

Printmaking, Faculty of Design

2015

Kapsula

Pearl, Zach, LeBlanc, Lindsay, Terziyska, Yoli, England, Sara, Morgan-Feir, Caoimhe, Granados, Francisco-Fernando, Dennis, Katherine, Genda, Dagmara, Wang, Deborah, Kaell, Hillary, Feldman-Kiss, Naakita, Bronstein, Noa, Bernier-Cormier, Samuel and Diamant, Tomer

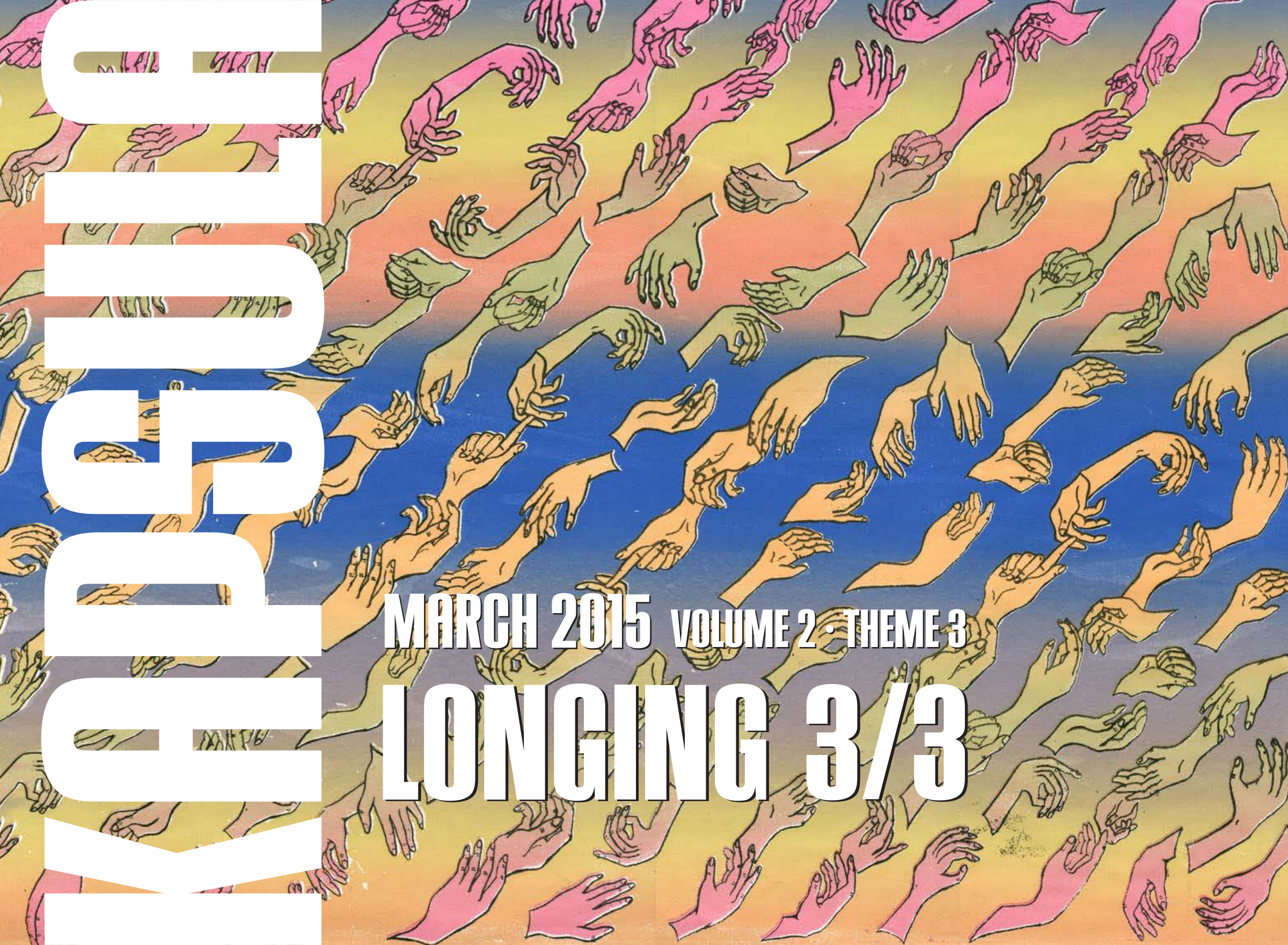
Suggested citation:

Pearl, Zach, LeBlanc, Lindsay, Terziyska, Yoli, England, Sara, Morgan-Feir, Caoimhe, Granados, Francisco-Fernando, Dennis, Katherine, Genda, Dagmara, Wang, Deborah, Kaell, Hillary, Feldman-Kiss, Naakita, Bronstein, Noa, Bernier-Cormier, Samuel and Diamant, Tomer (2015) Kapsula. Longing, 3 of 3, 2 . KAPSULA PRESS, Toronto, Canada. Available at <https://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/954/>

Alicia Nauta graduated from OCAD University with a BFA in Printmaking. She established the OCAD University Zine Library and co-established the new Library at Xpace Cultural Centre, including a zine Library, mix tape library and curated library. All her work is part of Alicia's Klassic Kool Shoppe: consisting of collage, screenprinting, installation, wallpaper, bookworks, and a growing collection of found oddities for a future museum. She is member of Punchclock, a Toronto print studio. Her work has been exhibited at the AGO, the Drake Hotel, Art Metropole, and Narwhal Art Projects, as well as installed permanently at Double Double Land, Likely General and a really cool baby's room. The KAPSULA logo appears in House Gothic Bold Four. Headers are set in Berthold Akzidenz Grotesk and body copy is set in Archer.

Open Research is a publicly accessible, curated repository for the preservation and dissemination of scholarly and creative output of the OCAD University community. Material in Open Research is open access and made available via the consent of the author and/or rights holder on a non-exclusive basis.

