes that he would receive an ADHD diagnosis if he had the means to pay for a specialist consultation — and he is possibly not far from the truth. Given how the adjudicating institutional gaze enhances the quirks of a “neurodivergent self,” along with the vast amount of information readily available online about the current self-reported, symptom-centred diagnostic criteria for ADHD, he is probably right. Even the long-popularised — and often misunderstood as causative — mainstream neurophysiological view that ADHD correlates with hypofrontality (Rubia et al., 1999), whether attributed to a weaker structure or reduced perfusion of the frontal lobe, lends itself to compelling discourses that frame the attenuated prefrontal dopaminergic pathways as explanations for everyday psychological challenges like anxiety (Zarrindast & Khakpai, 2015) and procrastination, ultimately folding those historically and socially mediated difficulties back into the individualising ADHD discourse. The more one sees their struggles validated through this framework, the more the diagnosis appears inevitable, creating a self-perpetuating circularity where subjective distress, institutional recognition, and

neurobiological explanations reinforce one another — each confirming the other as truth.

Notwithstanding this perception of a virtuous cycle of positive feedback, hypofrontality is observed across a wide range of conditions, where it appears alongside diverse behavioural, cognitive, and affective patterns — including, but not limited to, bipolar disorder (Onitsuka et al., 2013), schizophrenia (Hill et al., 2004), and major depression (Galynker et al., 1998). Extending way beyond mental health disorders, it also emerges, for instance, during cognitive task performance while engaging in physical exercise (Audiffren, 2016). This enormous lack of specificity regarding hypofrontality, combined with the apparent absence of any peer-reviewed study that meaningfully substantiates its prevalence in ADHD, suggests that this explanatory model is tenuous at best — especially given the institutional emphasis placed on empirical evidence. Still, both the first- and second-line pharmacological treatments for the disorder — stimulant and non-stimulant classes of drugs — ultimately engage the prefrontal cortex, *amplifying*⁸³ *its function* through different mechanisms: stimulants by rapidly increasing dopamine and noradrenaline availability (Stahl, 2010), and non-stimulants by modulating noradrenergic signalling to strengthen prefrontal regulation more gradually (Arnsten & Pliszka, 2011; Garnock-Jones & Keating, 2009). In both cases, the goal is the same: to bring cognitive function into alignment with expected norms of attention and control. In the social realm, ADHD exists as the embodied contradiction between “too much” and “not

⁸³ There is a certain irony here, as *stimulating* would be the most accurate term — even for the so-called non-stimulant drugs, whose distinction seems to rest more on their slower onset of effect rather than on an absence of brain stimulation. Ultimately, another issue of time and money.

enough” — too much energy, not enough focus. Thus, value becomes a matter of calibration: to be productive, one must be neither excessive nor deficient, neither restless nor absent. Medication, then, is not a prescriptive solution to care but a mechanism of alignment — an enforced cultural adaptation that equates cognitive enhancement with social worth, making pills a convenient, time-saving fix that comes at a financial and existential cost.

One of the greatest Trojan horses in the broader issue of medicocentric mental health diagnosis remains the failure to move beyond individualistic framings — an oversight reinforced by the cursory, maintenance-based prescription of pharmacological treatments, where minimal follow-up replaces meaningful engagement, aligning neatly with profit-driven discourses of efficiency. This model is sustained by a popularised ADHD discourse that upholds Westernised institutional fictions: that a typical developmental trajectory exists as a *norm*, from which one could irreversibly *neuro-diverge* psychologically, as if departing from the one correct linear path; that psychological struggles can be reduced to neurology and brain function schema; and that every psychological difference must be mapped onto a spectrum where outliers are pathologised and medicalised rather than accounted for within the breadth of human variation. That is how the medicocentric model conceals the institutional forces that not only shape the perception of disorder but also sustain its value — whether as an economic commodity, clinical currency, or a measure of time and productivity — especially when the very treatments used to “correct” ADHD demonstrably enhance performance not just in individuals with

a diagnosis, but even in those who would never meet diagnostic criteria (Bagot & Kaminer, 2014; Ilieva & Farah, 2013).

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Jerônimo: Did you have any other experience in therapy, other than the one you talked about with the three sessions?

René: Not in New Zealand. I used to go to therapy when I was a kid.

Jerônimo: So, in another country?

René: Yeah.

