

Special Issue: Art for the Sake of Care

Editors

Merel Visse, Section Editor
Drew University, U.S.A.

Elena Cologni, Guest Editor
Anglia Ruskin University, U.K.

<http://www.ijea.org/>

ISSN: 1529-8094

Volume 25 Special Issue 1.2

September 27, 2024

The Generative Nature of Parasites: An Experimental Essay on Parasites and Autotheory

Jennifer Clarke
Robert Gordon University, United Kingdom

Citation: Clarke, J. (2024). The generative nature of parasites: An experimental essay on parasites and autotheory. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 25(si1.2). <http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea25si1.2>

Abstract

This visual and poetic essay draws on the concept of the parasite from French philosopher Michele Serres, evolved into an artistic methodology within the author's ongoing project *Feminist Hospitalities* (2020-). Situated within the context of ongoing art-anthropological work in Japan, it works through concepts of para-sites and parasites and presents artistic research processes; an entanglement of theory and practice that involves transformations across image and language performatively 'translated' through digital tools, a para-sitic lecture performance, and images exhibited as the series *Parasites* (2021, 2023). The essay unfolds the creative process, grappling with being a parasite and creating para-sites, in the aftermath of disaster, and, particularly, the personal transformations related to motherhood. Rooted in language and (mis)understanding across forms and languages, the process reflects layering, appropriation, and poetic polyphony. The essay seeks to convey these complexities by presenting poetic texts alongside visual work, unpacking the challenge of describing creative processes retrospectively.



Figure 1. Parasites, Clarke, 2021. Mixed media digital print.



Figure 2. *It Could Go Wrong*. Clarke, 2021. Mixed media digital print.

Introduction

This experimental visual and text-based essay is rooted in an exploration of the concept of the parasite, and the ‘eventing’ of the concept, which I have developed and has arguably become an artistic methodology in the context of my long-term, ongoing project, *Feminist Hospitalities* (2020-). The essay frames this thinking with regard to the contexts and issues of my art-anthropological work in Japan, before focussing on the anthropological and philosophical concepts of para-sites and parasites, and an ethics of hesitation. Presenting elements of my creative process, and the entanglement of theory and practice, involves transformations of form: across image and language, and across multiple languages, performatively ‘translated’, filtered, and rendered through a variety of digital tools. It presents parts of what emerged via a para-sitic lecture performance (here offered up as a kind of script) alongside images eventually exhibited as a series, in a print publication, entitled *Parasites* (2021), and a kind of ‘concrete’ poem, presented as an artwork. I end the essay with a reflection on the work in relation to the notion of autotheory and practices of (un)learning.

This essay attempts, as essays must, to unfold some of the creative processes through which I explored and responded to questions of both *being* a parasite and being *parasited* as well as *creating* para-sites. As an anthropologist and artist working in Japan post-disaster, dealing with complex identity politics became connected to a changing sense of self; for me this is also related to becoming a mother, thus also, being parasited, hosting a parasite. This creative process began with reading (Serres) and speaking: it is rooted in language, in translation(s), in (mis)understanding across forms, as well as (mis)hearings and (mis)translations operating

across languages, often made (il)legible via cheap-and-easy-erroneous machine learning translation tools embedded in video conferencing. The development of this visual work echoed and was inspired by this layering, appropriation, interruptions, and corruptions, drawn together in a poetic polyphony, as I will show. I want to convey these qualities not only by *presenting* the ‘final’ works, a poetic text and visual artworks, but also by understanding the process, first by offering a ‘script’ as a trace of a lecture performance, but also in the attempt to unpack, to describe my creative processes retrospectively, processes which in the making and rethinking felt inherently like processes of *unlearning* (cf. Fournier, 2022).

Thus, the crux (in Japanese, the *kakushin*, 核心 or *kernel-heart*) at the centre of this article is this retrospective script: a digitally (mis)heard verbatim ‘document’ or transcription; an interrupted, parasitic recording — an offering of one version of one lecture performance. In the potentially para-sitic contexts of academic symposia as well as in art practice, but crucially, in the context of sharing work in development, online, I have developed intense, playful modes best described as lecture-performance. During the COVID pandemic, and as a new mother, I sought out structures of support through a course of study that was briefly available—thanks to that moment—in a ‘low-residency’ format.¹ The friendships, spaces of sharing, questioning, made this work possible, as it was delivered online, to a group of *familiar* artist-researchers, working across at least three languages (English, French, and Dutch) with several other native and known languages, including Finnish and Japanese. This script is followed, rather than preceded, by a discussion of para-sites and parasites, and my parasitic work/ process—the parasite as noise, as interruption. I finally reflect on this in relation to the relatively recently developed notion of autotheory, partially as a way to question ownership and authorship in artistic and social contexts.

The essay begins, however, by considering the context(s) for my ongoing project, for which I use the title ‘Feminist Hospitalities’, considering some of the challenges around feminism, and especially the language of feminism and gender in Japan. I use this umbrella term also to discuss earlier collaborative para-sitic practices with artists and mothers (especially artists who are mothers). In a concurrent bi-lingual, trans-pedagogical project of socially engaged art that I co-led, *Voicing Care* (cf. Clarke, 2024) we collectively addressed the politics of feminism and care through topics such as feminist anti-nuclear campaigns and the idealisation of mothers and motherhood in Japan (A context in tension with the ‘parasitical’ child, usually female, who remains at home; but that is another story). The *kernel-heart* of all this work are elements that can be called ‘autobiographical documentation’; practices not only of feminist art making, but also sense making, which I reflect on later in terms of autotheory. These functioned for me as a way to introduce distance, at moments of overwhelm, or overwhelming grief, or love, in a way that reminds me of how I tend to create

¹ ‘AdMa, An Advanced Masters’ of Artistic Research, undertaken at a distance, post-PhD, with Sint Lucas School of Art, Antwerp. 2020-2021

distance by using my camera when making self-portraits in moments of grief or despair; a form of self-care, perhaps, which I never share.

It's also important to note that *Parasites* occurred while navigating a challenging moment, and my own "response-ability" (as Donna Haraway reframes responsibility). First, under COVID lockdown in the chaos of multiple forms of isolation: from the world, from myself, pre-motherhood, and in response to other frankly shattering and hostile situations. How to understand the seismic shifts in my sense of self, as I became a mother? For the first time *in the same time* as grieving a traumatic miscarriage and cervical shock; grief stunted both by another pregnancy just few weeks later, and undermined by others' grief. How to connect with and be responsible for, or to, others? How to share (ot purge) myself of parasitic, lonely experiences, without words, without falling?

L- LOSS (M- Miscarriage, C- Cremation, P-Park)



Figure 3. *L-Loss*. Clarke, 2021. Mixed media digital print, from the *Glossary of Parasites*.