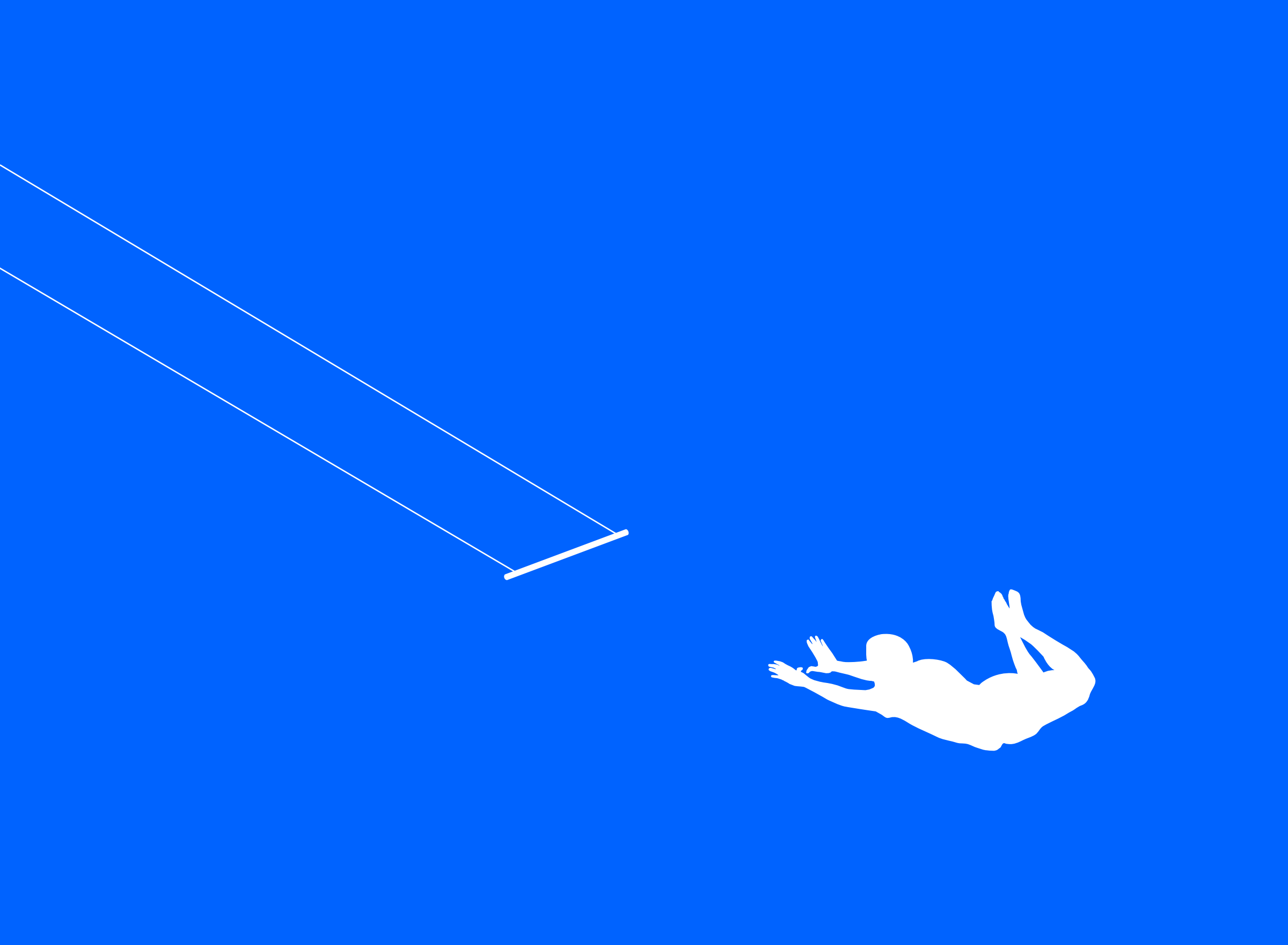
The OCAD University Library is committed to accessibility as outlined in the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) and the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) and is working to improve accessibility of the Open Research Repository collection. If you require an accessible version of a repository item contact us at repository@ocadu.ca.



CELEBRATE

MARCH 2015 VOLUME 2 • THEME 3

LONGING 3/3



CONTRIBUTORS

DAGMARA GENDA
DEBORAH WANG
HILLARY KALL
NAAKITA FELDMAN-KISS
NOA BRONSTEIN
SAMUEL BERNIER-CORMIER
TOMER DIAMANT

ON THE COVER

ALICIA NAUTA
Untitled (2010)
silkscreen on paper

Alicia Nauta graduated from OCAD University with a BFA in Printmaking. She established the OCAD University Zine Library and co-established the new Library at Xpace Cultural Centre, including a zine Library, mix tape library and curated library. All her work is part of *Alicia's Klassic Kool Shoppe*: consisting of collage, screenprinting, installation, wallpaper, bookworks, and a growing collection of found oddities for a future museum. She is member of Punchclock, a Toronto print studio. Her work has been exhibited at the AGO, the Drake Hotel, Art Metropole, and Narwhal Art Projects, as well as installed permanently at Double Double Land, Likely General and a really cool baby's room.

LICENCING



ISSN 2292 - 7204

KAPSULA Magazine is published under the Creative Commons Canada BY-NC-ND 3.0 licence. Subscribers are legally and freely permitted to redistribute this document without penalty. However, subscribers may not attempt to edit or sell access to its contents. For more information on what this entails and/or the various types of Creative Commons licences, visit:

This document is an interactive PDF Version 1.7, compatible with Adobe Acrobat 8.0 and later. For optimal functionality we recommend you download the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader.

The KAPSULA logo appears in House Gothic Bold Four. Headers are set in Berthold Akzidenz Grotesk and body copy is set in Archer.

KAPSULA acknowledges the views expressed by our contributors are not necessarily those of the masthead, and that all text, images and illustrations published herein are done so with the permission of their respective owners.

VOLUME 2 • THEME 3 • MARCH 2015 LONGING 3/3

PRODUCTION

ZACH PEARL / managing editor & art director
LINDSAY LEBLANC / editor
YOLI TERZIYSKA / subscriptions & development
SARA ENGLAND / marketing & communications

in editorial consultation with:

CAOIMHE MORGAN-FEIR
FRANCISCO-FERNANDO GRANADOS
KATHERINE DENNIS

KAPSULA Magazine is a serial publication of:
KAPSULA Press, a non-for-profit company.

44 Hedges Boulevard
Toronto, Ontario
M9B 3C4
Canada

General inquiries can be directed to:

THE
HOM



PROLOGUE

ON TOGETHERNESS

We're dedicating, or perhaps better yet, we're dedicat-
ed. You can find her in borrowed words and works cited,
the title of the prologue and en route to Quebec. She's
come up again and again, a voice in each issue, her text
a destination in itself.

It is not through any intrinsic quality of the sign
but rather through the interpretive acts of mem-
bers of a sign community that the sign comes to
have meaning. Hence the transmutability of all
signs, their capacity to serve as signified or sig-
nifier, independent of their physical properties.
The semiotic universe is an abstract and inter-
pretive universe constructed by means of con-
crete social practices.

—Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, 1984

We're in a place for sharing, and not just because it's
what mom and dad told us to do—it's where we've end-
ed up, after the paradoxes of intangible materials and

. At the end of it all, longing is
formed of overlaps, shared moments. It may seem like
no one's at the other end of the feeling, but that missed
connection . And sometimes, the
rapid clacking of keystrokes can sound just like cam-
era shutters.

Indeed, people gather around longing. Though its loca-
tion may be unfixed, it's a site nonetheless, and here we
map it between . The metaphor
illustrates why, regardless of its ,
longing never refers to the singular. Not simply a result
of its impermanent materiality, longing is so difficult to
describe because of its impermanent meaning, ever-de-
pendent on involved parties.

Our sentiment is an echo of Susan Stewart, who's also
our allegorical (though we didn't an-
ticipate it). She tells us that language is fundamentally
social, a collaborative phenomenon that's consequent-

ly unable to hold its meaning. An empty sign like any other, *longing* hinders on ; we won't be . Longing, we've come to realize, is what occupies the spaces between people.

