



PATTER(N)INGS: Apt 3B, 2020

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“Refreshing to come across an audio-only piece, which shows that creators do not always need to showcase the latest and flashiest technologies to produce strong works that resonate with audiences.”

ICIDS 2020 Jury

***PATTER(N)INGS, Apt. 3B, 2020:* sound as affective space for world-building**

Abstract

In our chapter, we reflect on our design of *PATTER(N)INGS: Apt 3B, 2020*, an interactive audio experience expressing some of the anxieties and challenges of living in and through 2020+ during a global pandemic in lockdown state. Our web-based audio application simulates a domestic space and its embodied inhabitants (human, non-human, and other) as encountered by a single user (or “eavesdropper”). The pandemic world we evoke is both specific and timeless, located and transhistorical, in its remixing of literary materials and other sonic agents that destabilize fixed subject identities and rational cognitive states in favor of affective, ontological ones. We draw on theoretical influences from critical posthumanism, feminist new materialism and non-human narrative as well work in electroacoustic musical composition and audio experimentation. We document our process of generative dynamic world-building and interactive digital storytelling as formulated through distributed agencies/embodiments, fragmentation (literary and sonic), affective acoustic space-making, and psychoacoustic manipulation.

Keywords

affect, interactive audio narrative, acoustic space, world-building, posthumansim, non-human narrative, embodiment

I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I'm at the spot where I find myself. To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them. . . . It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put. He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar. And he invents spaces of which he is the "convulsive possession." (p.30)

---Callois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" (1935)

Terrapolis is a fictional integral equation, a speculative fabulation. Terrapolis is n-dimensional niche space for multispecies becoming-with. Terrapolis is open, worldly, indeterminate, and polytemporal. Terrapolis is a chimera of materials, languages, histories [...] Terrapolis is in place; Terrapolis makes space for unexpected companions. Terrapolis is an equation for guman, for humus, for soil, for ongoing risky infection, for epidemics of promising trouble, for permaculture. Terrapolis is the SF game of response-ability. (p.11)

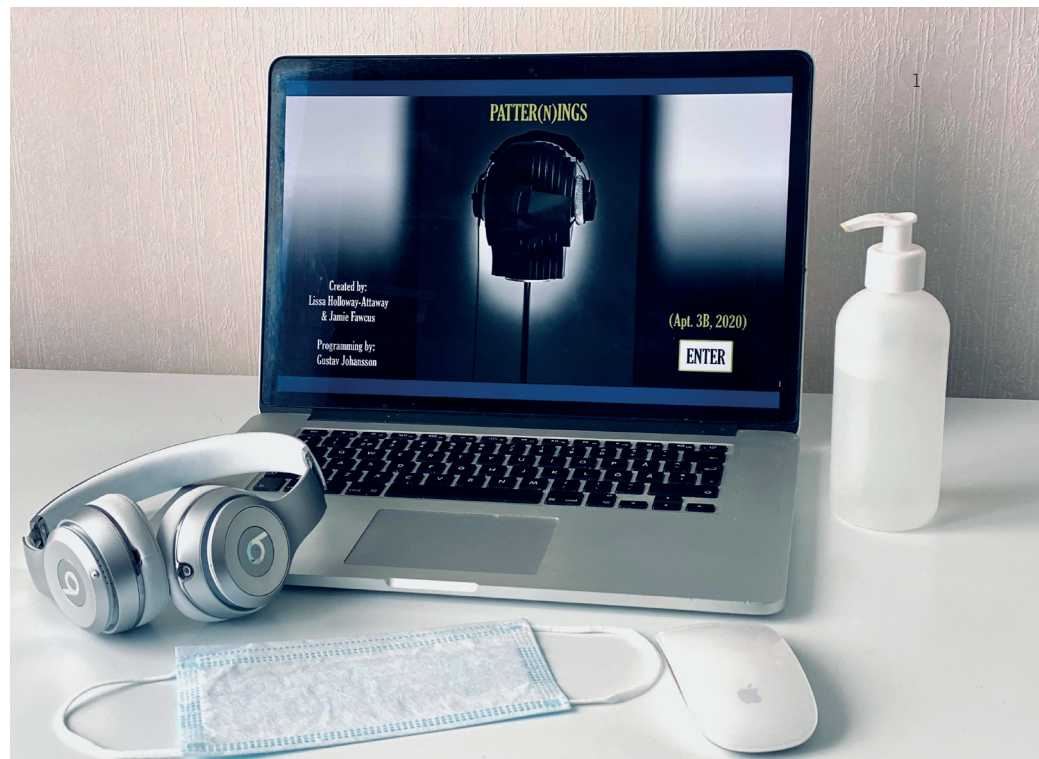
--Haraway, *Staying with trouble: Making Kin in the Chtulucene* (2016)

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Introduction: driving embodied disruption and difference

What does it mean to be present in space, and how do we distinguish ourselves from our worlds and from others? What are the cognitive, embodied, and sensory forces that converge to help us become aware? How can we familiarize our beings in a defamiliarized world invaded by foreign bodies?

These are some of the issues we explore in our work *PATTER(N)INGS, Apt. 3B, 2020*



(“PATTER(N)INGS”), an audio experience expressing some of the anxieties and challenges of our contemporary 2020+ troubled times. *PATTER(N)INGS* is an interactive web-based audio application (also available for download) that simulates a domestic space and its embodied inhabitants (human, non-human, present, reminiscent, and polysensual) encountered during lockdown by a single user (or “eavesdropper”). The eavesdropper uses a mouse to activate a cursor moving over a blackened computer screen to discover audio story fragments (such as vocal narration and abstract, distorted sound and noise), while trying to piece together a narrative difficult to assemble. The work is designed to engage an intimate connection with a single listener, ideally in isolation from others, to sharpen their auditory focus as a receptive and generative modality for storymaking and world-building. However our aim is not to restrict sensory perception; rather it is to multiply and reveal the synesthetic

and somatic effects of the complex media worlds we make, particularly as we have learned to encounter them at a time when a viral presence renders our world-spaces and living conditions incomprehensible.

