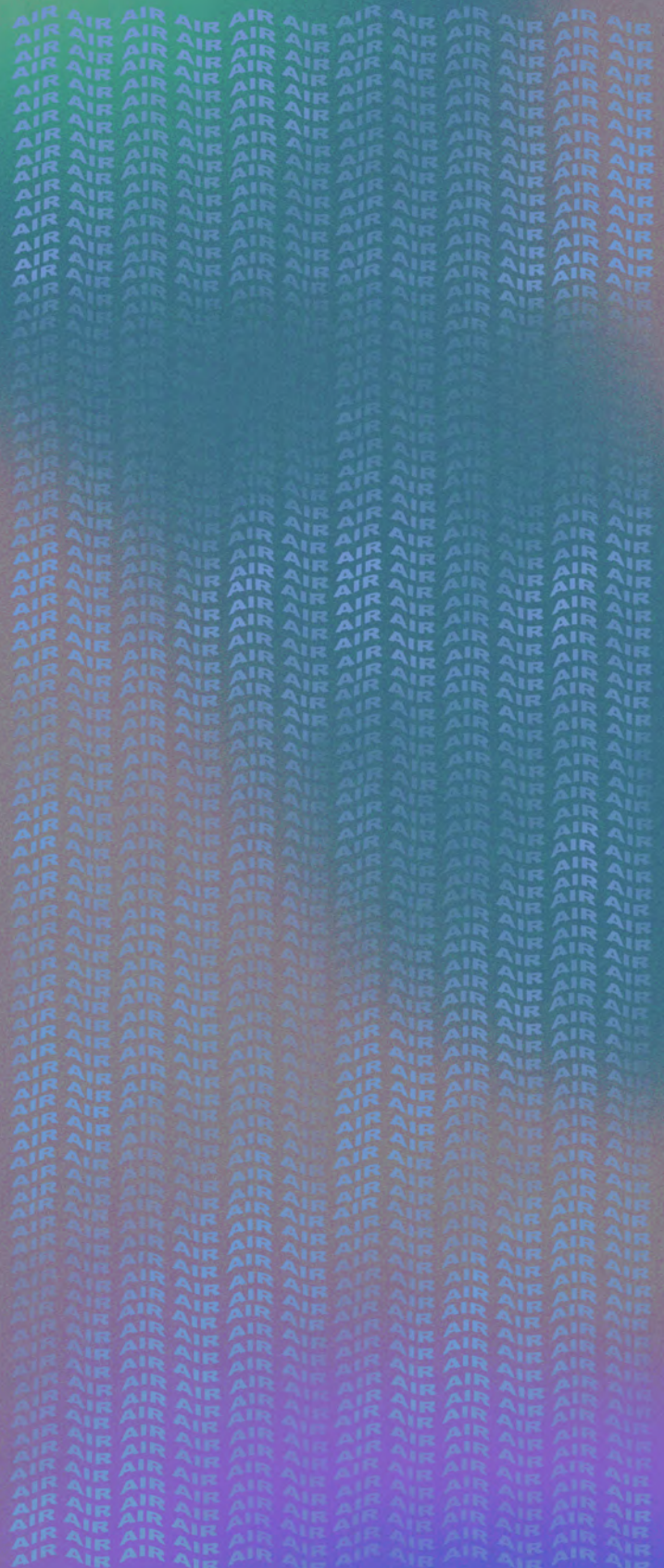
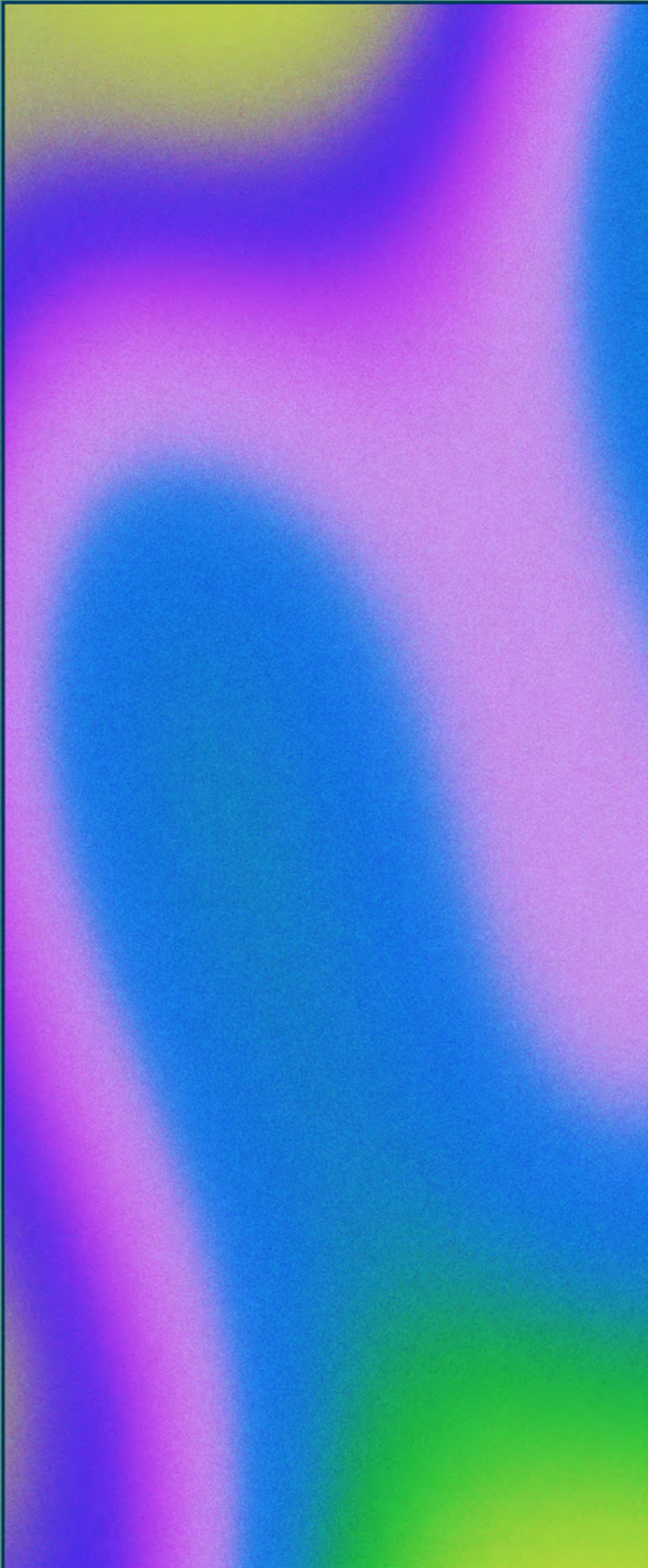