Jerônimo: What do you remember about that? Was it useful? Was it different from the one you had here?

René: It was quite useful, actually. It was more like play therapy, I think. And I remember, for a while, my whole family was going... [laughs]

*

There it was — almost an afterthought. “Not in New Zealand” (René). As if it were incidental, as if it had no bearing on the story he was telling. And yet, the moment hung in the air. If his therapy as a child had taken place elsewhere, then so had his childhood itself. A childhood before New Zealand. A life before *here*. René does not elaborate — echoing my own phrasing to classify it as “quite useful” (René), his words move quickly through the style of therapy before shifting to a vague but amused recollection of his whole family participating. And yet, within that passing admission, something lingers. If his first experience of therapy belonged to another country, another system, another approach to care, then so too did the coordinates that shaped his earliest understandings of help, distress, and what it means to belong. He carries with him traces of how time

and attention hold or lose their worth — remnants of a way of caring once shaped by relation, now measured in efficiency and access. It is not just that therapy was different elsewhere — it is that, in some way, *he* was different elsewhere. And now, here, in New Zealand, he finds himself encountering a mental health system that misrecognises him; that offers him not understanding, but brief sessions, quick assessments, the swift dismissal of what he himself has already half-diagnosed before even stepping into the room. The system does not meet him; it barely acknowledges the specificity of his experience. The more he speaks, the clearer it becomes that when he says “they” — the doctors, the mental health professionals — he is not just speaking of individuals. “They” is structural, embedded in the very way care is distributed and prioritised, partially erasing subjectivities in favour of a standardised objectification. For him, it is the institution of mental health. It is the country.

If ADHD, as framed in the Westernised medicocentric model, is an object of intervention calibrated for individual adjustment within a limiting context, this earlier encounter with therapy suggests a different possibility — one in which care was relational, collective, and perhaps, however fleetingly, felt differently. Yet, whatever was “useful” about it did not persist — neither in clear memory nor in practice — as René later navigated the fragmentary and constrained landscapes of institutional mental health care in a country that still felt foreign. When René’s experiences with mental health care are mapped, they trace a shifting topography: from early therapeutic encounters marked by family participation and play therapy to the hyper-individualised, pharmaceutical-dominated framework he later encountered. This transition mirrors the

institutionalisation of subjectivity under capitalism, where care is no longer an open-ended relational practice but a mode of adjustment to economic and social demands (Guattari & Rolnik, 2008). In René's case, this institutional shift was accompanied by a loss of connection — to his family, to therapeutic spaces that once held the potential for collectivity, and to a national system that he experiences as an alienating force.

Rather than engaging with mental distress as a complex phenomenon woven into shared life, René's encounters with mental health professionals in New Zealand followed a predictable script: cursory diagnostic processes, rapid pharmaceutical intervention, and the expectation that therapy could "fix" him in three sessions. The failure at play is not just one of treatment but of the very structures that define what care can be. Even when reforms claim to make care more accessible or responsive, they often reproduce the same over-coded structures of control, repackaging constraint as progress. The logic remains unchanged: care is structured not around the singular needs of those seeking help but around institutional imperatives that prioritise efficiency, compliance, and manageability (Guattari & Rolnik, 2008).

Yet, within these failures, traces of other possibilities remain. René's fragmented memories of play therapy suggest a fleeting moment where care was not yet fully captured by institutional constraints, where relationality and expression remained open-ended. This contrast invites a broader reflection: if the majoritarian institutional model of mental health has increasingly severed and alienated care from its founding institutionalising collective, perhaps there are still therapeutic practices that resist this trend — practices that have not yet

been entirely subsumed, or that persist in the cracks of the system, holding onto something that refuses to be fully over-coded. Yet how long they can persist without the shared desire to speak truth and sustain the space for it remains uncertain, just as it is unclear when the demand for measurable outcomes, efficiency, and exchangeability will begin to strip collectivised practices of the very ethos that makes them care in the first place. Because, in the end, when value replaces care, understanding comes at a price.