We are inspired, and intrigued, by the destabilized insects of our epigraph in Caillois’ reflection on natural mimicry—where tiny bodies attempt to become indeterminate, indistinguishable from the natural contexts they inhabit, camouflaged to blend in for survival. The bodies we engage in our work (live and virtual ones) also enter dark spaces, spaces of irrational and disorienting psychasthenia (30). In this state bodies are between self and context, and cognitive function is challenged. (*Who am I? Where do I begin and end? And how can you know me?*) But for Caillois, and for others who come after and inspire us further—the affect, posthuman, non-human, and new material theorists, for example—we question the possibi-

lities inherent in darkness, like our blackened computer screen (Alaimo, 2010; Alaimo, 2016; Alaimo & Hekman, 2007 ; Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2012; Braidotti, 2013; Grosz, 1994; Haraway, 2016; Hayles, 1999; Parikka, 2010; Wolfe, 2010). These conceptual spaces, where identity is fragmented, distributed and sensorially unfamiliar, can be liberating in their ironic display (un-display) of primal self-desire to escape the bonds and bounds of abstract rational human subjectivity. Instead we offer a mode to become more open to mixed and muddled, material states of affective being.

Counter to the debilitating psychosis of figure/ground disorientation that Caillois evokes (even while being intrigued by the notion of indeterminate identity), Stacey Alaimo, for example, in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* embraces the uncertainty and possibilities for new perspectives when a subject-body blends with an envi-

ronment-object, when a natureculture merging happens to create a “mobile space” (2) for daring interaction. Such transcorporeal confusion, where “the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world” (2), is potentially freeing as it brings the human (subject) and natural (other) world together in unfamiliar patterns, offering new insights about their relationship, present and future. Alaimo reminds us of the power of transitional, mixed states where Identities do not always align with individual, single subjects:

Indeed, thinking across bodies may catalyze the recognition that the environment, which is too often imagined as inert, empty space, or as a resource for human use, is in fact, a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions. By emphasizing the movement across bodies, trans-corporeality reveals the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures. (2)



In *PATTER(N)INGS*, we try also to find and release the energies of bodies interfacing in dynamic and mobile spaces, using the hand and ear, and the force-energies of bits and pieces of pasts and presents, real and virtual states, that can call the material world into action.

Our design spaces, then, foreground interconnectedness among bodies and worlds, subjects and objects, texts and sounds, voices and noises, but they are not ordered or orderly. We create flow states through and across bodies to resist hierarchies and rational control, recognizing this messiness as potential for telling new stories (about ourselves, our affects, our time-challenged histories) and seeing worlds differently. Like Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), we consider the troubled state of the 2020+ world, as an invitation to tell our storied experiences through a drive to empathy and discovery, even if the road is entangled and challenged. And Haraway affirms for us that the contemporary world is disrupted and in need of disruption, but it doesn't need simple

“techno-fixes” (5) or salvation myths. The world of *PATTER(N)INGS* we designed reflects these “vastly unjust patterns of pain and joy” (1) that we see as necessary elements enroute to resurgence—embracing all of the indeterminacy that word evokes.

(Who and what can resurge in a disrupted viral world? How do/will we know its effects and consequences? What does it mean to find kinship with foreign others, while also remaining socially distanced and isolated. How do we, as Haraway claims, live and die well?)

These questions trouble us. And yet we believe we do have to connect with the troubled world, especially now in our post COVID-19 pandemic times. As disturbing as we may find the experience of living and dying well in our contemporary plague world (one familiar to artists like Boccaccio, Pepys, Gilman and LeGuin, whom we remix in our story, the matters at hand, like the eavesdropper’s hand who moves the mouse within Apt. 3B, may also be pathways to find

imaginative and speculative sites for renewal and discovery. Our new normal may in fact be one pathway to resurgence. Haraway, for example, imagines our creative world-space, the Anthropocene Age, one formed in the aftermath of human devastation on earthly systems, also by an *other*, name: *Terrapolis*. She defines it as an “n-dimensional niche space (11),” where many possibilities for embodied beings coexist in a “chimaera of materials, language, histories” (11). We, in fact, borrow her indeterminate “n” and embed it in the middle of our *PATTER(N)INGS* title--while also alluding to the patter (chatter, sounds) and patterns (new configurations) of our troubled world that intrigue us.

Curiosity is, in fact, a powerful tool, and we raise it explicitly as part of our design to motivate eavesdroppers. Who isn’t drawn to impossible, implausible, and uncanny bodies, like the mythological *Chimera* identified by Haraway as an inhabitant of *Terrapolis*? Comprised of lion, goat, and snake, she (the creature) is more than hybrid in her bestial forms, and like her, we like

to mix it up. And like Haraway, we are drawn to the creative impulse to follow curiosity towards newness, and we see this mixing as a kind of curious form of “risky infection” (11). This is a state where boundaries between human identities, and all the other worldly bodies and matters, become porous, where Infected bodies, chimera bodies, create new world spaces where bodies flow into each other to discover new alliances and relationships outside familiar patterns for being. Our discussion of materiality, viral bodies, affective and interactive sound spaces in *PATTER(N)INGS* further explicates our designs, and we hope you will follow us to discover more...

Material expression beyond understanding

Our focus on audio and non-linear narrative as the primary transmission and transformation delivery mode for *PATTER(N)INGS* highli-

ghts our desire to move away from traditional semiotic systems—primarily linguistic and visual. We focus on non-representational storytelling (less conclusive and rational, more abstract in nature) embedded in our audio, spoken and otherwise, expressed in sound (laughter, crying, scratching surfaces, water dripping, bird calls). As such, there is no true closure in our spaces (in the rooms of Apt. 3B) or in our stories, pieced together with fragments from original work and from inspirational texts and storytellers that don’t properly cohere. The texts we mingle with our own (See Figures 3 and 4), were selected to be evocative of states of distress and disease/unease. Gilman’s work in particular, one that focuses on a first person account of woman forced into lockdown, on the verge of madness due to her Hysteria diagnosis (from the patriarchal medical profession), assists us in transmitting feelings of disorder. Along with the other text fragments, including first-hand accounts of ‘the Plague’ (From Boccaccio and Pepys) are used to create a choir of other historical voices that share the same feelings, using different words,



"I am sitting by the Window in this Atrocious Nursery."