ecopoetics workshop

july 18-31 2023



"[In the bourgeois epoch,] all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."

– Marx, "The Communist Manifesto."

National Geographic - [“The Science and Art of Meteorology.”](#)

Friedrich Nietzsche - [section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on gravity](#)

William Butler Yeats - [“The Second Coming”](#) (1919)

Percy Shelley - [“Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni”](#) (1816)

Karen Barad - [“No Small Matter: Mushroom Clouds, Ecologies of Nothingness, and Strange Topologies of Spacetime-mattering”](#)

Daphne Dragona - [“Commoning the Commons: Revisiting the Role of Art in Times of Crisis.”](#)

Leslie Scalapino - [“The Floating Series”](#) from *Way* + an interview on it

In this section of texts, I have included two classic poems drawing equivalence between nature and spirit (Yeats’ and Shelley’s). The Mont Blanc of Shelley’s poem is located in the same alpine range as Sottochiesa, though 400 kms away. The National Geographic article gives us some basic terminology and concepts from meteorology, such as that of ‘convection’—the rise of warm air and the sink of cold—and an introduction to the Italian physicist, Evangelista Torricelli, who proposed that we live at the “bottom of a sea of air” and invented the barometer. Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was partially composed in Sils-Maria, a short drive from Val Taleggio. It’s written in prophetic style, and the rhetoric of this section, on gravity, is as elevated as much of the rest of the work. Karan Barad is a popular contemporary theorist on the cross-over between art and quantum physics. In this essay, she writes evocatively about nuclear bombs and the entanglement of earth and air. I love Scalapino’s Buddhist-inflected poetics, so, have included this “series,” which conveys a complex sense of floating, while being about very material things. And curator Daphne Dragona’s essay is lucidly written, collecting various important recent theories of ‘the commons,’ a key concept for our residency and workshop. — Simon