Feminist Hospitalities?

As introduced above, this work lives under the broad umbrella title *Feminist Hospitalities*, (hereafter, FH) an ongoing project and form of research-creation (cf. Clarke, 2024). This has served as a platform for exploring the intricate dynamics and tensions inherent in hospitality, examining how it is employed, and co-opted, in contemporary art contexts, particularly in the realm of relational or socially-engaged art and curatorial practices. Indeed, hospitality and related ideas such as conviviality have become central to such art practices, especially those that are, or claim to be, activated by audience participation. This operates not only in EuroAmerica, but is a transnational, rising phenomenon.

Most often, my FH projects are collaborative, and I may take on the roles of host and/or guest. This work and these ideas can be considered in relation to explicitly feminist ways of thinking about and practicing sociality and hospitality, which I have (co) written about elsewhere (Clarke & Gausden, 2020). I will not elaborate on these here (see also Clarke et al., 2020; Clarke, 2024). It is important to note, however, that in *European* contexts hospitality (along with care) has very often been employed to address and intervene in urgent social issues, such as the politics of migration and refugee crises (Ndikung, 2021). Yet hospitality is also co-opted by ‘luxury’ art fairs, from Marrakech to Hong Kong. In Japan, the culture of *omotenashi* (translated as hospitality; reception; treatment; service; or entertainment) offers a particular history and quality to hospitality in Japan, ostensibly involving a sense of mutual recognition, and therefore a sense of self. *Omotenashi* has been more simply defined as ‘to show care for others and to put their well-being and needs first.’ It is also clearly linked to commercial practices, where the roles of host (very often women) and guest (a customer, or a tourist) are differently conceived. When one is an outsider, understood as a foreigner (*gaijin*), there are other layers of Japanese hospitality to consider. This relates to the concept of *uchi* and *soto*. *Uchi* means the home, or the inside, so by extension refers to the group to which one belongs. *Soto*, on the other hand, is something outside, or other. It’s important that this distinction is made on a daily basis in Japan and forms the basis of many social codes.

The approach I present here emerged from this wider anthropological *and* artistic work, addressing the absence of feminist criticality or perspectives in relational aesthetics (Reckitt, 2013) by examining hospitality that relates specifically to women’s work and roles in contemporary art. More explicitly, the notion of a *feminist* hospitality felt even more urgent to me after becoming a mother, trying to make time to make art, maintain connections, and develop collaborations with Japanese women artists, finding and making nourishing and careful connections and communities. Key collaborations for me have involved the creation or curation of spaces where we wanted to collectively care for one another, addressing shared issues: identity, work and labour, inclusiveness, care, and reciprocity. I have both led and been invited to participate in transnational, bilingual, collaborative projects, most significantly, Voicing Care (‘voicingcare.net’) and a film project, screened on e-flux artist cinema, called ‘Speculative Fiction: Practicing Collectively.’ All of this is context for how my work contributes to an alternative, feminist, *theory* of hospitality, but a theory that is, more importantly, a practice.

More directly, this work is about my experiences—my relationships—as an artist and anthropologist working/living in Japan, and as a mother, making art. This is personal, intimate work that has roots in relationships I have developed with other artists, curators, mothers, and others, mostly over the last ten years. It is intimate partly because it is a reflection on/of my changing sense of self, especially in Japan, where I have lived and worked in spates since 2003, and most obviously, becoming a mother at the end of 2018. But another of its intimacies is no doubt because of the context of my research after ‘3.11,’ the ‘triple disaster’ of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear ‘accident’ in northeast Japan, in March

2011. So for me, it is rooted in a particular question of witnessing, including the aftermath of loss and death, and developing art works in response, which I have written about with reference to ideas about endurance and resilience (Clarke, 2020).

I am most interested in women's experiences. While the activities of mostly male-dominated arts organisations generated important debates about Japanese art post-disaster, research suggests that a 'culture of disaster' has emerged, and that this "new phase of cultural production" and its discourses around risk and resilience are inherently masculine (Koikari, 2019). My personal experience bears this analysis out. In projects *about* and *by* Japanese women, often explicitly feminist activists, it is men (with authority, voices, roles), who speak. Or at least, speak first. What might be framed as the anthropological part of my art-anthropology project, centres on understanding the diverse roles of women in such contexts, the influence and versions of feminism, and femininities, considering the "invisible" labour at work. Who gets to speak? When, where, and how are decisions made? Part of this research, then, questions whether, and how, a *feminist* hospitality is possible in Japan. This is happening (if only in Tokyo-pockets, like work by *Back and Forth Collective* with whom I have had the pleasure of collaborating). When I had the privilege of presenting some of this work to a national anthropology network, a room of primarily Japanese academic anthropologists and graduate students, I was invited to consider the difference, if any, between a *generous* and a *feminist* hospitality. Could the word 'generous' be used, instead? The implicit question, I imagine, was why do I use the word 'feminist' so explicitly?

Since the 1950s, loanwords, mainly from Western languages transcribed into *katakana* (the form of writing used for foreign words) have substantially increased—particularly those of English origin. To give a relevant example: the Japanese language dictionary, *Kojien*, officially integrated the word 'gender' as a Japanese loanword in 1991. This one word has sparked controversy, possibly in direct relation to its potential to bring about socio-cultural change, according to Eto, a Japanese political theorist (2016). Despite government proposals in the 1990s to paraphrase gender and other borrowed terms into more accessible *Japanese* equivalents, the Japanese public consistently prefers adopting the loanword 'gender' (*jenda*) over paraphrased counterparts (Okamoto, 2004, cited in Eto, 2016). Although initially embraced by feminists and 'equality' proponents aiming to reshape Japan, the term *jenda* had triggered opposition, mainly from social conservatives intent on maintaining the status quo—even, Eto suggests, pushing for a kind of reversion to pre-war Japanese cultural practices (which is yet another story, given Japan's fascinating history of anarch-feminisms, violently quashed in the 1920s, when, an aggressive capitalist programme of Japanese modernity prioritised industrial automation over personal autonomy and the Eurocentric male-female gender binary became central to Japanese colonial ideology, cf. Nickols, 2023 n.p.). In the 1990s, gender became a focal point for the backlash from Japanese reactionaries. Japanese feminists termed the resistance against gender, in *katakana*, as '*bakkurasshu*' (backlash) (Mitsui & Asakura, 2012, as cited in Eto, 2016). The concept permeated government policies, prompting efforts by reactionaries to obstruct its usage and curb calls for gender equality. Thi

is, indeed, *more than a hesitation* to use ‘feminism, since even the word ‘equality’ is not used in policy and politics, replaced by a Japanese phrase that can be translated as ‘co-participation in decision making.’ Many of the (Japanese, young, female) artists and curators I met, interviewed, or had casual conversations with, are hesitant, however. Feminism is ‘unpopular’ there. It is often aligned with ‘other’ minority perspectives, such as LGBTQ+ politics. I use the term feminist in solidarity with my Japanese friends and colleagues who work as artists and activists in Japan and internationally, who use the term. As mentioned above I have collaborated with the *Back and Forth Collective* (Sakamoto Natsumi, Taki Asako, and Homma Mei) based in the UK, Japan and Indonesia, who are actively engaged in exhibitions, events, and feminist methodologies and collaborative research. Their focus on gender issues is explicitly feminist, through screenings and discussions on the Japanese feminist movement, gender and migrants, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, often working through film, across languages.