Final Scene: On With the Show — Staging Suffering, Staging the Self

“I think there’s no way of quick-fixing mental health. It’s something that it’s ongoing, that it’s never going to stop.” (René)

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The curtain lifts. René takes the stage, yet again — not merely as the subject of diagnosis, nor a cog in the institution’s economy of care, but as performer, as provocateur, as someone who, through the *mise-en-scène* of selfhood, forces into being what might otherwise remain unspeakable. If the world around him demands silence, she — René, stepping into the light, adorned, exaggerated, unmissable — answers with spectacle: she *plays* therapy, this time on her own terms. If suffering must be hidden, he drags it into the floodlights — she does not let it disappear. “I think it has become an important part of my life. I think it’s a little addiction because as much as you try and get away from it, you can’t” (René). In René’s story, drag is more than costuming and camp — it is performativity as survival, a negotiation of legibility. He turns his own becoming into an *act*, not as deception, but as the only means to be seen. “People call, like, ‘you’re beautiful! Oh, that’s great! Oh, you did so well!’ You need that” (René).

As this process unfolds, there is a pull, a reiteration, a loop of differing repetition (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) where recognition demands exaggeration, where presence is both a compulsion and a cost. This is where the tension gathers the paradoxical force of production and constraint: between visibility and concealment, between the necessity of exaggeration and the exhaustion of always having to perform. “You go away from it for a while and you’re like, ‘oh, it’s exhausting’ and stuff. But at the same time, it feels good” (René). And so, she steps forward, catching the light. He lingers in the shadows. To be seen is to be staged, but to be staged is to risk losing the self beneath the act. Yet the alternative — to go unseen — is no option. She is never merely René; he is also there, always weaving in the assemblage of expectations (!) — staging suffering, staging the self.

But even the most dazzling performance has its limits. There are moments when no costume, no floodlight, no carefully rehearsed gesture can break through the walls of silence. Not all suffering is granted visibility. Not all pain gets to be staged. Some disappear; some are disappeared. In this story, New Zealand does not speak of what cannot be measured, cannot be quantified, cannot be resolved. “I don’t think people like to talk about it. They just put under the rug, especially with suicide” (René). It gets tucked behind linguistic obfuscations, behind clinical protocols that ensure it remains a *non-event* — a fact without narrative, a crisis that never quite surfaces. René names it as a failure — “the fact that they just say, ‘he was found dead’” (René), as though erasure could keep the crisis at bay. But erasure does not mean absence. It

lingers in the gaps of institutional speech, in the bureaucratic responses designed to smooth over the unbearable.

René himself once made an attempt — though he barely names it as such. He was young, he says, maybe just looking for attention. The telling is unsteady, shifting, qualified, deflecting — “I think I did it more for attention” (René); then later, “maybe I was trying to call myself attention, realising things are hard or different, and that I need to do something” (René). The institutionalised response, too, barely named it. He was taken to the hospital, processed. The staff, possibly unsure of what to do, turned to scripts:

I was like, “oh, I’m fine, I’m fine. I was just really upset,” to what they were like, “have you been watching any...” — I will never forget that — “Have you been watching any weird videos that made you want to do this?” And I’m like, “Why would a video make me want to kill myself?” [a sharp, drawn-out laugh] They were like, “No? Okay, you just need,” you know, “to be happy. [...] Go to your GP and then see what you can do further.” (René)

Interpreting this passage as a cultural tendency toward avoidance might be an overreach. Yet, it emerges as an institutional mechanism that manages life through the containment of death’s expression. Biopower (Foucault, 1976/1990) operates here in its negative mode — not by disciplining the living body, but by regulating what may be named, grieved, or even acknowledged as a life on the verge of disappearance. If visibility is power, then erasure, too, is a form of control.

René resists. “You need to talk about it because it happens a lot — so much here — that hiding it or not talking about it, thinking, ‘it’s a triggering thing,’ is not helping” (René). He believes in rupture, in shock, in breaking the institutional choreography that tries to keep suffering distant, palatable, contained — yet never fully succeeds. “I’m much more of a believer in the shock value” (René), he insists, as though only through rupture can such suffering be forced into public reckoning. And is this not the function of drag as well? To exaggerate, to distort, to make visible through artifice? Drag, too, forces recognition of what is otherwise dismissed. If diagnosis demands clarity and taboos thrive on silence, drag revels in ambiguity. It offers a stage for what has no place elsewhere — a space where the unseen becomes visible, where the unnameable takes form. Not just the elegant, but the filthy; not just the dazzling, but the discarded; homage and derision. Drag drags gender through the gutter and the altar alike, making visible its scraps and its splendours, its excesses and its constraints, its inevitable failures and its persistent reinventions. It is not less real than therapy; rather, it makes visible the mechanisms that demand such performances in the first place. Drag is art: it makes seen the forces that are invisible by themselves (Deleuze, 2003).