Myung Mi Kim - [Anacrusis](#)

Steven Connor - [The Matter of Air, Introduction](#)
Supplemental: [Anaximander + Anaxemenes - fragments](#)

Joan Retallack - [What is Experimental Poetry and Why Do We Need It?](#)

Nathaniel Mackey - [Breath and Precarity](#)
Tracie Morris - ["It All Started"](#)
Supplemental: [Charles Olson - Projective Verse](#)

Kamau Brathwaite - [History of the Voice excerpt](#)
N.H. Pritchard - "Gyre's Galax" ([audio performance](#))
[The Matrix](#) (pdf) (with attention to: "Wreath" (1); "Windscape" (5); "Ology" (6); "Visage" (23); "The Voice" (30); "Gyre's Galax" (46); "Visitary" (64); "Aurora" (87-126); "Isostasy" (133))

Robert Smithson - [A Provisional Theory of Nonsites](#)
Supplemental: [Spiral Jetty](#)

Jonathan Skinner - [Interview with Cecilia Vicuña](#); [Editor's statement to ecopoetics](#)

Susan Howe - ["Frolic Architecture"](#)
https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=susan+howe+david+grubbs
Supplemental: [Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Snow-Storm"](#)

Johanna Drucker - [Stochastic Poetics](#)
Supplemental: [On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots](#)

John Cage - ["Lecture on the Weather"](#) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SWyZxZTtKI>

In "Anacrusis," Myung Mi Kim speaks to a poetics of "the floating materiality of matter that *does not fit*" — of a poetics "as that activity *tending* the speculative" — of a poetics that acknowledges the "intratemporal nature of the event" — and of a poetics of the poem that resides in "disrupted, dilated, circulatory spaces" of provisionality.

This set of texts is curated to present a flight of poetics through air's chaotic commons — through floating materiality, intratemporality, circulatory space, and provisionality. Steven Connor's *The Matter of Air* is a precise introduction to the emergence of air as a concept that, as he shows, only emerges "as a whole," somewhat paradoxically, precisely as it is understood to be a divided mixture. This relation between completion/continuity and partiality/discontinuity became the conceptual tension at the heart of these selections, a tension that, while not made overtly explicit here, we might also see reflected in the difficult ambivalences of the present, wherein each of our breaths is

simultaneously our own while also being part of a global system of atmospheric ambiance (and violence) that is both necessary and increasingly toxic.

Joan Retallack conceives of poetics as kin to a “formal experiment” that “reaches out to experience things that cannot be grasped merely by examining the state of our own minds.” These texts speak to formal experimentation as a way toward an ecologically expansive poetics partially beyond experience. Offering Black music as a “radically pneumatic poetics” of vitality and precarity, Nathaniel Mackey juxtaposes Charles Olson’s “Projective Verse” with jazz’s Black music of exultance and vulnerability, something we might think about in relation to Tracie Morris’s powerful “It All Started.” Like Mackey, Kamau Brathwaite insists on formal development related to situated histories; after all, “a hurricane does not roar in pentameters.” Such formal invention is at work in N.H. Pritchard’s graphic and sonic presentations of “Gyre’s Galax,” and elsewhere in *The Matrix*: an exultant, pneumatic, speculative poetics of vision and invisibility, graphicality and auralty, singularity, multiplicity, repetition, and difference.