A Glossary of Parasites | Edited Transcription | Lecture Performance

Note: The italicised text relates to text presented visually, on screen. The standard font is an edited version of a spoken script, a performed reading of Michel Serres’ work *Parasites* alongside other material. The text maintains misspellings as traces of mishearings. Some text is emboldened to aid reading and suggest emphasis, a careful slowing down of pace. Text in [brackets] relates to sound recordings played in/over the performative reading. The images from the original performance are scattered throughout this article; two have been selected to book-end excerpts from the ‘glossary’ structure.

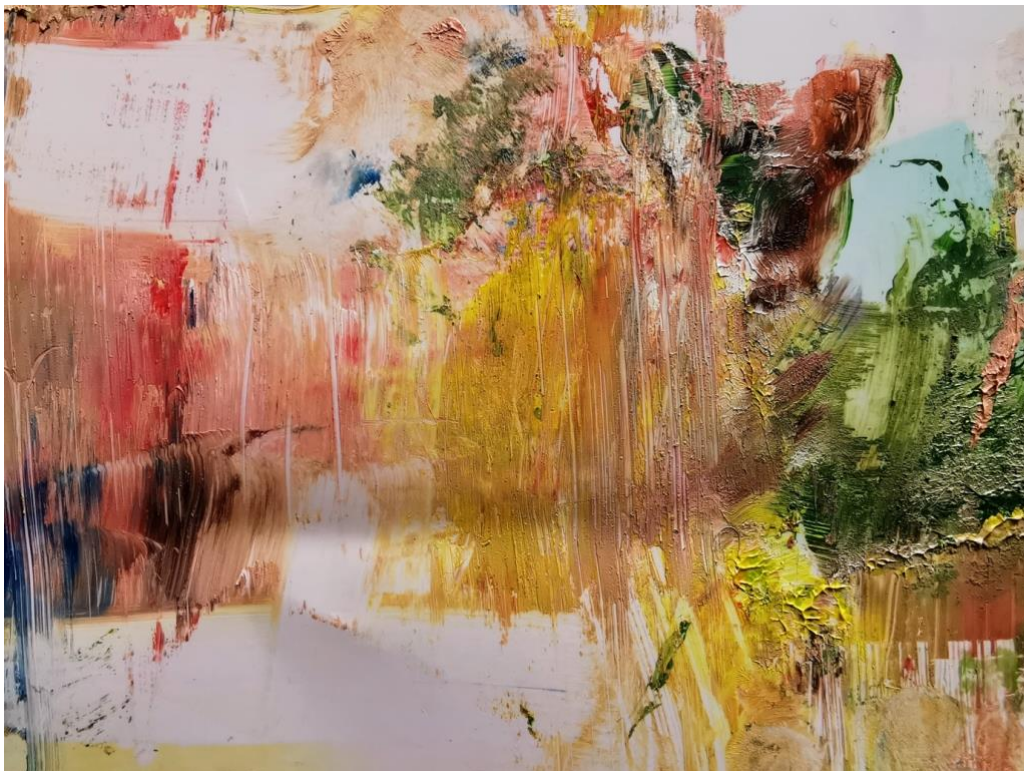


Figure 4. Clarke, 2021. Mixed media digital print, from the *Glossary of Parasites*.

The para-site is the hyphen, or noise, that exists between any two ‘sites’, be they self-other, good-evil, or individual-institution.

[screen]

Glossary, Gloss: ‘word inserted as explanation, translation, or definition.’
‘From glogh- thorn, point, that which is projected.’

“Although this story passes through my body, it is not mine alone. Nor am I entirely by myself in the re(w)ritings that become this text. No parasite is. Repeatedly” (Pfohl, 1992, *Death at the Parasite Café*)

This is a work in progress, this inevitably is. It is *electric* [lecture] performance; you may choose to have on the *whathmecallit* subtitles or not, that's up to you, so here we go.

Can you hear me?

res-of-chaos Res: Latin; feminine : Object, thing; matter, property. The Parasite is a res-of-chaos, a chaotic thing una cosa caotica パラサイトはレスオブカオス

A glossary of parasites: a series of translations, explanations.

Glossary can mean tongue can mean hearsay can mean an obscure or foreign word. *that which is projected*. Glosses were originally written between the lines, later, in the margins. Glossing can also suggest a deceitful explanation, in a ‘bad’ sense, a commentary that might disguise something, shift meaning – this sense coloured by another definition of gloss - something glistening, that has lustre, that is smooth...

And although this story passes through my body, it is not mine alone. Nor am I entirely by myself in the re writings that have become this text.

No parasite is, *repeatedly*. Translating into Japanese the orders shift. *There is no parasite*, it is repeated.

An anthropological *para dash site* “*always involves a material dimension; a kind of labour or making of things out of the way they are supposedly or otherwise given*” (Marcus, 2008, p. xx).

This quote caught my imagination and was the starting point for my interest in parasites, at all, in fact. What does it mean to make things *out of the way they are supposedly or otherwise given*? What is the nature of a site, the nature of ‘alternative’ sites? The nature of sites that hold excessive things?

‘Hold space.’

This is a para-site; and an opportunity, within anthropology, to make things out of the way they are supposedly or otherwise given.

[sound of birdsong recordings]

The parasite is the third; all the birds together. it is indefinitely the third.

[sigh]

Birdsong emerges, like love coming out of a black box. like poros, coming out of the conjugated box of hunger, the box of plenitude, the box of resource.

Cathexis

Oh, God.

In the case of mourning, the subject must gradually withdraw the cathected energy from the last subject and attach it to a new, loved object, or, risk an extreme form of melancholic incorporation, in which, all the energy is directed inward – precluding any further identification with anything.

All the energy, *all the energy is directed inwards.*

I like that the parasite, *a res of chaos*, or a chaotic thing, this *reservoir* [of] chaos is a *res of chaos* in Japanese or Dutch or Italian or Finnish. And this rise or res, this way, of chaos, this feminine object, this feminine thing, this property of chaos, is something that I've been exploring. I'm always trying to find a way of *being capable* of holding it.

he breaks the dialogue

There is noise in the system. There are parasites.