THE YELLOW WALL-PAPER.

By Charlotte Perkins Stetson.



It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer. A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted? John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and perhaps—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind—) perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see he does not believe I am sick! And what can one do?

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If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to "work" until I am well again.

Personally, I disagree with their ideas.

Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

I did write for a while in spite of them; but it *does* exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition.

I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

There is a *delicious* garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, too, but they are all broken now.

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and co-heirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid, but I don't care—there is something strange about the house—I can feel it.

I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself—before him, at least, and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! but John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," said he, "and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." So we took the nursery at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life.

One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions.

as representations of their world. We depend on these looping, distributed and entangled agents to carry our narrative and our sounds, deliberately dispersed throughout the rooms of our apartment with no central axis to anchor our eavesdropper. Even the number of rooms in Apt 3B should be difficult to know. Although we insert the creaking sound of opening and closing doors when an eavesdropper chooses to exit a room, the movement to a new space is hazy. There is enough familiarity among the rooms that the boundaries between them should feel blurred, and it should be unclear when one has explored all of the rooms, finding all of the sound fragments in each. Eavesdroppers, in fact, always carry some sounds with them from room to room, whether they are aware of it or not. We aim for a certain repetitiveness among the rooms, a state that borders between tedium and familiarity--one surely people who have been in lockdown, or spent enough time in a Zoom room, now know too well. Certainly it's own for the female narrator of Gilman's work, who becomes increasingly obsessed with the pattern of the

yellow wallpaper. (See Figure 4.)

Despite such confusion, we bring bodies into alliance with one another by playing with localization—that is making and unmaking spaces for the eavesdropper to discover. For us, the hand and the mouse, like the ear, are recording devices, receptors and transmitters at once, and they seek knowing. We isolate their affordances and functions from the *body as a whole* in order to hyper-focus our attention on the disparate and unique parts that come together to discover/reveal information about the world in process. We chose not to have a keyboard interface, for example, so that the swirling (patterned) movements of the mouse over the desk, and the cursor over the screen, become a form of tactile embodied hunting, a reaching for connection. Information is discovered as an act for connection, not completely fulfilled.

The ear too, foregrounded by the request for eavesdroppers to use blindfolds, facemasks, and headphones, and by our use of binaural audio to create acoustic dimension, was used to bring the ear forward as a storytelling device

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It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort, the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wallpaper.

If we had not used it, that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here after all, I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

Of course I never mention it to them any more—I am too wise,—but I keep watch of it all the same.

There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will.

Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.

It is always the same shape, only very numerous.

And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder—I begin to think—I wish John would take me away from here!

* * * * *

It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so.

But I tried it last night. It was moonlight. The moon shines in all around just as the sun does.

I hate to see it sometimes, it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another.

John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wallpaper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper *did* move, and when I came back John was awake.

“What is it, little girl?” he said. “Don't go walking about like that—you'll get cold.”

I thought it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

“Why, darling!” said he, “our lease will be up in three weeks, and I can't see how to leave before.”

“The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course if you were in any danger, I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better, I feel really much easier about you.”

“I don't weigh a bit more,” said I, “nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening when you are here, but it is worse in the morning when you are away!”

“Bless her little heart!” said he with a big hug, “she shall be as sick as she pleases! But now let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning!”

“And you won't go away?” I asked gloomily.

“Why, how can I, dear? It is only three weeks more and then we will take a nice little trip of a few days while Jennie is getting the house ready. Really dear you are better!”

“Better in body perhaps—” I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word.

“My darling,” said he, “I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?”

(not only a receptacle for holding). Ears are unique in their vulnerability. An unexpected loud, piercing, or disturbing noise (such as the baby cries, the sound of peeling duct tape, distant screams and the laughing within Apt 3B) can unravel one's senses, render one afraid, but also curious. This ear-iness is an uncanny way to engage with information. Soundscape composer R. Murray Shafer reminds us that part of the vulnerability of the ear is that it can't be closed, unlike one's eyes, which can literally shut out input. He reminds us we have no earlids (1977) and they are then constantly open. For Shafer, who invented the term schizophonia to describe the way eletroacoustic music (EAM) effects can split a sound from its source, notes that creating this kind of input was a way to destabilize rational (normal) methods for listeners trying to process acoustic information. The psychoacoustic phenomena included in our work (the binaural sounds and fragmentation/granulation of sound materials that de-centralize and deconstruct the sounding world, for example) distribute sounds in these schizophonic ways. They put them in and out of context and relationality. (Our piece is set in 2020, after all, and this is a confused state

we have come to accept and endure.)

We are also inspired by contemporary news media that attempt to report incomprehensible phenomena, like a viral pandemic and its aftermath, making real what seems impossible to understand. We are directly influenced by the May 2020 New York Times publication of all the names, ages, and partial obituaries for COVID-19 victims marking 100,000 US deaths (Grippe, 2020). The whispering of "100,000" over and over again in our work marks a kind of referential refrain for a US death toll that mid-2020 seemed unbelievable. (Is it more or less incomprehensible now, we might ask, as the numbers have risen exponentially? Does our familiarity with death bring it closer to reason or move it farther away from us?) But the whispered numbers are a way to manifest an abstraction into a material domain, with audio rather than text only. Similar to the New York Times' desire to personalize the death toll with snippets of stories of those who had passed, pulled from obituaries in other newspapers and collected in their front page space, we too tried to gather them together-apart. Although we didn't use the actual obituary names and stories, we created

our own fictional ones to pay homage to the victims, but also to this kind of material mourning and critical making. Disturbingly, since we've made our piece, a subsequent New York Times piece marking the 500,000 death toll, attempted another form of representation to make it meaningful (Coleman, 2021). In this case it used graphical representation in the form of dots, one for each death, creating a darkening pattern of death on its front page, one we found familiar in *PATTER(N)INGS*. For the New York Times, this was yet another way to transmit such extreme reality in a new configuration, to make it more real, more material, and more patterned—each dot-body an agent of empathetic connection to readers, a way to create a new whole, a new cut in the universe.