Robert Smithon’s “Provisional Theory” presents us with a strange traversal of space-time complemented by Jonathan Skinner’s understanding of ecopoetics as a “mobile contamination unit,” that, like a corrosive force, might alter the relation between the poem and the world, the site and the non-site. I see this as resonant with Cecilia Vicuña’s poetics of precarios, ephemerality, lost knowledge, organic growth, material being, and space. Susan Howe’s performance with David Grubbs of her visually arresting and somewhat confounding work *Frolic Architecture* continues to open fissures between *what is* and *what we experience* – a fundamental tension latent in the concept of air – while maintaining a meteoric sense of wonder in the process. And Johanna Drucker’s *Stochastic Poetics* pushes on the radical understanding of poetics as a dynamic, chaotic process of visual experiment, semantic noise, and ventilated knowledge. Finally, included are a few minutes from John Cage’s “Lecture on the Weather,” a chance-operation-based performance-lecture that, like these works altogether, open us to the continuous discontinuity of our sometimes ambient and sometimes more direct, but always inextricable, relation.

— Brent

Joe Milutus - [Ether: The Nothing That Connects Everything](#)
Recommended: Chapter 2

[The poster for the 1979 film Alien](#)

Trevor Paglen - UNIDS, Clouds, and The Other Night Sky
[Clouds](#)
[The Other Night Sky](#)
[UNIDS](#)
<https://paglen.studio/category/skies-clouds/>

R. Murray Schafer - [The Soundscape](#)

Walt Whitman - [Song of Myself](#)
[Section 2](#)

Trees

[Peter Wohlleben - The Hidden Life of Trees \(recommended: Ch. 33\)](#)
["Some Trees" - John Ashbery](#)
["Speaking Tree" - Joy Harjo](#)

Kalpana Subramanian - Cinema of Breath
<https://kalpanasubramanian.com/cinemaofbreath>
["Expanding on the Cinema of Prāyoga"](#)

Three artworks by Trevor Paglen (UNIDS, Clouds, and The Other Night Sky) consider the perspectives of both humans and machines within Earth's atmosphere and the space beyond. What is sought and discovered in the world above our heads?

The poster for the 1979 film *Alien* bears one of the most famous taglines in movie history: "In space no one can hear you scream." The mechanical waves of sound need a medium, such as air, through which to travel.

In thinking about sound traveling through air, a seminal text will be *The Soundscape* by R. Murray Schafer. Schafer was known for pioneering the concept of acoustic ecology, and become very concerned about human civilization's noise pollution and the disruption of Earth's natural soundscape. (Recommended: Ch. 2 The Sounds of Life)

Interestingly, until the end of the 19th century, many people believed that light, like sound, must travel through a substance; this supposed substance was called luminiferous aether, or ether. In 1887, the Michelson-Morley experiment discovered that this ether did not actually exist. Scientists were stunned. What then did light travel

through? In his book, *Ether*, poet, artist, and philosopher Joe Milutis traces a historical, cultural, and philosophical history of ether and nothingness. (recommended: Ch. 2)

Also when pondering “air,” I thought of breathing. My colleague in Buffalo’s Media Study department, Kalpana Subramanian, just finished a dissertation on the “Cinema of Breath,” which takes inspiration from the importance of breath and embodiment in yogic practice and Indian philosophies. I am sharing here her website with some of her theoretical underpinnings and a recently published article, “Expanding on the Cinema of Prāyoga as an Embodied Approach to Experimental Film.”

Of course, we think of human breath, but what of the respiration of a tree? Inverse to our own respiration, trees breathe in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen. I also wanted us to think about the ways in which other flora and fauna on earth use the air: birds, who use the air for transportation, fish, for whom long exposure to air would mean certain death, and trees, who provide the air on earth with the oxygen which sustains human existence. I believe Peter Wohlleben’s book *The Hidden Life of Trees* will be an interesting resource. (recommended: Ch. 33 “Healthy Forest Air”). I’ve also added two poems on trees: *Some Trees* by John Ashbery and *Speaking Tree* by Joy Harjo.

Finally, I’ve included Section 2 of *Song of Myself* by Walt Whitman. This short section has specifically to do with air, breath, smell.