The observer is perhaps the inobservable; being supplanted he becomes observed. This. this is the position of the parasite. This is the position, or the journey, of the parasite, which emerges like .. liminality at the threshold. At the threshold of ambiguity. *In a passage...* in the between, in the cities of light and shade.

Between identity and time. *But someone or something must intervene in these cities of light and shade.*

but what do you want to say? Say it clearly.

behind them they leave fragments; pieces of texts and references. Tomorrow there will only be quotations.

The intervention complicates the system, it multiplies the borders, enters into a bifurcating system, then the system becomes more complex—it gets more noisy and is exposed to more parasites and this growth is fatal. We must intervene again. A third system is built. It never stops *that is the system*. it is breathing. it continues. it breaks, it breaks down. The breakdown that happens to the one who is preparing for the breakdown.

Duality D

the introduction of a parasite in a system is equivalent to the introduction of a noise.

What I call the dividual pertains to *particulate*—particular—social orders and the dismembered corpus of the in-dividual. The individual is quite literally [jewel], dual, multiple. The duality present within the individual is localised in the figure of the parasite; or the third party, that permits the *imaginary coherence* of this dyadic structure.

Sight. Site. to remain whole.

The parasite is therefore the noise that exists between any two sites; be they self other good evil or individual institution.

E Eggs?

All the eggs a woman (born with eggs) (will ever carry form in her ovaries while a four-month-old foetus in the womb of the mother. This means our cellular life as an egg begins in the womb of our grandmothers; that each of us spent five months in our grandmothers room [womb] and she in turn formed within the womb of her grandmother. We vibrate with the rhythms of the mother's blood before (s)he herself is born. And this pulse [poses], the threat of blood, that runs. Runs all the way back through the grandmothers. to the first other. The first mother?

[The] Eventing [of] concepts?

In my work, I place a significant emphasis on *presence* and on process. By *eventing* I mean creating and *holding space*; spaces that are capable of holding; spaces that allow an intensification, an encounter. The eventing of ideas for me involves trying to problematise apparently self-evident concepts. For me, the body is a starting point. Our bodies, the body, our ecologies of practice.

How do concepts intersect with or *impinge upon* (to borrow a phrase from Isabelle Stengers) the becoming of the work?

How does it work with or for 'the' audience? Is it necessary for my works' becoming? Necessary for me? (Do I need an audience?) And if so, who is that? I mean anyone outside of this or these rooms of ours, these boxes?

Problematising apparently self-evident concepts is partly what drew me to the parasitic; in relation to rethinking ethical possibilities, for example. Because of course a parasite is generally perceived as something negative; the word conjures images of tiny but menacing creatures like tapeworms or infectious microorganisms, which penetrate, infiltrate our bodies, eliciting a sense of harm and disgust, and consequently, a compulsion to eliminate them. The essential character of parasitism is a non-reciprocal subtractive relationship with an unwilling or non-consenting host. These associations often transfer onto the ways in which we think of parasites metaphorically. But I think it's interesting to step back from this instinctive range of associations and ask whether, under the right circumstances, a parasitic relationship might be beneficial? And when it might be essential? It might as Serres says, be the 'atomic' relation. Can a parasite help the flourishing of a social group? It's also possible to think about the parasite as a means of opening up new ways of interrogating social relationships. To ask, is it productive to take rather than always to give?

There is a Heaviness (Feminist parasites)

There is a heaviness to the parasitic relation. [*Raskaus*] means heaviness in Finnish. It also means pregnant.

Discussions of maternity within feminist literature includes addressing enforced maternities, and their refusal: from Simone de Beauvoir's horror of motherhood in *The Second Sex* to ways in which German Greer has articulated women—hyper feminine women or hyper-femininity—as parasitical. These offer us ways of thinking about pregnancy, and our bodies and our babies, as parasites; parasites which take over, which create disturbing dreams and bleeding gums and fatigue. [the slowest down].

They make the question of individuality moot because we become *more than one*.

To love is not only to give but also to take. What kind of writing is possible in a time of crisis? that is a question people have been answering with their bodies all over the world for a very long time.

here we are, let's see what unfolds. what is the page for? what is a sentence for? right now I don't know ha

How to wash a heart (a dictated machinetranscription of an excerpt of Banu Kapil's beautiful poem, recorded in two languages and layered over each other is played over:

[image]

*Give me something to eat I'm so hungry I call out to my mother, call my mother;
the conditional the conditional care conditional clear the conditional care*

of even these imaginary payments excreted hormone excludes hormonal load.

am I safe with you? You are like a baby crawling on the bumpy carpet.

Am I my own mother, actually?

Imagine a baby developing so rapidly that by nightfall it has ripped through the pale blue smock to evolve beyond the limits of the human

I remember how my mother woke me up so early to look at the bloody stars.

Kapil *one* [won] of the most well-known awards for British poetry, the TS Eliot Prize for the collection *how to wash a heart*. A British Indian poet, she lives in the States and this collection depicts the uncomfortable dynamics between an immigrant and her white middle-class host. In the collection she's addressing her liberal host exploring how, I quote, *it's exhausting to be a guest* in somebody else's house forever. She said that she began to imagine and fictionalise a story of hospitality of being welcomed and welcoming in, *that is also at odds to the situation itself*. She wanted to find a way to write about the discrepancy between being in spaces that outwardly present themselves as inclusive, open to outsiders or minority presences, but actually she said, in the lived experience of inhabiting them

it is excruciating.

H hesitation

In my exploration of parasites I'm not trying to argue that his system is itself is, can be, should be, inherently *ethical*—or inherently valuable. It's more about trying to think about working with an *ethics of hesitation*: where we reserve judgement in situations where an apparent instance of parasitism presents itself. So whether the parasite is good or evil, the suggestion is that identifying it with a particular person or thing takes away our attention from the from the real spread of parasitic relations.... so which relations? and where? that are parasitic can or should be tolerated. What is para sited/cited in turn? And how what kinds of parasitic chains could be promoted through participation.... A parasitic ethics demands hesitation before judgment.

H hooked?

[]

L Lack oops

You are my sunshine (song with my son)

[A recording of a conversation between me and art-worker-researcher SW, Sunshine, is played:

SW: *“like, it's never a straightforward relationship, of taking and giving I mean.*

*And also yeah mother and child obviously, but it almost feels like what you're saying [about Michele Serres' analysis] it doesn't have to be [pejorative?] pejorative because it's kind of like **I really like the word lack, the lack you know.***

it is just this void or something it just sucks it up ... and and and

so let's think from the position of the lack

where what can I do. there's a negative spaces in between things.