In our 2020+ age where transmission and infection bring fear of foreign bodies and their impact, we wonder what it is, like dots on a page, or whispered numbers in a room, to become-with non-human, inhuman(e), bodies, viral bodies, and to tell their stories. We explore this state through the construction of fluid, transmission modes across bodies, operating the way a virus does: getting inside from outside and then chan-

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Day the First

HERE BEGINNETH THE FIRST DAY OF THE DECAMERON WHEREIN (AFTER DEMONSTRATION MADE BY THE AUTHOR OF THE MANNER IN WHICH IT CAME TO PASS THAT THE PERSONS WHO ARE HEREINAFTER PRESENTED FOREGATHERED FOR THE PURPOSE OF DEVISING TOGETHER) UNDER THE GOVERNANCE OF PAMFENA IS DISCOURSE OF THAT WHICH IS MOST AGREEABLE UNTO EACH

As orno, most gracious ladies, as taking thought in myself, I mind me how very pitiful you are all by nature, so often do I recognize that this present work will, to your thinking, have a grievous and a weariful beginning, inasmuch as the dolorous remembrance of the late pestiferous mortality, which it heareth on its forefront, is universally known to all who saw or otherwise know it. But I would not therefore have this afflict you from reading further, as if in the reading you were still to fare among sighs and tears. Let this grisly beginning be none other to you than is to wayfarers a rugged and steep mountain, beyond which is situate a most fair and delightful plain, which latter cometh so much the pleasanter to them as the greater was the hardship of the ascent and the descent, for, like as dolor occupieth the extreme of gladness, even so are miseries determined by imminent joyance. This brief annoy (I say brief, inasmuch as it is contained in few pages) is straightway succeeded by the pleasure and delight which I have already promised you and which, belike, were it not aforesaid, might not be looked for from such a beginning. And in truth, could I fairly have availed to bring you to my desire otherwise than by so rugged a path as this will be I had gladly done it; but being in a manner constrained thereto, for that, without this reminiscence of our past miseries, it might not be shown what was the occasion of the coming about of the things that will hereafter be read, I have thought myself to write them.^[1]

I say, then, that the years (of the era) of the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God had attained to the number of one thousand three hundred and forty-eight, when into the notable city of Florence, fair over every other of Italy, there came the death-dealing pestilence, which, through the operation of the heavenly bodies or of our own iniquitous dealings, being sent down upon mankind for our correction by the just wrath of God, had some years before appeared in the parts of the East and after having benefitted those latter of an innumerable number of inhabitants, extending without cease from one place to another, had now unhappily spread towards the West. And thereagainst no wisdom availing nor human foresight (whereby the city was purged of many impurities by officers deputed to that end and it was forbidden unto any sick person to enter therein and many were the counsels given^[2] for the preservation of health) nor yet humble supplications, not once but many times both in ordered processions and on other wise made unto God by devout persons,—about the coming in of the Spring of the aforesaid year, it began on horrible and miraculous wise to show forth its dolorous effects. Yet not as it had done in the East, where, if any bled at the nose, it was a manifest sign of inevitable death; nay, but in men and women alike there appeared, at the beginning of the malady, certain swellings, either on the groin or under the armpits, wherof some waxed of the bigness of a common apple, others like unto an egg, some more and some less, and these the vulgar named plague-boils. From these two parts the aforesaid death-bearing plague-boils proceeded, in brief space, to appear and come indifferently in every part of the body; wherefrom, after awhile, the fashion of the contagion began to change into black or livid blotches, which showed themselves in many (first) on the arms and about the thighs and (after spread to) every other part of the person, in some large and sparse and in others small and thick-sown; and like as the plague-boils had been first (and yet were) a very certain token of coming death, even so were these for every one to whom they came.

To the cure of these maladies nor counsel^[3] of physician nor virtue of any medicine appeared to avail or profit aught; on the contrary,—whether it was that the nature of the infection suffered it not or that the ignorance of the physicians (of whom, over and above the men of art, the number, both men and women, who had never had any teaching of medicine, was become exceeding great) availed not to know whence it arose and consequently took not due measures thereagainst,—not only did few recover thereof, but well nigh all died within the third day from the appearance of the aforesaid signs, this sooner and that later, and for the most part without fever or other accident.^[4] And this pestilence was the more violent for that, by communication with those who were sick thereof, it gat hold upon the sound, no otherwise than fire upon things dry or greasy, whereas they are brought very near therunto. Nay, the mischief was yet greater; for that not only did converse and consention with the sick give to the sound infection of cause of common death, but the mere touching of the clothes or of whatsoever other thing had been touched or used of the sick appeared of itself to communicate the malady to the toucher. A marvellous thing to hear is that which I have to tell and one which, had it not been seen of many men's eyes and of mine own, I had scarce dared credit, much less set down in writing, though I had heard it from one worthy of belief. I say, then, that of such effluence was the nature of the pestilence in question in communicating itself from one to another, that, not only did it pass from man to man, but this, which is much more, it many times visibly did,—to wit, a thing which had pertained to a man sick or dead of the aforesaid sickness, being touched by an animal foreign to the human species, not only infected this latter with the plague, but in a very brief space of time killed it. Of this mine own eyes (as hath a little before been said) had one day, among others, experience on this wise; to wit, that the rags of a poor man, who had died of the plague, being cast out into the public way, two hogs came up to them and having first, after their wont, rooted assam among them with their snouts, took them in their mouths and tossed them about their jaws; then, in a little while, after turning round and round, they both, as if they had taken poison, fell down dead upon the rags with which they had in an ill hour intermeddled.



ging both worlds by exposing the randomness of borders and their failed security systems. We look to all the layered and disorienting possibilities that transmission and reception across and through bodies (or possibly not ever coming close to them at all) evokes: via a hand in motion finding pockets of sound, via a sound that once discovered, circles behind you, or moves quickly from left to right, opposite of the cursor movement.