– Courtlin

Rem KoolHaas - [“Junkspace”](#)

“Birth of the Cool” -

<https://www.marfapublicradio.org/2018-07-20/birth-of-the-cool-a-brief-history-of-air-conditioning>

Febreze Safety Standards -

<https://www.febreze.com/en-us/ingredients-safety/our-safety-standards>

Febreze Commercials 1990s - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0JXwT3suWw>

Aileen Morton-Robinson - [“Relationality: A key presupposition of an Indigenous Social Research Paradigm”](#)

Joanne Barker - [“Confluence: Water as an Analytic of Indigenous Feminisms”](#)

Orchid Tierney - [“Bad Air in the Anthropocene: The Global-Local Entanglements in John Gerrard and Cilla McQueen”](#)

Craig Santos Perez - [“American Atmosphere”](#)

Gabriel Nils Edvinsson - “A Psychogeographical Drift through Air”

<https://gnedvin.bandcamp.com/album/a-psychogeographical-drift-through-air>

Cecilia Vicuña - [“10 Metaphors in Space”](#)

The inspiration for my short collection stems from the properties of gas (air is mostly gas, but not all gasses are air). Gasses have three properties: “they are easy to compress, they expand to fill their containers, and they occupy far more space than the liquids or solids from which they form” ([The Properties of Gases](#)). Because this short list is gaseous, it was compressed, yet fits its container. And hopefully, in reading these together, they will take up more space than they do apart (i.e. be more generative). Even though I will discuss them in groupings, I encourage cross-pollination inside and outside my section.

What is air-conditioning? What does it mean to condition the air? How does the modulation of air modulate ourselves? Koolhaas approaches air conditioning through the lens of architecture, as a mechanism to perpetuate what he considers junkspace. (Why do we associate air conditioning with cooling? What place does the fire have in

air conditioning?) Alongside his essay, which discusses much more than air-conditioning, I wanted to provide a history of air conditioning as well as a non-temperature approach to modern air conditioning. For example, rather than modulate the temperature, Febreze “eliminates” odors (in part by inserting their own). I included Febreze’s safety statements, which I encourage you to look at for the questions they (tacitly) ask, perhaps as much as for the answers they give, and as an imagined set of common consumer concerns. Additionally, I included some 1990s Febreze commercials so we can think about the marketability of conditioned air.

Next, I wanted to include two fundamental texts from my Indigenous Methodologies course this semester. Morton-Robinson discusses and defines relationality as a key facet, but not the only component of, an Indigenous research paradigm. Relationality “informs [the] epistemological and ethical premise that social research should begin with an awareness of our proper relationships with the world [as] inhabit[ed], and is conducted with respect, responsibility, generosity, obligation, and reciprocity” (71). Because air is shared, how does this approach shift our framework or understanding? Additionally, Barker’s piece similarly shifts us away from a binary between Western empirical scientific view of water and Indigenous knowledges of water, positing that “water teaches us to think about knowledge in continuous movement, transition, and change” (6). How does Barker’s notion of water as confluence translate to air? Although neither text discusses air, I do believe they offer an important framework to our eco-poetical engagement with air.

The next two pieces I found in the journal *Venti*. Perez’s poem discusses air through the framework of bio/necropolitics during the pandemic. Although it is a brief poem, it touches on some topics that we might want to discuss, providing us a launching pad for further discussion. Tierney’s piece analyzes two different pieces, John Gerrard’s *Western Flag* and Cilla McQueen’s “Tiwai’s Sequence,” asking important questions about bad air and common air. Her piece opens many interesting questions and should also prove fruitful for her talk at our residency.

Finally, I leave you with two pieces, one new to me and one not. For the new, the music piece, “A Psychogeographical Drift through Air” by Edvinsson, might allow us to think about air through a different sense: sound. I recommend reading the notes on the bandcamp link. Finally, Vicuña’s “10 Metaphors in Space” allows us to think about temporality, spatiality, and precarity. We might consider not simply the visible (the water pushing, the hands moving, etc.) but the invisible (what place does air have in each piece). — Brooke