I'm just thinking about that you know”

J: *I think the parasitic *hesitant ethics* is a mode of working in the minor key. I was going to tell you a story about five days in April in Spain, but instead, I'll pause.*

I read yesterday in a glossary of film sounds a definition of silence. What's beautiful about the definition I remember, was that it's so explicit that it requires effort and attention to bring silence – in order to tune into other ways of understanding, [space] feelings. and for me the material dimension of my work, silence has been really important.

[tears?]

S's – situation, subjects, kisses, misses

A situation *subjects* subjects.

The situation is a meeting place or gathering. A situation is an event; constituted by a variety of parasites, that remain hidden. Just here.

[sound of a deep sigh]



Figure 5. Clarke, 2021. Mixed media digital print, from the *Glossary of Parasites*.

[sound of a Kiss]

Misunderstanding creates distance. The title is like the book a lecturer puts between [him]self and his public. The lecture isn't about the book, but the book creates some distance.

I'm finished.

Para-sites and *Parasites*

I have been influenced by the American anthropologist George Marcus' discussion of ethnographic para-sites, described as sites of *alternative* knowledge practices:

a space of excess [...] a site of alternativity in which anything, or at least something different, could happen [...] when a researcher “actively creates a field of inquiry “and then follows it” in a way that “always involves a material dimension, a kind of labour, or a *making of things out of the way they are supposedly or otherwise given*. (Marcus, 2000, p. x).

In a recent article, Marcus (2021) reflects on an example of a student's para-sitic anthropological fieldwork—a dialogue, if not a collaboration, with what he calls alternative

“domains of reception” (most often, for anthropology, in collaboration with NGOs or government), where the audience is also the subject of research (here, American lawyers addressing the death penalty). The reflection focuses on forms of knowledge production and bringing collaborators into the university in a seminar context. In a performance of epistemic practices, he emphasises how it is not through formal presentations but rather through informal, open, ‘cross talk’, that the para-site operates. This discussion relates to the changing nature of anthropological research and the significant shift to prioritising ‘engagement’: from being an observer, documenting one’s ‘subjects’ to, if not activism, at least the license to engage. Such experimental ethnography is certainly an intervention; the para-site in this sense is an event, or eventing, a place where articulations of practice are shared. For Marcus, it is this impetus that makes it possible to “enrich similarities and disentangle differences” between respective inquiries (Marcus, 2021, p. 45). A para-site in his experimental sense is a gathering of specific ‘communities of reception’ whose practices are somehow lateral or adjacent,. The para-site then is where complex relationships of partnership and collaboration are performed, are created, through sharing a common object.

For my own para-sitic practices, and cross-talk between art, anthropology and activisms, I employ other parasites, and use similar language, for example, ‘paragogy.’ This a mode developed by artist and educator Neil Mulholland (2019) as a set of developmental principles that offer a flexible framework for peer learning and knowledge production in art. I have also found the multi- or ‘indisciplinary’ crossing notion *transpedagogy* useful, following Portuguese artist Pablo Helguera. He argues that the term pedagogy is employed in a too-vague and ambiguous way, defining *transpedagogy* as “the migration of the discipline and methods of education into art-making, resulting in a distinct medium where the artwork is constituted simultaneously of a learning experience or process and a conceptual gesture open to interpretation” (Helguera, 2010 p.3). I have used *transpedagogy* as a name for some of my art-anthropological, trans-national, para-sitic projects, such as *Voicing Care*, which sought to create temporary communities of artists, designers, mothers, others, where bi-lingual, translation itself has been described, by a participant, as ‘an act of care.’

‘Para’ then is key. It means by the side of, beside, or alongside, but it can also imply an alteration, perversion, or simulation. The essence of parasitism as generally understood lies in its non-reciprocal nature, characterised by taking without giving, as a subtractive relationship with an unwilling host. For Michel Serres, however, the parasitic relation is the ‘most common’, or ‘atomic’ social relation. In his work *Parasites*, he explores its presence in ancient customs and via habits of hospitality and conviviality, playing with the dual meaning of the French term ‘hôte’ for both ‘host’ and ‘guest.’ In French, the term parasite encompasses four distinct but related meanings: the poor, ‘permitted’ to dine alongside the rich; a ‘freeloader’ who appropriates from others; an organism that extracts (vitality, life) from its host; and, finally, a disruptive noise, or static. For Serres, these various meanings are intricately linked, so that if we refer to one type of parasite, we implicitly invoke the others. This gist of the book is that parasitical relations are always fundamentally unequal, and are so

in multiple, non-linear ways. *Parasites* employs fable to explore these relationships and the dynamic between a parasite and its 'host.' Serres' poetic writing undercores the sense of multiplicity, going beyond metaphorical use of the parasite as a scientific concept. Indeed, it is by being pests, he suggests, that "minor groups become major players in public dialogue" and argues that the parasite is responsible for creating diversity, for the complexity vital to life; that it is the parasite, generating a potential *third* position, can create new logics.

I was drawn to these rich, sometimes counterintuitive ideas as a means of exploring motherhood and questions this has brought me, around interdependence, care, shared bodies, and material intimacies, as well as the politics of the 'relational' in art. In the context of socially engaged art, what are considered 'ethical' and caring practices usually hinge on often presumed notions of fundamental equality between artist, host, guest, and audience; what is important for me to note is that the idea of the parasite challenges such assumption, by pointing to the ever-evolving relations of mutual interdependency. I have argued that many intentionally socially engaged art practices too-often rely on preconceived notions of an idealised *equality* among actors. In certain contexts equality becomes an expectation or presumption, something to be pursued, maintained, and restored when destabilised. Attention towards the parasite counters such presumptions and makes space to acknowledge relationships of ongoing inequality. It raises ethical questions that, as others have argued elsewhere (Burton & Tam, 2016), give rise to economic ones too, since ethical systems tend to function on the basis of implicit economic logics. Or at least a relation of reciprocity such as that inherent in gift-exchange, a much discussed practice, in anthropology (Sansi, 2016).

But also, most importantly, attention toward parasitic relations demands that we pause, and consider an ethics of hesitation (Burton & Tam, 2016). For my work, this means introducing pause, to reflect, acknowledge, and question relationships, roles, and voice. Who speaks for whom? How, and why? It means identifying and accepting the constantly transforming relations of mutual interdependency (between artists, anthropologists, families, funding, institutions, audiences, before we even consider making or the more than human). Rather than striving for a static ideal, the parasite encourages an understanding of relationships as a dynamic interplay of forces in constant flux, requiring adaptive responses.

Interruptions: The parasite is the noise in the system of relations.