Engaging with this kind of world-making, as transmission and reception across bodies and boundaries, is directly relevant to much of the work on affect, theory exploring visceral states opposed to reasoned and reasonable meaning-making. Melissa Gregg and Greg Seigworth in their "Introduction" to *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010) remind us that directed transmission and reception, where there are clear pathways for meaning, are particularly difficult in a world order where one presumes origin stories are subverted. If the world is always emergent, then it never is in a consistent state; it also never was, and so we can't hold it still long enough to find

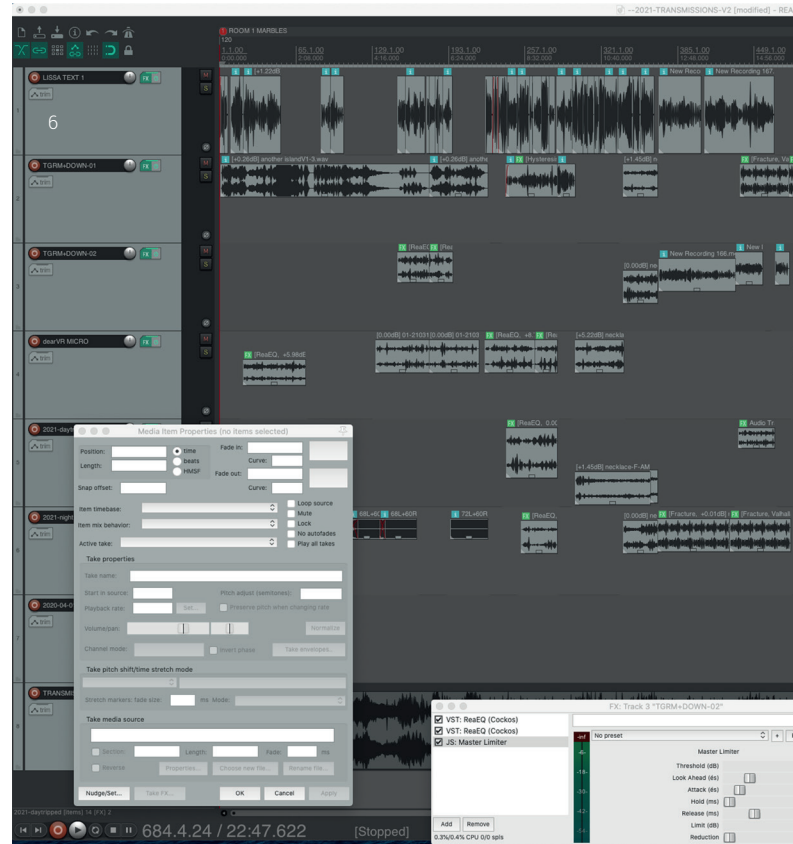
a safe, secure place to conceive of it. We must remain vulnerable to its many differently engaged directions and changing formations. Like a virus, like a vaccine, we must chase it, study it, discover its new strains of being. This kind of affective knowing, deliberately in-between non-cognitive bodies and beyond abstract emotional response is instead overwhelmingly visceral. And it keeps bodies in a state of becoming-with, of open-ended encountering in the worlds that it builds. This kind of knowing, to us, is the knowing of a world made new by a viral intrusion, the knowing within Apt. 3B that engages bodies together as parts of destabilizing forces, energies of transmission and reception that change us in ways that are both powerful and uncanny. Gregg and Seigworth remind us that there is a strong possibility of the world's intractability--the possibility for not-knowing. Our encounters, immersive and on-going, are filed with 'failures' to connect, finding instead "the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations" (1).

These affective drives are what we hope

to convey in our *PATTER(N)INGS* world that is designed to be about 2020, but is also timeless. Historical intertextuality, intra-connectivity across time periods, cultures, and media, is illustrated by our inspirational text fragments from Pepys, Boccaccio, Gilman, and LeGuin, spanning centuries and embedded in our soundscapes. These authors remind us that this time, 2020 time, is not unique. We've been here before (as though such historical localization is possible), and the plague times, Black Death(s)—like the darkened computer screen in our interface design—are then always with us. Viruses bring us into relationship with a past that becomes present and future at once—like the hypnotic visions stimulated by the yellow wallpaper swirls Gilman's narrator recounts (Figure 4), or the caravan of corpses documented by Pepys, parading down the street to help us visualize what outbreak looks like—and smells like—and just is, in all of its necessary sensory evocation.

Sound as space

In *Insect Media* Parikka reminds us that the semiotic systems of sound are multi-dimensional, that “the creation of sound is territorialized” (21). It is always localized, coming from somewhere. In this way sound and space are interconnected in their desire to make places for beings to inhabit, places like Apt 3B. But we are also reminded that insect media bodies do not exist alone; singular insects are incapable of sustaining meaningful and manifest expression (for transmission or for reception) if left to their own singular devices. Instead they need the strength of multiplicity, of the swarm. Through the swarm, “the sound of a body almost most too tiny to see, or to hear, is here brought into worlds of perception of technical media” (25). Thus we construed the many voices, agents, sounds, and places of resonance within Apt 3B to come together, to swarm, at least in some ways, because even a swarm has its limits and edges. Our swarming is often represented in the way that





sounds move and trace paths through the stereo field, and the appearance of proximity and closeness to the ear of the listener. Binaural movement and placement is at once perceptually familiar and evocative, but also artificial (sound in the real world seldom occurs only in the right or left ear, and stereo movement is seldom so distinct and precise in normal audio worlds). Sounds within the *PATTER(N)INGS* space often appear to be moving, travelling, navigating and searching on their own for a place of belonging or interaction, collectively seeming to flock or swarm into a larger, more amorphous sound assemblage.

Further, in our case, our sonic agents are occasionally layered. The poetry selections and literary passages from LeGuin, are repeated and remixed in different orders and sequences in some of the spaces. As with other literary selections, they are clustered, but only to a degree, thematically, with other sounds and texts. Most of the LeGuin text fragments from *Always Coming Home* and *The Carrier Bag of Fiction* stay in one room, for example, unless they are carried

by a user from one room to the next. The LeGuin fragments are intended to evoke feelings of loss about normalcy and what constitutes a sense of home after great loss, along with reflections on new ways to tell stories, embedded in old ones. Similarly, there are Gilman and Pepys rooms (containing voice-over narration from their respective texts). But each room has non-human sounds within it too, so that we don't prioritize one literary, narrator-voice over other registers for telling and discovery: Bird sounds, cat purrs, footsteps and dripping water also tell stories. Each room is then a collection of connective threads, allowing the listener to navigate and create their own narrative structures, becoming a co-designer of sorts. Each human/non-human room sound varies; it may contain the sounds of babies crying and cooing, a binaural head recording of room ambiences, and/or a newscaster-type reading of a list of dead names, obituary text. Another room may include short fragments of randomly triggered granulated text, along with foetal heart monitors, laughter, tearing sheets of paper and close mic-ed breathing.