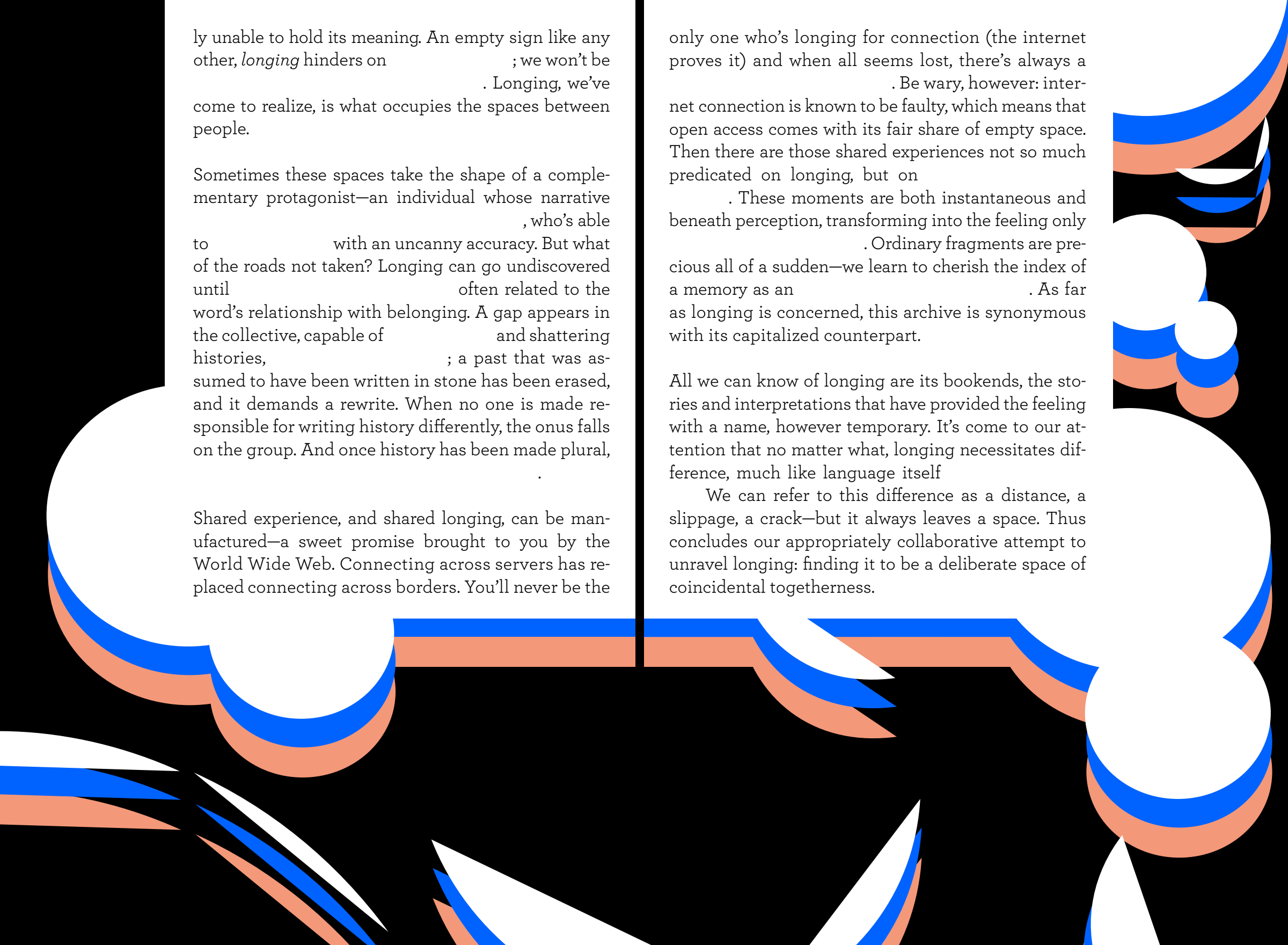
Sometimes these spaces take the shape of a complementary protagonist—an individual whose narrative , who's able to with an uncanny accuracy. But what of the roads not taken? Longing can go undiscovered until often related to the word's relationship with belonging. A gap appears in the collective, capable of and shattering histories, ; a past that was assumed to have been written in stone has been erased, and it demands a rewrite. When no one is made responsible for writing history differently, the onus falls on the group. And once history has been made plural, .

Shared experience, and shared longing, can be manufactured—a sweet promise brought to you by the World Wide Web. Connecting across servers has replaced connecting across borders. You'll never be the

only one who's longing for connection (the internet proves it) and when all seems lost, there's always a . Be wary, however: internet connection is known to be faulty, which means that open access comes with its fair share of empty space. Then there are those shared experiences not so much predicated on longing, but on . These moments are both instantaneous and beneath perception, transforming into the feeling only . Ordinary fragments are precious all of a sudden—we learn to cherish the index of a memory as an . As far as longing is concerned, this archive is synonymous with its capitalized counterpart.

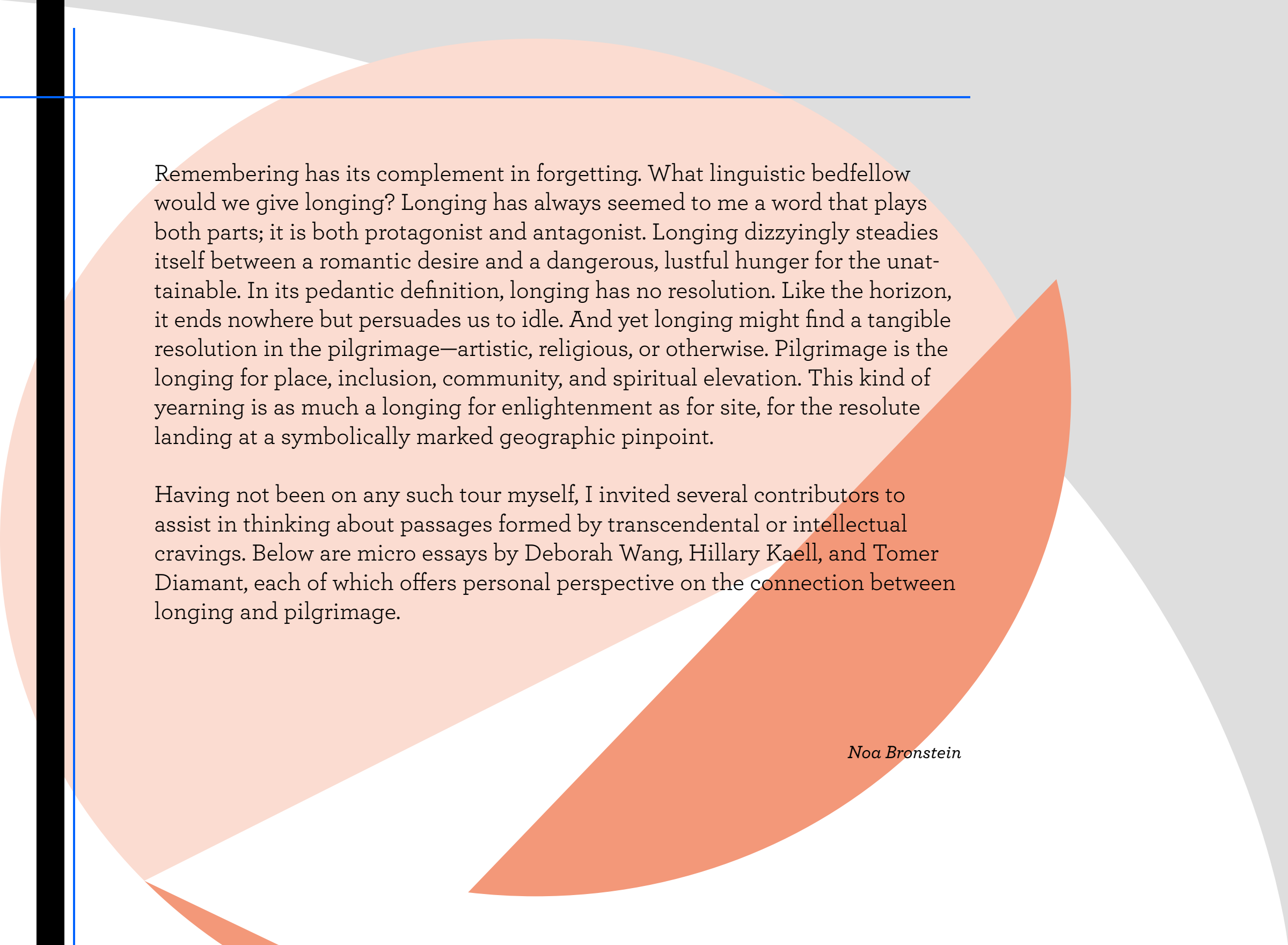
All we can know of longing are its bookends, the stories and interpretations that have provided the feeling with a name, however temporary. It's come to our attention that no matter what, longing necessitates difference, much like language itself