If the conceptual cornerstone of this artistic work is the notion of the parasite, that must include the parasite in the sense of noise, attending to its temporal qualities and disruptive nature, to noise in the system, seen as a creative interference, or interruption. Indeed acknowledging and using interruptions generatively became a critical methodology for me; this is where I see the parasite operating as a kind of excessive condition. Incorporating Serres' writing as a kind of parasitic device in my artistic research and practice, I developed ways of employing the parasitic as a means of working with/in transformations, or corruptions (of programs, forms)—for example documenting and working with mishearings,

(mis)translations, in experimental and playful ways, and moving between or across words/text/images, description and speculation. The core of the performative ‘scripts’ that follow is based on recorded readings, often close readings from *Parasites*, as well as other poetic text, recordings of related domestic sounds, songs, conversations, direct interruptions, birdsong. An important method involved using various quotidian computing tools, like machine learning and translation tools, to ‘speak back’ to the interruption, static, and noise, allowing not only invited, considered, sense of hesitation, but just by staying open to glitches, dissonance, friction, excess of “alternative” para-sites and knowledge practices that manifest disruptions via machine learning language errors, translations, and confusion. My audience described this as “play and proliferation” with material, playing with the intended and unintended, with chance, where noise became a disruption to a ‘force.’ Can the parasite, then, be a way of acknowledging (or indeed *is* already) the emergent difference in relation?

The writing presented below, along with a selection from several series of images made around the same time, is a version of a developing lecture performance, a series, constructed from rehearsals/recordings of performative readings. There were two primary parasitic elements to this reading process, allowing for pauses, play, attention, questions. The first interruption was listening to and singing with my child, an infant (18 months old or so when I started). His discoveries, in language, and in the world

boo, oh boo! He breaks the dialogue

effected not only interruptions to my readings, performances, and thinking, but also provoked and *created* meaning, a new logic, through multiple hesitations.

The second pivotal element for this work involved tools of trans-national communication, specifically trans-national video conferencing across time zones and translation, mistranslation, understanding, and misunderstanding, across multiple languages, which remains a critical part of my art-anthropological projects (and my life at the time, in an often covid-isolated little household, with two languages already present in the everyday—English and Italian), including intense bilingual translation work across Japanese and English, for other projects. Primarily the text draws on Serres’ philosophical text *Parasites* but also incorporates interruptions into those readings, of various sorts, from my son, to birdsong. It is constructed via (mis)hearings made through machine learning recordings and/or translations, literally responding to and appropriating, at times, the text.

My creative process in this project developed *interdependently*, chaotically, and carefully. Parasitical, performative reading, sometimes alone, sometimes with others, or with my child. This involved documentation, recordings, online lecture performances, and various methods and aesthetic forms such as layering, appropriation, poetic polyphony, all filtered through obtuse machine learning/ listening, and autobiographical documentation. This parasitic approach not only influenced my artistic practice, intervened in or disrupted the making of

work (that is always-already parasitic in that it is about, and represents, experiences of motherhood, including miscarriage, and breastfeeding), but rather, the interruptions, corruptions, and transformations are what enabled the work, are the work. It was a means of attending to questions of *response-ability* (Haraway, 2016), exploring *how do we understand the context we are embedded in as we are embedded in it?* The parasite brings to life the complicity, or co-imbrication, of making for me impels me to ask: What parasitic relations might exist in this group? Who's hosting? Who's asking which questions? Who is *leaching from* whom (and how and why)? Is there discrimination in the negotiation? What is shared? I mean: As a white, western, academic, woman, can I even *talk* about troubling the boundaries of (Japan's) patriarchal culture? Do I bring a perspective that is entirely outside others' embedded experiences of patriarchy? Is it a valuable perspective? I remain parasitic, *Open to both*, holding open spaces, contestable practices, and thus, coming to the *problem* of knowledge itself, perhaps (and the question of love—as Serres might have said).



Figure 6. Clarke, 2021. Mixed media digital print, from the *Glossary of Parasites*

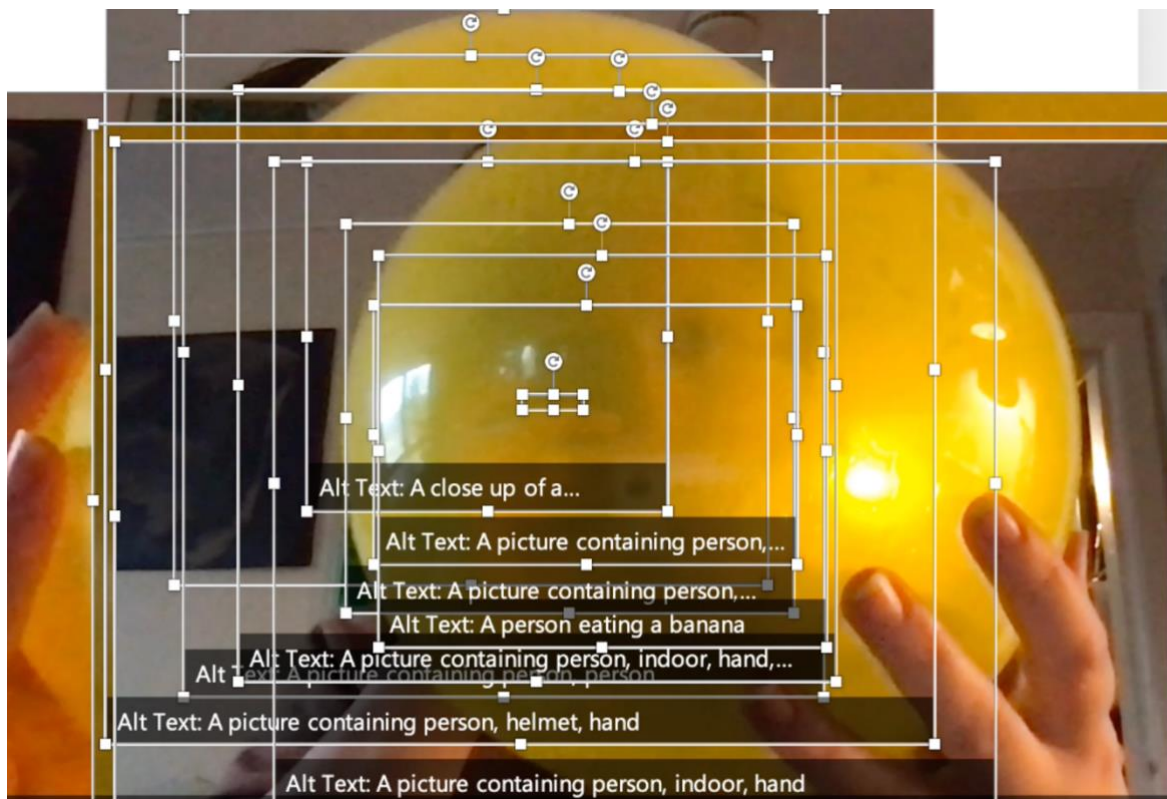


Figure 7. Clarke, 2021. Mixed media digital print, from the *Glossary of Parasites*.