This living theatre can be a prison, but also a vital trapizonga-esque instability — an unfolding that both constrains and sustains. There is no single stage, no fixed scenery, no singular performance that can fully contain what is happening. It shifts, unsettles, refuses resolution. “It breathes, it heats, it eats. It shits and fucks. What a mistake to have ever said *the id*” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 1, emphasis in original). The institutional theatre suffocates when it

leaves no room for improvisation, forcing a script and demanding adherence — when it functions as an over-coded structure, a disciplining dispositif that constrains rather than produces (Foucault, 1995). But if theatre disbands rigid roles and preordained meaning, it might fleetingly re-emerge as a *theatre of becoming*, where the act itself produces the reality it claims to portray. When it reaches this immanent threshold, theatre ceases to be a space of mere representation; it becomes transcendental in its very immanence — a life, an assembling of forces that exceed the logic of fixed meaning (Deleuze, 1997; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). René takes the stage, but the roles do not hold. Drag amplifies him, ADHD over-explains him, his needs exceed three sessions of therapy, his past abroad shies away. Each instituted system stretches him into legibility, yet none sustains him. Time runs out, funding dries up, diagnoses accumulate — but the question splinters, fragments, reassembles — a machine of machines: what is wrong with me, and what is me?

Exoduction

But it fades, like a breeze,
 Lets go of form in its sighs,
 And now, no other music lingers
 But that of the pine groves.
 — *Fernando Pessoa, Song*⁸⁴

This trapizonga began with promulgation, skipping a conventional introduction in favour of a preamble that set the rhythm for the journey we have endured together. Its writings stumbled forward, wandering without prelude, as if already in motion before you and I arrived. Now, as it approaches its last words, it seeks its way back into the undercurrents already alive — the same immanent currents from which it was first called forth. So, if introductions *lead inward* — from the Latin *intro-ducere* (Harper, 2001) — what might lead outward? Let this be an *exoduction*: neither a conclusion nor closure; not an exit point, interruption, or finality. Let me hope that this last bit of trapizonga *exoduces* — flows as a passage to the world — an unfolding that stretches beyond boundaries, dissolving the rigid edges unwittingly shaped by this makeshift document. Let it not be merely a gesture, but the motion itself: spilling beyond, dispersing into what already stirs and vibrates, refusing to settle, inviting the continuation of thought, resonance, and becoming. Yet, even as this makeshift document stretches toward new terms for its movements, it carries the weight of

⁸⁴ Fernando Pessoa, a Portuguese modernist poet whose influence crossed the Atlantic, often wrote under heteronyms — distinct literary personas with unique styles. This stanza, from the poem *Canção*, captures a quiet transition: a structure dissolves, giving way to other resonances that are already stirring. The translation is mine — “Mas cessa, como uma brisa, / Esquece a forma aos seus ais, / E agora não há mais música / Do que a dos pinheirais...”

language's histories — its sedimented layers, its co-optations, its capacity to constrain the vitality it once assumed to carry.

If I were to be precise, what I write now should be called an *education* — the exact Latin term to describe the movement I seek, *lead outward*, or *ex-ducere* (Harper, 2001). But this word has been co-opted by individualistic frameworks and inflexible schooling systems for too long, and I lack the strength to reclaim its once implied freedom. For me, there is a kind of shock, a contradictory feeling, when I confront what a word once meant and what it has come to signify after centuries of co-optation — much like *school*, derived from *skholē*, the Greek word for *rest* and *spare time* (Harper, 2001). Beyond yearning for a return to an idealised past — which, I admit, I sometimes succumb to, seduced by the illusion of a founding beginning — my entire body aches at the alienating disconnection that occurs when words lose their link to the forces that sustain their multiple lineages, their traces of living histories. Words are not static; they carry echoes of their many emergences, provenances, and collectively hallucinated origins, shaped by the flows and intensities that gradually yet persistently carved them. These flows, over time, harden into order-words, stratified and enforcing systems of control, cutting language off from the immanent forces that could renew its vitality. In this makeshift document, my use of etymology served as a kind of philological refuge — a way to offer openings rather than corrections, with the hope that this simple exercise might act as a productive, decolonising force toward complexity and difference. Yet, I am acutely aware of the paradox here: the very lineages I traced are saturated with histories that have not only shaped language but also imposed and naturalised systems of domination, carrying the

weight of centuries of exploitation and control. This tension persists, yet it invites reflection on how even these sedimented histories — marked by extractive violence and domination — might be reshaped into new possibilities for becoming and creation. By retracing the movements and resonances through which language emerges, the trapizonga continues to seek reconnections with its vitality — not as a fixed tool, but as a shifting terrain of possibilities.