We can refer to this difference as a distance, a slippage, a crack—but it always leaves a space. Thus concludes our appropriately collaborative attempt to unravel longing: finding it to be a deliberate space of coincidental togetherness.



THE PLACES OF LONGING

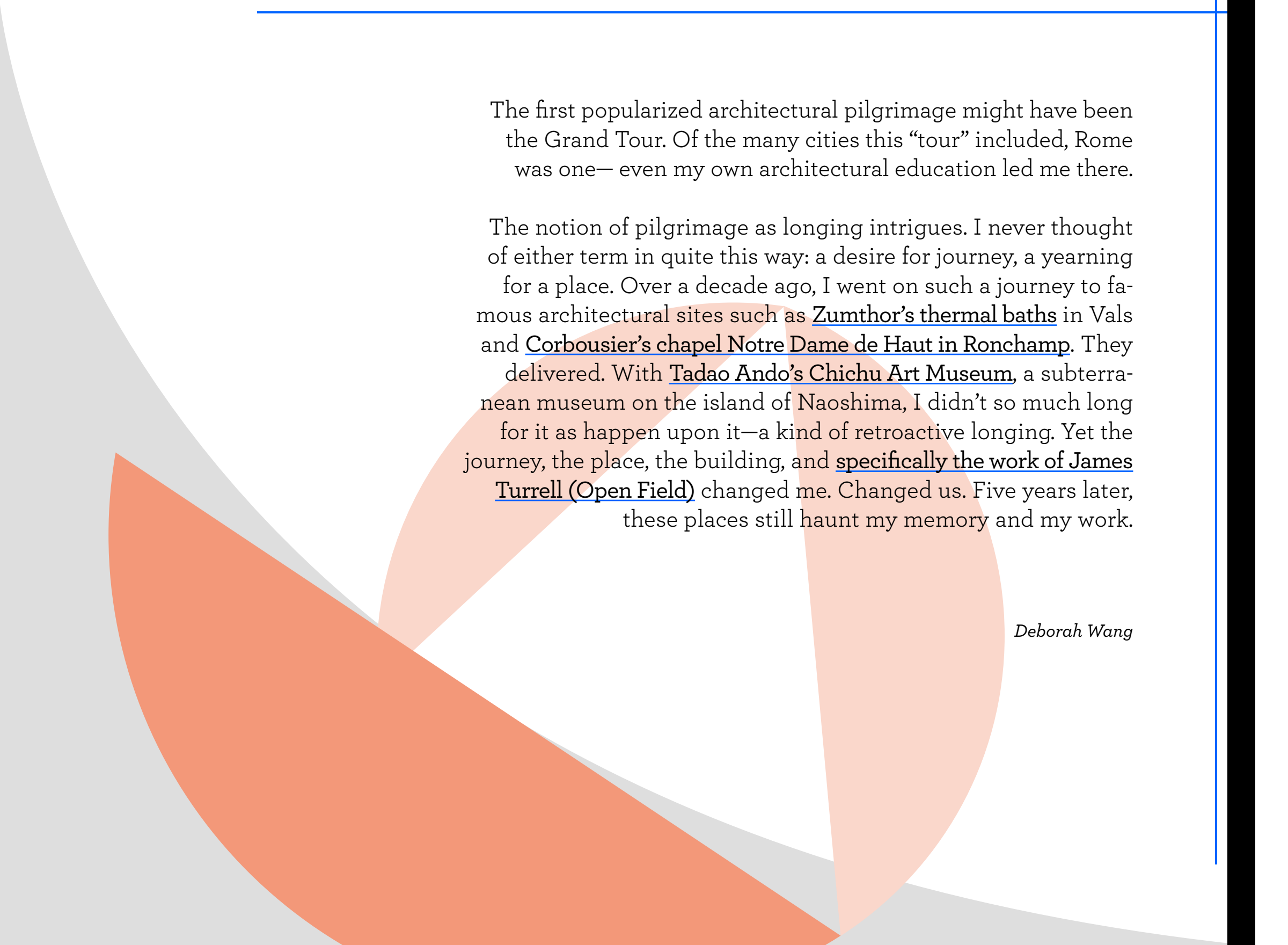
NOA BRONSTEIN | DEBORAH WANG | HILLARY KELL | TOMER DIAMANT



Remembering has its complement in forgetting. What linguistic bedfellow would we give longing? Longing has always seemed to me a word that plays both parts; it is both protagonist and antagonist. Longing dizzyingly steadies itself between a romantic desire and a dangerous, lustful hunger for the unattainable. In its pedantic definition, longing has no resolution. Like the horizon, it ends nowhere but persuades us to idle. And yet longing might find a tangible resolution in the pilgrimage—artistic, religious, or otherwise. Pilgrimage is the longing for place, inclusion, community, and spiritual elevation. This kind of yearning is as much a longing for enlightenment as for site, for the resolute landing at a symbolically marked geographic pinpoint.

Having not been on any such tour myself, I invited several contributors to assist in thinking about passages formed by transcendental or intellectual cravings. Below are micro essays by Deborah Wang, Hillary Kaell, and Tomer Diamant, each of which offers personal perspective on the connection between longing and pilgrimage.

Noa Bronstein



The first popularized architectural pilgrimage might have been the Grand Tour. Of the many cities this “tour” included, Rome was one— even my own architectural education led me there.

The notion of pilgrimage as longing intrigues. I never thought of either term in quite this way: a desire for journey, a yearning for a place. Over a decade ago, I went on such a journey to famous architectural sites such as [Zumthor’s thermal baths in Vals](#) and [Corbousier’s chapel Notre Dame de Haut in Ronchamp](#). They delivered. With [Tadao Ando’s Chichu Art Museum](#), a subterranean museum on the island of Naoshima, I didn’t so much long for it as happen upon it—a kind of retroactive longing. Yet the journey, the place, the building, and [specifically the work of James Turrell \(Open Field\)](#) changed me. Changed us. Five years later, these places still haunt my memory and my work.