The sound material in *PATTER(N)INGS* falls into a number of broad categories. Firstly, the recorded voice carrying the textual and narrative material - texts from different eras, authors, backgrounds and objectives with a common characteristic of overt storytelling function. Secondly, there is the abstracted, treated, fragmented, granulated, reconstructed and reinvented recorded voice, seeding conceptual spaces, directions and flows. The voice is segmented and granulated using various software in order that it might rearrange and reintroduce into the audio flow. The "scatter" effect in Unity is used in a number of rooms to reorder the vocal material in space and time. Simpler treatments such as fades, slow panning and changes in relative amplitude or also employed to delineate and emphasize space, both narrative and audible, and destabilize the conventional fixed-point of the single subject narrator. Thirdly, one discovers the recorded concrete sounds taking their inspiration from ASMR conventions, close mic-ing, intimate, disturbing, unpitched sounds that stimulate the deeper parts of the brain concerned with fight or flight, comfort, familiarity,

The screenshot displays the AUXTURE software interface, which is used for creating granular audio textures. The interface is divided into several main sections:

- Left Panel:** Contains input/output settings, including a file name field, duration (set to 30.00), gain (0.000 dB), and channel selection (2 channels).
- Top Left:** A waveform display showing amplitude over time, with a 'Overall Amplitude' control and various playback icons.
- Top Center:** A 'STOCHASTIC GENERATOR' panel with settings for Distribution (Uniform), Interpolation (Linear), Points (50), and Min/Max values (0.000 to 1.000).
- Top Right:** The 'AUXTURE_Main' control panel, featuring a spectrum analyzer, attack/decay/sustain/release envelopes, and a 'MASTER' volume control.
- Bottom Left:** A 'PRESETS' section with a list of saved settings and a 'last save' indicator.
- Bottom Center/Right:** The 'grainscape' v1.0 interface, which is a complex grid of controls for individual grains. It includes a piano roll for pitch, various filter and envelope parameters, and a 'position shift' section.

unease.

These sounds both create space and alter space, experientially and personally, and the sounds are often indeterminate in origin. In almost every room there is some form of spatially recorded sound such as rustling paper, creaking floorboards or chairs, ceramic pots and other utensils that are indistinct and difficult to identify when heard out of their recording context, while at the same time remaining familiar and recognizable - the overall effect ranging from a spatial "framing" of the other sounds to a more disturbing suggestion of human activity within those spaces. Fourth comes the sound truly abstract in nature - synthesised and manipulated beyond their initial sources into spectromorphological, shaped sounding bodies inhabiting spaces we can't really place. They are defined by their otherness and non-worldly, non-human natures. These sounds do not so much create space, as navigate it, and by doing so make the changes and undulations of space more apparent. A good example of this kind of shaping is the navigational sound aid that accompanies screen cursor movement - a collection of distorted and momentary sound objects that move in

the stereo field and are filtered to assist the interacting agent in placing themselves in the two dimensional space (up/down, left/right). As the mouse or cursor moves, these sounds are rapidly triggered monophonically in the stereo field creating an audible beacon and simple audio avatar with which navigation becomes possible. The proximity of sound, or the perception of proximity expands and contracts the reception, attention, and emotional and subconscious states of the eavesdropper in particular, but of world-listeners in general. We play with proximity as an affective medium. Sound is multidirectional, layered and constantly shifting, both in its physical characteristics and its associations and affects. The presentation of sound material within the interactive space employs simple treatments such as variations in amplitude and low/high pass filtering, sounds such as vocal fragments are presented at apparently different distances from the listener. To further play with spatial perception, close recorded, monophonic sounds are triggered whilst stereophonic environmental sounds are already running, giving the appearance (particularly with the vocal material) that sounds move in and out

of virtual spaces, but also can seem to move and hover in a non-space separate from the binaurally recorded material. *PATTER(N)INGS* is, then, a multidimensional space that allows simultaneous and shifting perspectives on the material directed within it. Words and texts can be simultaneously heard from the point of view of the narrators or the eavesdropper. This collectivity, together with the actual temporal fragmentation and rearrangement of words and aural imagery, decentralizes attention and interpretation, playing with space as a relative site for ordering existence.

Like our texts, our sound spaces too are transhistorical. Spatial, architectural and the tactile/experiential use of sound stretches back to listeners many thousands of years ago. Studies of the archaeoacoustic properties of ancient sites in Malta, the Neolithic caves of France and Spain, the stone structures of the Orkneys, monoliths of Stonehenge, Newgrange, and more, display not only stark and immersive, experiential sound worlds, but also strong evidence that our ancestors sought out and exploited these sound milieus for social and ritual use (D'Errico & Lawson, 2006; Devereaux & Jahn, 1996; Watson & Ke-

ating, 1999). The experiences of natural echoes, sounding objects such as natural lithophones, stalactites and stalagmites, and other phenomena such as Helmholtz resonances, standing waves and illusory or disorientating audible effects are not only musical, but deeply physical and psychological. The experiences of the listener can involve shifts in perspective, location of the self and perception of space itself. Add to this the darkness of deep caves and enclosed stone tombs and ossuaries, and sound magnifies into a fundamentally affective media space. *PATTER(N)INGS* is very much a continuation, but also expansion and reinterpretation of these affective sound experiences: water dripping, distant voices, footsteps, creaking chairs and doors, bird calls, tearing paper. This is the virtual cave, tomb, ossuary and temple arising and returning, reimagined and reconfigured through and within the 2020 darkened rooms and the enclosing headphones as media filters.