B – Birds

All the birds together (siah) 

the parasite is the third it is indefinitely
the third

birdsong emerges

like love coming out of a black box
like porous coming out of the conjugated
box of hunger
the box of plenitude
the box of resource

Figure 8. – B Birds -Clarke, 2021. Mixed media digital print, from the *Glossary of Parasites*.

POEM: The introduction of a parasite in a system is equivalent to the introduction of a noise.

This (sort of 'concrete') poem was created via a series of lecture performances, drawing on Michel Serre's work Parasites, (mis)translations, interruptions and other noisy interventions.

Although this [story] passes through my body, it is not mine alone. Nor am I entirely [by] myself in the re(w)ritings that become this work.

No parasite is.
(There is no parasite).
Repeatedly.

Intuition speaks. Silently, softly, emerges, so as near silence.

The parasite is a res-of-chaos! A chaotic thing

and a way, between. It is il trattino, o il rumore, it is the hyphen, or noise *che esiste tra due siti qualsiasi* that exists between two. Between self and other, good and evil, individual and institution. Between bodies, between bodies of matter.

I'm speaking, polyphonically.

Poro(u)s knocked up poverty; she gave birth to love, emerging from a black box, the conjugative box of hunger and plenitude. Box of resource.

This love, this parasite, this viable foetus, this unviable child. Flesh become dust. *Vlees wordt stof. Aarde.*

Stone deities shaped liked children, silently observe an increasing sequence of noises. The trees, listening, too, hear the first little noise, a sob. She can't breathe. A parasite chases it out – erasing an order and reconstituting another: the breakdown. The arguments begin, and never really stop *e non ci fermiamo, mai, veramente.*

The city of being, of ontology, brings us to atoms.

The theory of relations brings us to the parasite: He is the relation, he is what passes: quasi-object quasi-subject. He [always, he?] is the law of the series, the son of lack, of passing, passage; pass and lack. *Ik hou echt van het woord gebrek, deze leegte. "Dat het omhoog schreeuwt"* this lack that screams, shouts in the void. Emptiness sucks it up.

Behind them, they leave fragments: shards of text, shadows of references, facing towards anger or towards tomorrow. Tomorrow, there will only be quotations. There is noise in the

system, there are parasites. That can happen, that can happen by chance (and perhaps that is what chance is?)

and as it was now in the beginning is now and ever should be world without end.

Someone or something must intervene in these cities of light and shade. But the trouble with knowing what to say, and saying it clearly and fully, is that clear speaking is generally obsolete.

The observer becomes the in-observable, being supplanted, becomes observed; this is the position of the parasite. The parasite is what living together is: *ce qu'est la vie, ce qu'est vivre ensemble mais, vraiment?*

And as I said before, and as I've said before: this the law that we have followed since the beginning

sigh.

We are going backwards again.

Who is love?

She is a relation.

The intermediary, the intervention that complicates the system, that multiplies the borders.

We enter into a bifurcating system that becomes more complex, gets more noisy. We are exposed, to more parasites, and this growth can be fatal. She must intervene, again. A third system is created, with the branching of parasites, it never stops, the system, never stops ... breathing.

Birdsong emerges

like love, coming out of that black box:

What do you say now, old midwife? Who is love?

The mouth

is the organ of the parasite, previously used for eating, and for speaking.

A close-up. A close-up of a picture, a close-up of a picture containing a person, a person become.

A close-up of a breast, a heart, my heart, a hand. And him: a mouth.

Everything is there, everything is there where it belongs. Mmmmm mm... .. bigger bigger bigger!

“You owe me.” You, of, me: *tu me dois, vous deux, moi ; vocês os dois eu, vocês os dois, eu?* You to me you two me. We are two, you: pure noise.

Boo oh Boo! He breaks the dialogue.

Between spirit and breath, noise interrupts, straightens it out, rights its wrongs. The introduction of a parasite in a system is equivalent to the introduction of a noise.

Everything is there, everything is there where it belongs.

Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art

The parasitic is a way in to the personal-theoretical, or autotheoretical research. I am drawn to its incidental and “gut-centered” nature, interested in the implications for the integration of theory with personal experience (Fournier, 2021). In the book *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, and through reflections on her own practices described briefly a kind of “unlearning” (2022) Lauren Fournier explores a variety of ways art and life and theory mingle, in the incorporation of everyday life into theory, echoing bell hooks' perspective. Autotheory, as Fournier defines it, breaks down barriers, validating bodily experiences as integral to knowledge production. It is: “the integration of the auto or “self” with philosophy or theory, often in ways that are direct, performative, or self-aware (Fournier, 2021, p. 11). Autotheory from this perspective is an integration of theory and philosophy with autobiography, with reflections, or representations on/of the body, and other so-called personal, explicitly subjective modes. The nature of autotheoretical research, thus, is *personal*-theoretical, incidental, gut-centered. It exposes the interconnectedness of art and life, theory and practice, and the self and research. This aligns with the perspectives of feminist artists and scholars who have persistently advocated for breaking down artificial distinctions between these realms. As she notes, “Autotheory reveals the tenuousness of maintaining illusory separations between art and life, theory and practice, work and the self, research and motivation, just as feminist artists and scholars have long argued” (2021, p. xx).

According to this criterion, the term autotheory makes sense applied to my practice, in so far as its feminism is based in making the private public, allowing the personal to interrupt, to shape, to speak, to be heard. To *allow for* interruptions. Of course, disclosing and sharing lived experiences, “so-called personal” issues, is what allows us to see what is structural and systemic—from the idealisation of motherhood to traumas connected to childbirth, or miscarriage, or loss; each of which at the edges of motherhood, hard to grasp, and yet can be

so isolating for women, whose experiences are too often unsupported, unacknowledged (and exacerbated by institutional issues, in poorly staffed or badly managed, under-resourced British hospitals, as well as academia). This goes for the challenges of work and motherhood, challenges specific to art and culture, but go way beyond this, is the search for community, and the *reconciliation of myself* after having a child. Questioning autotheory leads to the complicated question of what constitutes philosophy and theory in the first place, though “autotheory” does not refer to a “theory of the self” so much as to theory that emerges from the self (Fournier, 2021, p. 35). Fournier’s definition refers to Mieke Bal’s, who defines autotheory as both a “practice” and an “ongoing, spiralling form of analysis-theory dialectic,” one that she turned to after being confronted with the shortcomings of written documentation, which I can relate to. It can also be a way of talking about, or just doing, art making *as a form of thinking, or life-writing*. Fournier ultimately describes it as a very self-conscious way of engaging with theory, as a mode of thinking *and* practice alongside such lived experience and subjective embodiment prevalent in “spaces that live on the edges of art and academia” (p. 7).