Deborah Wang

Cultural theorist Susan Stewart describes longing as a yearning desire. To think of the past with such fondness that we write it into the future—into a life we want to recreate. In the countryside, she writes, longing is implanted into the geography of the place. Something about the bigness of sky that recalls the infinite. Something about a closeness to nature that makes us yearn for a life we have lost. Since I began researching [Quebecois wayside crosses](#), I have been more attuned to how the romantic creeps into depictions of rural life. In actuality the farmers, carpenters, and others who maintain these 15-foot crosses are always matter-of-fact. They tell me about the everyday work of running the farm or plowing rural roads. At the crosses, they talk about how to treat rusty screws and chipped cement. Or they recount stories—fond remembrances more than longings—about the parents and grandparents who used to pray there with them when they were young. When we meet at the crosses for their annual prayers in May, a type of local pilgrimage, they ask God for help with the here and now: a villager is sick, a business is failing. There is something too vital, too real about this relationship with the land and with the crosses to call it longing or nostalgia.

WORKS CITED

Stewart, Susan. *On Longing*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

But despite myself, there are moments when I get caught up in that kind of yearning Stewart describes. I was struck by it last spring during what might be considered a kind of pilgrimage for academics: I was at Laval University, surrounded by box upon box of archival materials. Barely used since they had been sealed up, they contained pages of notes, doodles, and photos compiled by Quebecois students who had travelled across the province in the 1970s and 1980s documenting the crosses. On Day Three of my work, in Box 51, I pulled out a photographic plate of black and white images showing nameless crosses along the road. Some were barely visible on the horizon, while others stood out starkly against the setting sun. Each tiny photo box contained a little world and suddenly it hit me: the infiniteness of the sky, the tininess of human action, the almost palpable sense of loss. An object, once beloved by someone, was now rotting, barely discernable against the trees. Sitting in the bright glare of institutional lights on the standard-issue university chair, a feeling washed over me that had been absent on my actual travels to the crosses, which are so present, monumental, overwhelmingly there. Being far enough removed, I suppose, made it suddenly possible to feel longing instead.

Hillary Kaell

I'm in Bilbao. A narrow street of eight-storey buildings forms a tunnel pointing me towards the shimmering surfaces of the city's new museum. It's 2001, the winter before entering architecture school, and this is where I've chosen to make my pilgrimage. The approach towards the titanium shrine takes on a surreal quality as I pass by a giant topiary terrier presiding over the grounds. I circle the museum exterior, delight in its cacophonous form and make my way down towards its entry hall. I'm bemused to see that the entire museum has been temporarily given over to a massive show of minimalist works from the Guggenheim's Panza collection. I've encountered works by many, many of these artists before—but here, of all places?

The works relate to the museum's architecture like a tone poem to a parade. Unexpectedly, I found myself spending the better part of a day meandering through the museum in a strange and exhausting liminal trance that had been induced by this juxtaposition. Maybe the architecture in itself didn't pack the formative punch I'd been seeking, but the curatorial tension within the space, intended or accidental, left a strong impression on me.

The following year, in architecture school, we'd study the great Gothic cathedrals. Our professor would emphasize the psychedelic exuberance with which these buildings must have been conceived of in their time. He would also make the case that as important economic catalysts, these cathedrals represented the original 'Bilbao Effect.' I would recall my experience of Bilbao and imagine the bones of St. Thomas of Canterbury resting in a Donald Judd box.

Tomer Diamant

BIOGRAPHIES

Based in Toronto, **Deborah Wang** is an independent artist, curator and designer, with a background in art and architecture. Currently, she splits her time as Creative Director of the Toronto Design Offsite Festival, a designer for superkul inc |architect, and as a scholar/maker.

Hilary Kaell is a professor of religion at Concordia University in Montreal, with a PhD in American Studies from Harvard University. Her research examines the history and practice of North American Christianity. She is interested in how the divine, the miraculous, and the unseen become real for people in particular times and places, especially through material objects and commercial practices.

Tomer Diamant is an architect based in Toronto.

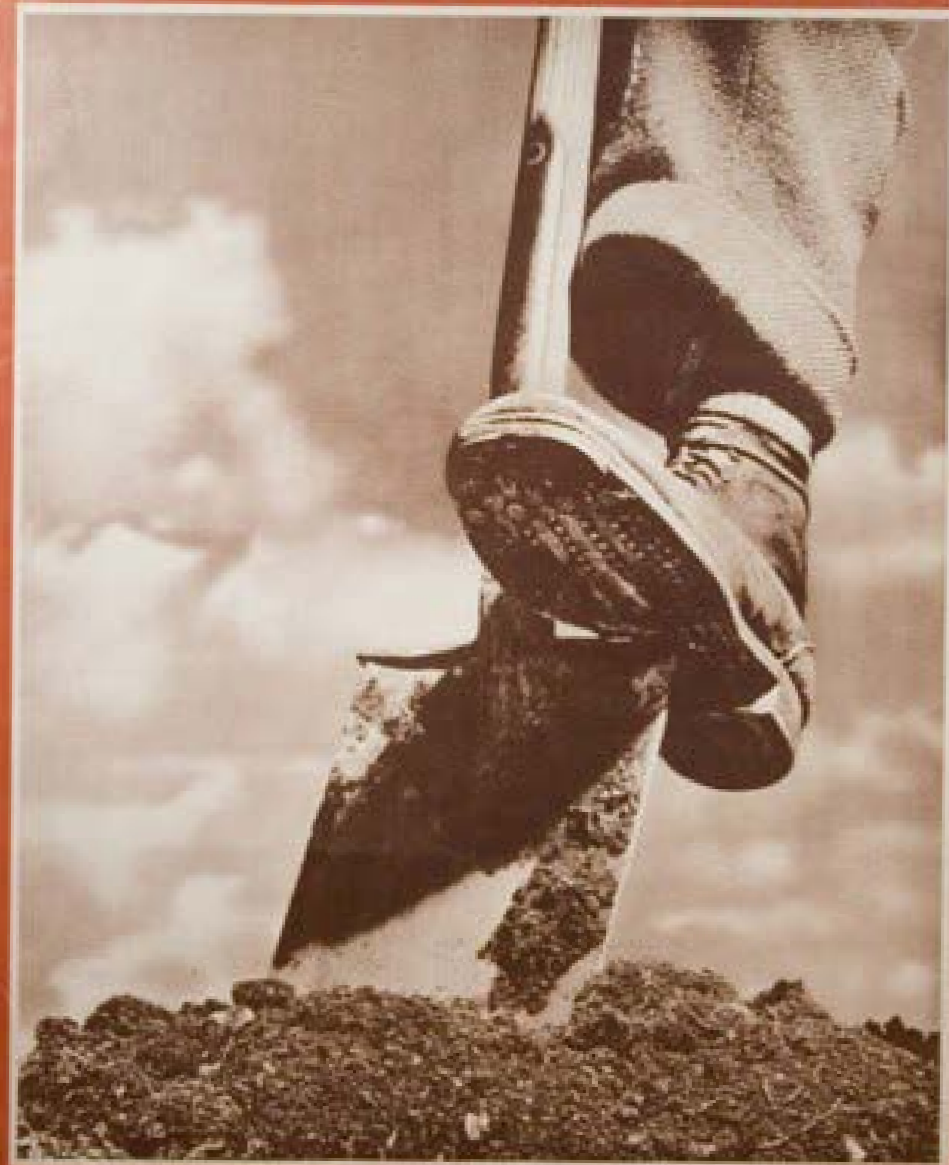
Noa Bronstein is a curator and writer based in Toronto. She is currently the Executive Director of Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography.