Other related EAM work informing our sound spaces are *Le Vertige Inconnu* (1993) by Gilles Gobeil. *Le Vertige Inconnu* (and other works in the electroacoustic canon) can be listened to as a linear deconstruction of sound

within gestural form. Gobeil's piece illustrates how sound can be heard as a metaphorical, cinematic and suggestive moving collage of reference and sound spaces, but also as an abstract spectromorphological structure that can be perceived purely in terms of frequency, amplitude, duration and structure. A more subtle, but similar work inspiring us is *Etincelles* (2005) by Christine Groult. *Etincelles* blends instrumental and concrete sound recordings into a fluid, organic, flowing experience incorporating sustained tones, smooth, flowing passages, and long gestures contrasting rich and sparse spectral content. The piece uses a more organic architecture in contrast to Gobeil's crashing and surging gestural form, though both illustrate a complex and multilayered approach to sound material we have taken with us into *PATTER(N)INGS*. Both pieces, and in turn *PATTER(N)INGS*, demonstrate a cross-pollination and hybridisation of sound, context, interpretation and directivity. Our juxtaposition of momentary, percussive or gestural sounds such as laughter, distorted vocal fragments, crows and abstract sound objects, against more environmental, slowly developing and revealed room recordings, abstract sound

spaces, are created using audio amplitude/frequency convolution and other sustained sound environments that incorporate compositional ideas and forms into the interactive space. Although much of the material is triggered according to the activity of the interacting listener, other sounds are triggered according to slower and more evolving time frames, allowing those sounds to move and interact more musically, with the directly triggered sounds often sounding like a solo instrument improvising across a composed spatial sound assemblage.

Linguistic space is also a place for our experimentation. Our sonic spaces are partially constructed through the medium of human speech, seeking emotional connection through personal expression, the confessional diary-like delivery of some with the personality of a human narrator, who even when reciting text from other sources, is trying to tell a story. Interjections, mumbling, repeating passages as though to understand them while speaking, offer a humanizing way to organize sounds as contained within one body, even when unsuccessful. The hysterical laughter one encounters in some spaces is also a way to engage the user, but it is

somewhat uncanny in determining whether it is comical or tragically hysterical. (“What is she laughing about?” one might ask. “Is something funny, or is something just wrong—with her, or with me as I discern its meaning?”) We have a long history of written storytelling, of course, and an even longer one of oral tales, but our audio confuses both types. It manifests as audible (and sometimes almost inaudible) spoken text, but it foregrounds the extra dimensionality and power inherent in the recorded medium that contains it, or attempts to and makes it non-human through digital intervention. This sounding form, between writing and speaking, real and digitally manipulated, demands attention. The written word, Pepys’ Diary in text form, for example, can more easily be re-read, repeated and frozen in time by the one who encounters it than can our fragmented recoding and remixing of Pepys’ experience during the Bubonic Plague in 17th century London—so similar to pandemic times. Our Pepys selections are plague-focused, primarily from 1665, and include passages where Pepys himself is marveling at the death rates in London, grappling with what this means in his once-familiar city/life that he documents so

scrupulously in his Diary, and where he is now fixated on corpses, death, and dying and how London as he knew it has been transformed: “In the City died this week 7,496 and of them 6,102 of the plague. But it is feared that the true number of the dead, this week is near 10,000; partly from the poor that cannot be taken notice of, through the greatness of the number, and partly from the Quakers and others that will not have any bell ring for them” (Pepys, 1932). This kind of refection, similar to the obituary texts we recount, feels quite contemporary, and when spoken aloud, displaced from its historical context, and read in fragments, is not even likely to be fully recognized from its original source—except perhaps by astute scholars of the literary period. And who trusts them? Fake news and all.



8

In conclusion (not really)...

Uncontained, yet re-contained, we mix space-time boundaries in *PATTER(N)INGS*, crossing histories and media forms. Much more like Gilman's unnamed female narrator, who exists in a state of mental distress and lockdown in a single room (along with the mad wallpaper pattern she identifies with), but who also seems to be recording (via writing) her experience for a diary, our affective, viral spaces are also crazy, hysterical even. But they transmit human experience seeking reception and connection. Like the narrator's vision of the other woman she sees in the yellow wallpaper (who is both her and not her, real and imagined, inside the locked room and escaping out of it into the garden at night), in *PATTER(N)INGS*, we play with how we conceive of domestic/natural world space as safe, impermeable, different, or even real. Our digital audio-only design is a key element of our experimental interactive storytelling. Recorded media forces and demands a listener's attention,

memory, and action, and it is able to be re-heard at will, repeated in the sounding spaces it composes. This is both true, and not, of the audio experiences and spaces we make. The recorded voice can also be masked, hidden in ways unnatural to the normal ear. Whispered sounds, like the many we use, can be amplified and clear, spoken sounds muffled and indistinct. The narrated text emerges and disappears according to rules seemingly unconnected to the content or

delivery of the narrator. It can be manipulated, complemented, teased and hijacked by other sound material and sound processing—taking it to other spaces. Pulsations and vibrations move and drive bodies, combining matters and affective energies into newly configured worlds, assemblages of unnatural relation, making tactile pathways to discovery, in the hand, in the ear.