So, language lasts. And with it, our institutions endure — carrying their instituted allegiances while resisting instituting currents. In this sense, no definitive lesson emerges from this trapizonga, but rather an invitation to stay with the questions it attunes to, resisting the false clarity imposed by fixed and reified understandings of truth. What hopefully exoduces from this work is not a simplifying answer, but an ethico-aesthetic-political call to keep “doing” therapy in the daily journey: an *ethos of presence* that remains open to immanence, an *aesthetic of groupality* that honours multiplicity, and a *politics of parrhesia* that dares to speak truth within the cracks of the present. These movements, however, cannot be prescriptive; what may hold in one relation could falter in another. Protocols, frameworks, and clinical certainties are not the final word — they are more like snapshots of a process that constantly shifts, shaped by the living realities of each ongoing encounter. At times, they might even misalign entirely, becoming the wrong thing to do. What remains, then, is the ongoing task of staying with the unfolding, of tending to the relational currents that move between us, and of daring to meet each moment with truth, even when it fractures what is known.

Ethical movement: toward the endurance of presence. Presence continues not as a passive state, but as an embodied disposition — a commitment to staying with the here and now, no matter how shattered or unresolved it may appear. In this trapizonga, presence was never merely a gesture of being-there; it emerged as an active refusal to abstract life into predetermined categories or outcomes. It is a practice of noticing — of attending to the imperceptible shifts and tensions within encounters, of holding open the cracks where multiplicity can thrive. This ethos of presence resists the pull of totalising resolutions and dares to dwell in the unfinished, the partial, the unfinalisable. Yet presence is also an attentional practice, a way of staying attuned to the subtle flows of affect and movement that shape encounters and resisting the demand for immediate coherence. It acknowledges the weight of history, yet it refuses to let that weight define the limits of what is possible. As a movement, presence stays because it is vital: it nurtures the conditions for care, thought, and sharedness to unfold, not as fixed forms but as living, breathing acts of becoming.

Aesthetic movement: resuming the braiding of groupality. Groupality remains as an aesthetic that weaves threads of life in their institutionalising motions — a dynamic negotiation of forces, intensities, and connections that cannot be reduced to the static image of coexistence. That is, groupality is not about smooth alignment or harmony but about the vitality of grounded divergence, of multiplicities moving together in contingent, improvised ways. In this trapizonga, groupality insisted on a division of the sensible that attends to the relational textures of being-with: the silences, frictions, and ruptures that refuse the closure of a monolithic narrative. Thus, groupality is more than an

aesthetic of relation; it is a collective reclaiming of the daily construction of institutions, reimagining them as provisional, lived practices rather than rigid structures. Groupality stays because it invites us to think and live collectively, embracing the messiness of alliances and the creative potential of moving through difference, continually remaking the institutional forces that shape our lives.

Political movement: sustaining parrhesiastic participation. Parrhesia persists as a politics of daring — not of grandstanding courage, but rather the deliberate, necessary act of speaking truth amidst power's entanglements. In this trapizonga, parrhesia does not settle for resolutions or simplifications; it breaks, unsettles, and holds open spaces for thought where silence, compliance, or resignation might otherwise dominate. This politics acknowledges the profound vulnerability of participatory truth-telling, as well as its capacity to disrupt and reshape the conditions of power. Parrhesia is not an isolated act of heroism, but a shared, collective practice — a way of sustaining the delicate balance between honesty and care, between rupture and relation. It calls us to resist the comfort of certainty, to speak even when the truth unsettles, and to remain vigilant to the subtle ways power manifests and reproduces itself. Parrhesia stays because it refuses the easy path of avoidance, insisting on an active, relational engagement with the fractures of the present. In doing so, it nurtures a politics of care that dares to embrace the transformative potential of truth and the tensions it inevitably brings.