Do with less—
so they'll have
enough!



RATIONING GIVES YOU YOUR FAIR SHARE

DIG FOR
VICTORY



... AND EUROPE WILL BE STUNNED

looking back as a way of moving forward in Yael Bartana's filmic trilogy

The man who belongs, organically belongs to a civilization cannot identify the nature of the disease which undermines it (Cioran 1968, 48).

—E. M. Cioran

The Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland's (JRMiP) manifesto is a red, poster-sized proclamation typed in black, atop a logo of the crowned Polish eagle combined with the Star of David. Written from a Jewish perspective, it passionately calls for the return of 3.3 million Jews to Poland in an effort to rectify the tragedies of the past. Like a work of fan fiction, it proclaims: "We long to write new pages into a history that never quite took the course we wanted." In tune with this sentimental genre, it voices the desires of its audience, however unrealistic. Though framed in a Jewish context, it stands for the lost Other in any community. The manifesto appeals to "all those for whom there is no place in their homelands," with the goal of creating a multicultural state in Poland based in liberal values of diversity. "Join us," the text concludes in what I can only hear as nearly breathless exhilaration, "and Europe will be stunned."

The manifesto is a take-away component of Yael Bartana's *...And Europe Will Be Stunned*, a filmic trilogy that has been screened as a film, shown as a multi-channel installation, and led to a 2012 Berlin conference on the topic of the Jewish Renaissance

at the Berlin Biennale. While a movement with real historical underpinnings, the current manifestation of the JRMiP vis-à-vis the three films remains more an academic thought experiment than a plausible reality. Indeed, the conference (excerpts from which are available online) opened with the declamation of imaginary deceased JRMiP leader, Sławomir Sierakowski, who is in reality a living leftist political thinker in Poland.

The cultural dynamic in Poland maintains largely unacknowledged anti-Semitic undertones, even at the level of everyday language, which is why Bartana's representation of Poland in the 2011 Venice Biennale seems such a step forward—she was the first non-national artist, let alone Israeli artist, to represent the country. It is interesting, then, that an artist without Polish roots produced a work eliciting nostalgia for a country that has historically proven itself inhospitable to its Jewish population. Bartana's layering of different types of longing form a complex web that evokes not only the ambiguities of place, but also a time when communal action seemed possible. Most importantly, Bartana's work presents nostalgia as a function of the present

and
we're
well
known

rather than a reality of the past.

Derived from the Greek *nostos* (return home) and *algia* (longing), nostalgia was first coined in the 17th century when diagnosed as a sickness in Swiss mercenary soldiers (Boym 2001, xii). Since then it has been a much maligned concept, associated with an often unrealistic glamorization of the past and aesthetic kitsch. Literary scholar Svetlana Boym has attempted to revitalize the concept into a legitimate and even critical aesthetic response. Through the examination of the art of Russian émigrés among other things, Boym has differentiated between two types of longing: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia (Boym 2001, 49). The former is associated with a static image of the past that the nostalgic seeks to revive. This approach, marked by a belief in better times, lends itself to nationalism and other stultifying absolutes. Resolutely sincere, it looks to the past for a long-lost truth. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, relishes in the act of longing itself. It is closely associated with personal experience, rather than collective memory, and thus embraces all the contingencies of forgetting. Instead of embodying human desire within an ideal or institution, it repackages big ideas as individual memories. Reflective nostalgia brings the mess back into historical narratives by allowing the co-existence of individual stories.

Of course, as with any analysis of human emotion, simple reductions can get tricky and if strictly adhered to, absurd. In reality, nostalgia does not always neatly fall into one category or the other, and Bartana's work seems to find resonance in each of Boym's definitions. Just as her films are marked by ironic, if not uncomfortable historical contradictions, they are also suffused with naive and sentimental dreams

of restoration. Envisioning the return of 3.3 million Jews to Poland is not a simple, or even ethical affair—a return is a symbolic gesture of relocation and not a literal undoing. Of those who might relocate from Israel: who are they, and what ties do they have with Poland? Has the population of Poland become any more open to a multicultural state, despite its vaunted history of being one? With all Bartana's references to totalitarian propaganda and allusions to WWII, it is difficult to take this proposition as sincere, yet it did inspire a conference around its theme attended by scholars, artists and intellectuals from around the world. Interestingly, Bartana has called her work a “universal presentation of the impossibility of living together.” Though the film might be taken as yet another marker of failed human relations, it may also open a space of shared imagining where, through its layered weaving of ideologies, alternate futures might be written.

...*And Europe Will Be Stunned* is composed of three films, each completed two years apart spanning from 2007 to 2011: *Mary Koszmarmy* (*Nightmares*), *Mur i Wieża* (*Wall and Tower*), and *Zamach* (*Assassination*). Together they are an hour in length, though they have been exhibited simultaneously in separate rooms as well as screened in sequence. The films layer historically and ideologically competing allusions, references, and styles to create a sophisticated narrative. The overarching sense is one of simultaneous sincerity and irony that reflects a world acutely aware of the dangers of grand narratives, yet one that longs for the very utopias it so rightly critiques. In short, it is a world marred by scepticism that nevertheless finds room for hope.

The first film, *Mary Koszmarmy*, features the leader of the JRMiP in Warsaw's now overgrown Soviet-era Decennial Stadium. The style of the film directly references Leni Riefenstahl's 1934 *Triumph of the Will*, where Nazi political speeches are recorded in crowded stadiums. Here, however, the orator's passionate declamation echoes in a near empty field. He is the Pole calling for the return of

his lost Jewish Other. By returning, he says, Jews will heal Polish wounds, and thereby also heal their own. His attentive audience is a small group of youth scouts and pioneers—the future patriots of Poland. As he orates his emotional message, the camera slowly pans to reveal the boundary where the film's narrative meets the outside world. At the fringes of the stadium there stands a group of makeshift structures resembling a small outdoor market, where people go about their daily business oblivious to the speech happening below.

Mur i Wieża depicts the construction of a 1930s style “wall and tower” kibbutz in the Muranów district of Warsaw, former site of the Warsaw Ghetto. Set to the Polish national anthem, then to the Israeli anthem played backwards, the film takes the form of a Soviet propaganda film; it depicts happy, young, agile men and women working together to build a centre for communal living. Hebrew-Polish language classes are held inside and a flag depicting an amalgamation of the crowned Polish eagle and the Star of David is raised atop the tower. However, despite the Hebrew “Welcome” above the gate, the kibbutz fence is ringed with barbed wire, evoking the darker past of the site. At night, a spotlight from the tower shines on the Holocaust memorial across the street.