Autotheory or otherwise, I now see the work I’ve explored here as a mode of thinking and practice that advocates for an ethics of hesitation, and makes space for interruptions, for life “on the edges of art and academia,” folding into work, as we work on ourselves. Now, a few years on from the experiences that provoked the work (literally shaped in the midst of interruptions related to my being a mother), I am see the generative potential of the parasites. Parasitic practices can be framed as the complex processes of unlearning what can be, or has been, made, through the parasitic relation. As a way of acknowledging a community of support, however temporary, and of enduring change; constantly reforming life and work, joy and pain, private and public. So I try to insist on and in the pause, paying attention to and valuing the complexity and nuances that parasitic relationships bring to artistic work in everyday life: hesitating in hope and regret, in flow and suspension, heaviness and lack. In love. This essay, which has offered its own struggle and resistance to exist, has allowed me pause, to think-write through a process, its time and the chaotic nature of its making. To feel through things, in response to loss, and joy, common to phases of motherhood. So it is a celebration of sorts, moving through isolation in collaboration, in love and friendship, amidst a ‘res of chaos.’ Embracing the parasitic, my practice permits a whole series of temporary pauses, ends, outcomes: attend to the interruptions, acknowledge corruptions, accept mistranslations, mishearings, misunderstandings. They auto-operate between and across languages, between and across forms, from image to text, reading to writing, through the biases and privileges of bodies and technological interventions and tools, mess and noise. Together they offer me a transformation. My practices require parasites. The relation is the work.



Figure 9. Clarke, 2021. Mixed media digital print, from the *Glossary of Parasites*.

References

- Burton, J., & Tam, D. (2016). Towards a parasitic ethics. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 33(4), 103-125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276415600224>
- Clarke, J., Duffy, F., Grant, R., Homma, M., Sakamoto, N., Mcwhinney, S. And Taki, A. (2020). 'A story of she': Collective feminist film making at home (between Japan and Scotland. *Entanglements* [online], 3(2). 97-102.
- Clarke, J. (2022). The Introduction of a Parasite in a system is equivalent to the introduction of a noise, *TYPP Journal of Artistic Research*, Issue 2: It Astonishes me when I hear you say Love. Antwerp.
- Clarke, J. (2024, *Forthcoming*). Parasitic projects and the politics of research-creation. In R. Sansi & J. Tinius (Eds.). *The Trouble with Art*. London: Routledge.
- Eto, M. (2016). 'Gender' problems in Japanese politics: A dispute over a socio-cultural change towards increasing equality. *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 17(3), 365-385. doi:10.1017/S1468109916000141
- Fournier, L. (2021). *Autotheory as feminist practice in art, writing, and criticism*. MIT Press.

- Fournier, L. (2022). "Auto" theory. Vtape, March 29 - April 23, 2022
- Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the chthulucene*. Duke University Press.
- Helguera, P. (2010) Notes Toward a Transpedagogy. In K. Erlich (Ed.) *Art, Architecture and Pedagogy: Experiments in Learning* (pp. 98–112). Viralnet.net.
- Holmes, D. & Marcus, G. (2005). Refunctioning ethnography: The challenge of an anthropology of the contemporary. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd Edition) (pp.1099-1113). Sage.
- Kapil, B. (2020). *How to wash a heart*. Liverpool University Press.
- Koikari, M. (2019). Re-masculinizing the nation: Gender, disaster, and the politics of national resilience in post-3.11 Japan, *Japan Forum*, 31(2), 143-164.
DOI: [10.1080/09555803.2017.1378698](https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2017.1378698)
- Marcus, G. (2000). *Para-sites: A casebook against cynical reason*. University of Chicago Press.
- Marcus, G. (2021). The para-site in ethnographic research projects. In A. Ballester, & B. R. Winthereik (Eds.). *Experimenting with ethnography: A companion to analysis* (pp. 41-52), Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478091691-006>
- Mulholland, N. (2019). *Re-imagining the art school: Paragogy and artistic learning*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Ndikung, B. S. B. (2021). *The delusions of care*. Archive Books.
- Nickols, J. (2023). 'Regulating Bodies: Gender Construction in Japan.'
<https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/soashistoryblog/2022/06/03/regulating-bodies-gender-construction-in-japan/>
- Reckitt, H. (2013). Forgotten relations: Feminist artists and relational aesthetics. In A. Dimitrakaki, & L. Perry (Eds.). *Politics in a glass: Case feminism, exhibition cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (pp. 131-156). Liverpool University Press.
- Serres, M. (2007). *The parasite*. University of Minnesota Press.

About the Author

Dr. Jennifer (Jen) Clarke is an Aberdeen-based anthropologist, artist, and curator. An Associate Professor at Gray's School of Art, her interdisciplinary background spans art, anthropology, and artistic research, with degrees from Glasgow, Goldsmiths, Aberdeen, and Sint Lucas School of Art, Antwerp. Jen's artistic research/practice currently involves transmodal forms, montaging words and images across languages, producing performative moving image works and installations. Areas of specialisation in her anthropological and artistic work include the integration of visual art and social practices as responses to (and interventions in) environmental politics and related academic knowledge production,

emphasising interdisciplinarity through collaborative and speculative approaches. She also collaborates on and leads transnational socially engaged art projects in the UK and Japan, where, in 2022, she held a Visiting Professorial Research Fellowship, to develop her project *Feminist Hospitalities*. Jen co-convoked ANTART, the European Association of Social Anthropologists ‘Anthropology and the Arts’ Network (2020–22) and has been Chair of the Scottish Sculpture Workshop (SSW) since 2018.

International Journal of Education & the Arts

<http://IJEa.org>

ISSN: 1529-8094

Editor

Tawnya Smith
Boston University

Co-Editors

Kelly Bylica
Boston University
Rose Martin
Nord University
Laurel Forshaw
Lakehead University

Jeanmarie Higgins
University of Texas at Arlington
Merel Visse
Drew University
Karen McGarry
College for Creative Studies

Managing Editor

Yenju Lin
The Pennsylvania State University

Associate Editors

Betty Bauman-Field
Boston University
Amy Catron
Mississippi State University
Christina Hanawalt
University of Georgia
Diana Hawley
Boston University
David Johnson
Lund University
Heather Kaplan
University of Texas El Paso
Elizabeth Kattner
Oakland University
Mary Ann Lanier
Groton School
Allen Legutki
Benedictine University

Alesha Mehta
University of Auckland
Leah Murthy
Boston University
Hayon Park
George Mason University
Allyn Phelps
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
Erin Price
Elizabethtown College
Natalie Schiller
University of Auckland
Tim Smith
Uniarts Helsinki
Yiwen Wei
Virginia Commonwealth University
Zahra Bayati, Helen Eriksen & Gry O. Ulrichsen
Solmaz Collective

Advisory Board

Full List: <http://www.ijea.org/editors.html>

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).