Presence endures as the ethical force of the here-and-now; groupality enlivens institutionalisation by weaving multiplicity into the aesthetic rhythms

of shared life; and parrhesia brings us to the political edge of truth-telling, where words are risked and encounters make visible what was once obscured. These movements — presence, groupality, and parrhesia — remain grounded in the ethico-aesthetic-political commitment that guided this critique. Yet even these movements cannot hold themselves apart from failure. Drawing on schizoanalysis, this makeshift document resisted fixed procedures, instead attending to the movements that shape encounters as they unfold. Failure threads through each of these movements, not as a counterpoint but as an accomplice: testing the limits of presence, scattering the neat lines of groupality, and unsettling the certainties of speech. It breaks and multiplies, creating spaces where something else might arise.

So, failure is not an end — and certainly not the final word of this trapizonga. If it lingers in these movements, it does so as an immanent force that reshapes the ground it unsettles. Failure, in its assemblages, resists finality, instead offering a continual re-opening. It stretches the ethical by refusing to settle into fixed forms. It deepens the aesthetic by allowing the edges to blur. It sharpens the political by daring to sustain tension without retreating into comfort or quietude. Giulia, Nise, and René's narratives, as a clinical triptych of the institution of psychology, bear witness to the multiplicities that failure sets into motion. Their participations trace ethical tensions, aesthetic complexities, and political struggles woven by failure. In their stories, as in all our stories, the threads of failure weave through, shaping the textures of shared life in ways both seen and unseen. Their participation in this makeshift document carries these movements forward, inviting us all to trace how failure lingers, unsettles,

and reshapes the landscapes of our collective lives. The stories of Giulia, Nise, and René, like the movements of this trapizonga, push back against the colonising forces of psy practices, inviting a decolonising reimagining of institutional life.

In its complexities, the trapizonga moved with the currents of an existential cartography, charting the assemblages of failure as dynamic and contingent rather than prescriptive or fixed. And this is where this trapizonga must leave you: not with a completed map or a fixed resolution, but with an unfolding terrain — a flow spilling outward, inviting you to trace its contours as they continue to emerge. As failure insists, it also exoduces. It carries the movements of presence, groupality, and parrhesia beyond this page, into the relational flows already alive in the world. These movements were never meant to conclude, just as failure was never meant to settle into boundaries. Instead, they linger in suspension, breathing alongside the questions they invite you to hold: How will you stay? What will you braid? Who will you dare to address, and why will you speak? And finally, where will you let failure lead you?

*

It is almost time to stop writing, and I cannot say I will entirely miss the journey that led to the creation of this trapizonga. It has been a challenging experience for so many reasons, and wrapping it up comes as a relief to my bones and nerves. Yet, as a product, the trapizonga now inhabits me as an event. And even if I made a point of leaving in words the affective difficulties I have endured throughout this pathway, this makeshift document will always enact its becoming-always-other, continuously unfolding its trajectory. Years from now, I

will probably revisit it. Browsing its intricate lanes, I might ask myself: “Did I already know that, then?” or “Who wrote this passage?” — startled by the movements of a life that continues its clinamen, swerving, changing, yet resisting annihilation.

I told you before, my dear reader, my invitations were never demands. I hope some of them interested you. And I am itching to know which ones you engaged with, and which ones you refused. I will tell you a secret: you were the one that, in the end, kept me going. Like Ishmael aboard the Pequod — chasing whales and obsessions — or the Reader navigating Calvino’s labyrinthine tales, this journey has unfolded across vast oceans of thought and intricate mazes of meaning. And yet, through it all, you were not a mere reader, but a companion on this journey — the Sancho Panza to my Don Quixote — steadfast, grounding, and dedicated, even when the towering windmills of imagination loomed largest. So, thank you for enduring by my side — walking, pausing, and shifting alongside this trapizonga’s peripatetic turns.

Ultimately, I hope that what lingers of this work is not a sense of dogmatic clinical certainty, but minoritarian schizoanalytic traces — movements that break apart the unquestioned givens to meet the flows already stirring. May each line of critique in this trapizonga emerge not as wicked demolition but as a caring composition, harmonising with the institutions’ instituted layers and calling them back to life’s immanence ethically, aesthetically, and politically. Failure, then, is not an end but a beginning — a rupture that unsettles hardened norms, inviting us to nurture, to reimagine, and to stay with the movements of a shared life as it swerves and unfolds anew. And so, life insists.