The final part of the trilogy, *Zamach*, takes place in the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw—Stalin's “gift to Poland” situated at the southern tip of the former Warsaw Ghetto. The film begins with what looks like the drawn curtains of a theatre set. But soon we realize it is the interior of a hearse. The back doors open to reveal the Palace's colonnade where black and red banners hang between columns giving the sinister impression of totalitarian power, specifically Nazi Germany. The coffin is carried in procession to a large assembly hall where speeches are made and visitors come to view the body. The leader of the JRMiP has become a martyr for his cause and his followers vow to carry on.

Like the JRMiP itself, the films border fact and fiction. As mentioned

above the hero and leader of the JRMiP is Sławomir Sierakowski, a leftist political thinker and the editor of *Krytyka Polityczna*—a prominent Polish leftist newspaper. The cast of the second film is filled with many known cultural figures, such as Polish painter Wilhelm Sasnal and Israeli composer Roei Ben-Sira. In the third film Polish-Israeli writer Alona Frankel plays herself, while the crowds gathered to hear the eulogies are real citizens who take part in the JRMiP (Cumming 2012). Ideologies and histories are just as seamlessly mixed in a visual vocabulary suffused with nostalgia, irony, and hope. Each film, through the visual techniques employed, can be understood as its simultaneous reversal. The kibbutz becomes a concentration camp as well as a mark of forceful Israeli settlement. Similarly, the JRMiP eventually grows into a monolithic and oppressive structure marked by hanging banners, processions and speeches.

Bartana seems to warn that any restorative endeavour, even those with the best of intentions, are framed by totalitarian ethos. Under the works' sweeping narrative of longing lies an implicit parallel to Israel as the Promised Land with all its continuing conflicts, the result of which has caused some to believe that "the true home of the Jew is the diaspora itself" (Kremintzar). The artist highlights the tenuous nature of homeland, nation, territory, and any other absolute demarcation of space. To this day the pathologies resulting from imposed borders surge forward like a return of the repressed. Persistent territorial conflicts in all parts of the world reveal that no terrain is truly anyone's homeland by natural decree. Every land, just like every memory, has its competing claims. Moreover, all territory has a pre-existing population and ecological balance that is necessarily complicated by the arrival of new inhabitants. We all live in a creative and often contradictory negotiation with each other and our surroundings. Bartana's sentimental evocation of a place of belonging for all those who fall through the cracks of collective memory is not as much a desirable end as it is cathartic. It diagnoses, through fiction and longing, the very

nature of *be-longing*. Bartana proposes a state of being that does not find fulfillment in the place it longs for, but in the act of longing itself, and the imagined narratives that might ensue. Longing cannot necessarily be cured, but in its individual idiosyncrasy, it can be used as a force for change.

Nostalgia in *...And Europe Will Be Stunned* is used as a means of repurposing the past for its relevance to contemporary experience, in place of attempting to understand nostalgia within an analytic framework. If we are to move forward, how do we remember without reopening the wounds of the past? More than this, how do we heal without forgetting? Bartana's project, over which I have only skimmed, does not provide a methodology for living together but neither does it discredit the possibility. The strategies of art—critical employment of a given medium, open-ended imagining, multiplicity—are methods of imaginative world-building that will persist as artefacts for future generations. Bartana's use of nostalgia does not harness longing into a singular trope, in the way the kibbutz or the manifesto did, but leaves longing, and belonging, as an open-ended proposition.

WORKS CITED

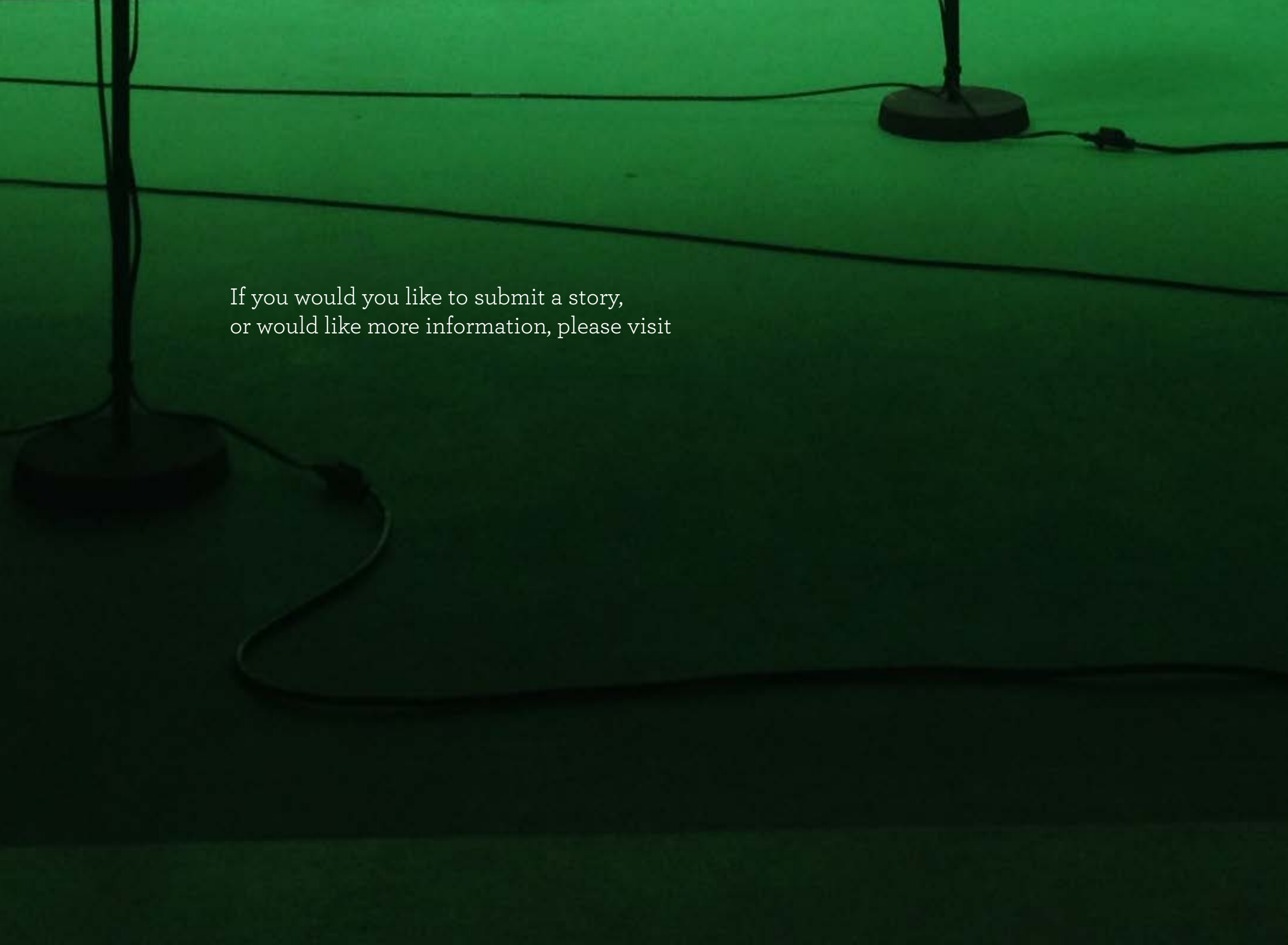
- JRMiP. "Statement." *JRMiP*. Accessed February 11, 2015 http://www.jrmip.org/?page_id=240
- Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.
- Cioran, E. M. *The Temptation to Exist*. Translated by Richard Howard. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968.
- Cumming, Laura. "Yael Bartana: *...And Europe Will be Stunned*." *The Guardian*. Last modified May 13, 2012. Accessed January 22, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/may/13/art-exhibition>
- Kremintzar, Yuval. "A Polish State in the Land of Israel." *JRMiP*. Accessed February 11, 2015 http://www.jrmip.org/?page_id=251

DAGMARA GENDA

(Koszalin, Poland 1981) is an artist and freelance writer. She has published with Border Crossings, Esse and Revue ETC in addition to being a member of the BlackFlash editorial committee 2008-2011. She has written catalogue essays for aka artist-run, Forest City Gallery, Cambridge Art Galleries, and the Dunlop Art Gallery. Genda graduated with an MA from the London Consortium, Birkbeck College in 2010, and with an MFA from Western University in 2007.