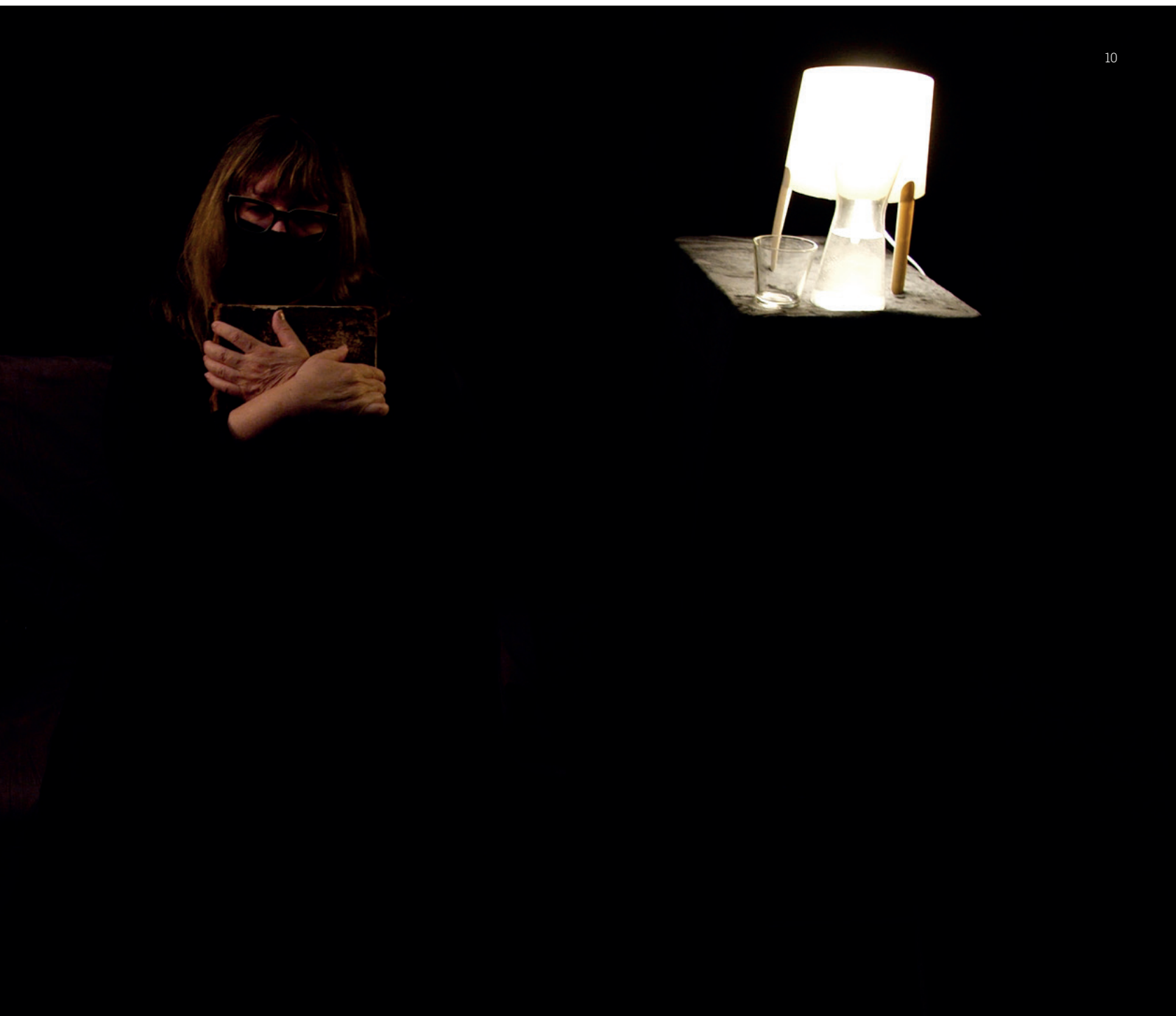
We continue to experiment with new



modes of presentation and in May 2021, we recorded a live performance of *PATTER(N)INGS* for the Electronic Literature 2021 Conference and Festival “Platform (Post?) Pandemic (Holloway-Attaway & Fawcus, 2021) Here our aim was to extend the work into a new platform for participation, that of live performance, to test the limits of meaning-making and world building across media. Our recreation of the web-based audio application, used a live interactor (replacing the original eavesdropper) who manipulated objects at a table (Figure 9), which then triggered responses from Jamie Fawcus (Figure 8) and Lissa Holloway-Attaway (Figure 10) who remixed and re-performed the sounds and texts from the *PATTER(N)INGS* web-application live.

In this sense, we are trying to keep the work open and dynamic to see where it can take us further in our evocative attempts to express our disordered state of being post-2020. We hope to meet you enroute to the new worlds we are building and unmaking.





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Images

1. Opening Screen of PATTER(N)INGS on Laptop with Headphones and Other Necessary Accessories. Note: From PATTER(N)INGS Promotional Material, by Lissa Holloway-Attaway, 2020, Skövde, Sweden, Copyright 2020 Lissa Holloway-Attaway;
2. Binaural Head Microphone with Headphones and Facemask Note: From PATTER(N)INGS Promotional Material, by Lissa Holloway-Attaway, 2020, Skövde, Sweden, Copyright 2020 Lissa

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3. Text Selections used in PATTERNINGS from Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper, 1892. Note: From The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1892, The National Library of Medicine (<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/.../pdf/The-Yellow-Wall-Paper.pdf>) In the Public Domain;
4. Text Selections used in PATTERNINGS from Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper, 1892. Note: From The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1892, The National Library of Medicine (<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/.../pdf/The-Yellow-Wall-Paper.pdf>) In the Public Domain;
5. Screenshot from Online Version of The Decameron from the Project Gutenberg eBook (top) and Original Illustration from Boccaccio's The Decameron, 1492 (bottom). Note: From The Decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio, 1492, Project Gutenberg, (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/23700/23700-h/23700-h.htm>). In the Public Domain. (top); From: The Decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio, 1492, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Decameron_1492.jpg). In the Public Domain. (bottom);
6. Screenshot of Desktop Showing Audio Editing Process for PATTERNINGS. Note: From Jamie Fawcus, 2020, Skövde, Sweden, Copyright 2020 Jamie Fawcus;
7. Screenshot of Desktop Showing Audio Editing Process for PATTERNINGS. Note: From Jamie Fawcus, 2020, Skövde, Sweden, Copyright 2020 Jamie Fawcus;
8. Jamie Fawcus Performing in PATTERNINGS Live. Note: From PATTERNINGS: Live Transmissions From the Plague Years, 2021, Lissa Holloway-Attaway and Jamie Fawcus, Skövde, Sweden, Copyright 2021 Lissa Holloway-Attaway;
9. Torbjörn Svensson Performing as The Interactor in PATTERNINGS Live. Note: From PATTERNINGS: Live Transmissions From the Plague Years, 2021, Lissa Holloway-Attaway and Jamie Fawcus, Skövde, Sweden, Copyright 2021 Lissa Holloway-Attaway;
10. Lissa Holloway-Attaway Performing in PATTERNINGS Live. Note: From PATTERNINGS: Live Transmissions From the Plague Years, 2021, Lissa Holloway-Attaway and Jamie Fawcus, Skövde, Sweden, Copyright 2021 Lissa Holloway-Attaway.

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