Até logo. Ka kite anō. See you later.

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Appendix A

Information Sheet

[Print on Massey University departmental letterhead]

[Logo, name and address of Department/School/Institute/Section]

When Pain Cannot Be Translated: Consumers Discourses About Failed Clinical Psychological Interventions

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher

My name is Jeronimo Menezes, and I am a PhD candidate in Psychology and a Graduate Assistant in the School of Psychology at Massey University. I am conducting this research for my doctoral study, and I am supervised by Prof. Mandy Morgan, Dr Ann Rogerson and Dr Kirsty Ross. This sheet informs you about qualitative research interested in listening to people's previous stories of unsuccessful therapy to better inform professionals on future interventions. I am interested in the times when treatment doesn't work because I have previously worked as a therapist in Brazil and I am aware that there are many issues that we do not understand as well as we could. If you have any questions about the research, please feel welcome to contact Mandy or me. Our contact details are provided on the last page.

Project Description and Invitation

Good practice in clinical psychology requires professionals to choose the best available treatment they can offer to their clients. Despite the current effort in psychology to improve clients' care, many people feel that their treatment has not

been successful. This project will reflect upon the stories that ex-clients tell about previous failed therapy. People who have previously experienced unsuccessful therapy can help inform future professional decisions so that the treatment offered to others is better. If you have one of these stories and you are feeling well now, I invite you to consider participating in this project and telling me about your experience.

Participants

Participants will be recruited in the Manawatū and Wellington areas by trusted intermediate people who will hand out this information sheet. You have received this information sheet because someone that I trust knows you and thinks you might be interested in the project. If you are interested in taking part in this study, please get in contact with me.

You will be eligible to participate if you:

- are over the age of 18;
- are comfortable to tell your story in English;
- have a story of unsuccessful therapy in the past;
- are not currently in treatment;
- are not currently experiencing a crisis, i.e. you are feeling well, and your life seems to be going well at the moment.

I aim to recruit up to 12 people willing to share their stories in detail. If you decide to contribute to this study, you will have an opportunity to reflect on your experiences in a welcoming and respectful environment. However, remembering previous experiences of therapy may be uncomfortable or distressing to some people. If something like that happens, I will stay with you until it is safe and

comfortable for you to leave. I am also able to provide you with information about other forms of support that you can access after the interview if you wish.

Project Procedures

You can expect to spend up to two hours on activities related to the project that will involve:

- A first contact to make arrangements, when you will be able to ask any questions you have before deciding to move further in the project. This will take up to 15 minutes;
- A one-hour interview in person (although I will make sure I can be with you longer if you wish);
- Another 30 minutes to read and edit a transcript of our interview before you decide if I can use it in the study if you want to;
- Another 15 minutes to receive a summary of the findings and discuss it with me if you would like to.

The interview will be carried out in a public but quiet place, such as a private study room in a public library, or a room on the University campus where you will be able to talk freely. You should not worry about how long the interview takes as I will be available for as much time as you need to say all you want to tell me. The time, date and venue of the interview will be agreed upon by us. Support information and contacts relevant to your well-being will be provided to you, in case you feel like talking to someone about anything brought up in the interview. Even so, I will be available to support you with any issues related to the project, throughout the process, whether it be to answer a query or to talk about any

feeling that you may experience by remembering your past stories. You are also welcome to bring a support person with you to the interview if you wish.

Looking after your interview information

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded. I will later transcribe the audio files myself. You will have the opportunity to read, edit and approve the transcript. To protect your confidentiality, I will not transcribe any details that identify you. All the information will be stored on password protected computers or in a locked filing cabinet on the Manawatu campus of the university for five years, after which it will be destroyed. My supervisor will be responsible for destroying the information. The information collected will only be accessed by the research team. In all research writing, pseudonyms will be used for all individuals or the naming of particular places. Stories or accounts of specific experiences will not be recognisable to anyone except you. After the research is concluded, you will be contacted and offered a summary of the results of the study.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study any time prior to signing the Transcript Release Form;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts

Thank you for taking the time to consider our request. If you would like to take part in the project or has any questions, please contact:

Jeronimo Menezes

Phone: 06 356 9099 ext 85056

Email: J.Menezes@Massey.ac.nz

The main supervisor of this project is:

Prof. Mandy Morgan

Phone: 06 356 9099 ext 85058

Email: C.A.Morgan@Massey.ac.nz

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 19/37. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Negar Partow, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 04 801 5799 x 63363, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

[Print on Massey University departmental letterhead]

[Logo, name and address of Department/School/Institute/Section]

When Pain Cannot Be Translated: Consumers Discourses About Failed Clinical Psychological Interventions

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet that has been given to me. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name] _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Background

The interviewer will pay attention to how “failure” and “success” are construed in stories about past psychological interventions, regarding:

- the clinical/therapeutic methods narrated;
- the relationship with the professionals/institutions/other stakeholders;
- (inter)personal expectations of normalcy or healthy body/mind.

Other emergent points of analysis will be taken into consideration during the interview, especially those that come clearly connected to emotions. Attentive recognition (Kastrup, 2019) will be used as a strategy to connect with and give support to the interviewees, that will be encouraged to speak their minds without judgement.

Introduction and warming up

- Interviewer introduces himself and asks for the interviewee also to introduce themselves;
- Explanation about the research — address questions until clear;
- Check the voluntary agreement to participate in the interview, according to the signed consent form;
- Ask for permission to start recording, after reassuring the confidentiality of the data.

Ground rules and Invitation to narrating

In this part, the interviewer should express his willingness to listen to stories while explaining how the interaction will happen. The interviewee’s

narrative will be encouraged. The opening invitation should be similar to the following:

This is a conversation in which I am interested in the recollection of some experiences you had in the past. You are the person who knows about your own history here, so my work will be to support you and to help you tell it to your satisfaction, in as much detail as you like. For that to happen, we will follow one simple rule: whenever something comes to your mind, please speak it out, even if it does not seem important at that moment, or if you think it is not completely connected to what we are talking about. I will be paying close attention to your story, and I may interrupt you sometimes to ask you about specific points in it that I would like you to talk more about. Is that okay? [...]

So, you showed interest in participating in this interview because you have a previous story with therapy that did not go so well. Can you tell me that story?

Prompts

There follows a list of sample prompts to help frame and encourage the stories being told.

a) About medical history:

- *When did the symptoms begin? For how long?*
- *Did you have any first impression about the person that treated you? ... the place you were treated in?*
- *Does anyone around you also have this problem/illness/disorder?*
- *Did you have any other experience with therapy/counselling/other before this episode?*
- *Did you have to take any medication for this condition?*

- *What kind of treatment did you receive?*

b) About self-support and peer-support:

- *Did anyone know about the issues you were going through? Did they support you?*
- *When did you decide to tell family/friends/co-workers/people about what you were going through?*
- *When did family/friends/co-workers/people discover you were going through something? How did they respond to finding out?*
- *When did you first think that you might need help?*
- *When did you start to want to be treated/supported/heard? Did these feelings change over time? Why?*

c) About failure and success:

- *Now that you are feeling well, is there anything that you can think of about the therapy sessions you attended that seems to trouble you most?*
- *Did you expect the intervention to be different? How so?*
- *Was there anything that you liked about the therapeutic process?*

d) About the present and the future:

- *How does your previous experience of therapy influence your everyday life now?*
- *What do you hope for the future? Are your hopes and plans influenced by your history with distress/mental illness/psychological struggle?*
- *Do you have any coping strategies for difficult times nowadays? Did you learn them from someone else, or did you develop them yourself? What can you tell me about how you learned them?*

e) Other than these guiding questions, the interviewer will be attentive to words that may have clusters of meaning that are unclear and will ask specifically about those, to contextualise them:

- *What do you mean by [word]?*
- *What does [word] imply?*
- *How do you feel when you think about [word]?*

Conclusion

The interview will follow until it is enough for the interviewee. By the end of the interview, as soon as the interviewee is well and prepared to go, they will be given the Helplines and Local Mental Health Services brochure, with the most important services in New Zealand that offer information about mental illnesses and support to people:

Please let me know if you need any support. Although the services in this brochure are not connected to this research, they can also help you if you want to talk to someone else about what we talked here today. Thank you for participating. Your story makes the study valuable.

I've been bleeding too much,
I've been weeping like a dog,
Last year I died,
But this year I refuse to die!

— *Belchior, A Fortunate Soul, 1976*