This is an interactive visual essay. Clicking hotspots on the image will reveal the written content.





If you would you like to submit a story,
or would like more information, please visit

LONGING THROUGH THE LENS

The Role of Photography in Our Social Lives

There is something incredibly sensual about photographing somebody else. Yet the photographic device, whether a professional grade Nikon D4 or an iPhone, remains between us all. We try to touch each other, but we *capture* each other instead, separated by a cage: the apparatus. Paradoxically, the very device that brings us so close to one another comes to negate real human contact; we lose each other in the photographic moment. We might feel we are falling in love with every photograph we take, but in fact we die together (maybe that is even more intimate), and all that is left is the trace of a moment that the photograph can only vaguely recall. The photographer, much like the lover, exists in a constant state of longing.

We have developed an urge to photograph and so it becomes a reflex, a need—what are we looking for by shoot-

ing away? The other day I woke up and she (*l'objet aimé*) was lying next to me. Coming through my window, the light hit her naked body in a bright triangle, creating incredible contrast. This gave me the strong urge to photograph her. I was blown away by the beauty of the sight, and my first instinct was to pick up a camera and *immortalize* her in her sleep. This troubled me. I wondered why I felt the need to do such a thing. A thing that, in this context, seemed intrusive and almost perverse. It was not, however, a sexual urge, nor was it purely aesthetic—it was a moment that I wanted to preserve. As much as we try, this proves to be impossible to do. The photographic object can hold a memory, but a memory is never clear. Remembering is the longing for a moment. By taking photos we try to immortalize moments, but what makes us so attached to these is their very mortality. So, when we photograph, we long for a moment that we cannot relive.

We are trying to remember.

Taking a photograph creates a moment of its own kind, a lapse—it happens like an inhale. It is almost like sharing a shadow with another, an intangible closeness. I am inspired by the photographic theories of Roland Barthes here, even if I look at the photographic moment in a less morbid way than he does in *Camera Lucida* (Barthes 1981). In an effort to elaborate on this branch of photographic theories, I would like to think about the photographer's inherent state of longing in contemporary terms. How is Barthes' phenomenological thought (and the romanticism that comes with it) relevant today, in the realm of the digital, the web, and social media?

We have all become photographers or, perhaps more accurately, we all now take photographs. Either way, most of us regularly impersonate the figure of the photographer.

This might be a consequence of sheer accessibility; it's just too easy. Phones can now create photographic quality that is comparable to any point-and-shoot camera. At this point, an increase in megapixel does not mean much, considering how high standard quality has become. Even if it did make a difference, it seems irrelevant given the file compression involved in the sharing of these photographs. This is, as explained by Lev Manovich in his essay "The Paradoxes of Digital Photography," one of the contradictions of (supposedly) indefinitely reproducible digital files. The degradation of a digital photo, in practice, happens much quicker than in the case of an analogue print (Manovich 2003, 242). Few people will be printing their iPhone photos in large format—most of these images are sent and received through internet-based platforms like e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, etc.

We take these photographs quickly and we want them made visible just as quickly, often simultaneously, so that we can receive instant feedback in the form of comments and 'likes.' We need immediacy and therefore the quality of the file is

beside the point. Here, we see a deep sense of 'want' and 'need.' It seems that this process is one of constant *longing*. There is no stop to it, it keeps repeating itself. What is this longing for? We seem to have moved away from the sensual longing of the photographic moment. Our physical proximity to others seems to be diminishing. This is especially true when the photographer becomes the subject, in the case of the 'selfie,' where an active isolation occurs; one is truly alone in space. Photography has become a crucial aspect of our social interactions. We even have platforms of their own to strictly communicate through visual language, such as the mobile application 'Snapchat.' We are using photography to reach out to others, but the enormity of the apparatus seems to bring us further from each other (viscerally speaking), leaving a daunting emptiness or lack in its wake. This effective technology gratifies us but never fully satisfies. I cannot think of a better word to describe such a situation than *longing*.

The self-portrait was around long before photographic practices were even developed. The self, understandably, is a common subject of interest. When the camera

was made accessible to the masses, turning it towards oneself became a common practice. Of course, there are logistical obstacles: you have to use a timer or extend your arm, camera in hand, and hope you fit in the frame. Today this awkward position has become an accepted part of everyday life for many of us. It is so incredibly simple to take a photo of oneself that this form of photography is now a centrefold of people's social lives. It is a phenomenon that speaks to our contemporary situation in a world dominated by virtual realities and the web.

What happens when the photographer also becomes the subject? There is no longer another person behind the camera. There is no longer another person looking at you. The only gaze comes from the lens that you, yourself, chose to operate. There is, maybe, a new kind of sensuality that develops here—that between us and the photographic device. The intimacy in photography comes from the isolation of the photographer and subject from the outside world in the moment that the shutter is clicked. The self-portrait, therefore, is a momentary but complete isolation of the individual. It is an act of introspection, but



again, the camera acts as an interpreter, showing us a different image of ourselves.

I recently went into a photo booth—a physical photo booth inside the Berri-UQAM subway station in Montréal (not the application on my MacBook). I want to concentrate on this particular experience of the self-portrait. I found the photo booth to be the perfect physical representation for this act; separation from the outside world takes the form of

a box in which you sit. The isolation became very real as I stared at myself on the booth's screen and 'took' the photos.

I found myself alone with myself, alone in the presence of an apparatus that almost felt like an intruder, and yet I was the visitor. It was an intimate space.

Photography is a visual medium in which longing plays a crucial role. Whether we are positioned as photographer, subject, or viewer, it seems that we are looking

for something that cannot be seen, like a memory. Longing can be quite a beautiful notion when speaking of photography within the discourse of love. However, the technology now associated with the apparatus brings about a much stranger feeling. The endlessness of longing has been accelerated, it is both perpetual and immediate. Contemporary photographic practices support a new kind of individualism that is now apparent in all corners of our culture, the art world included.

WORKS CITED

Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.

—. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

Manovich, Lev. "The Paradoxes of Digital Photography." In *The Photography Reader*, edited by Liz Wells, 240-249. New York: Routledge, 2003.

SAMUEL BERNIER-CORMIER

is pursuing a BFA in art criticism & curatorial practice at OCAD University. He is currently working on a curatorial thesis project exploring the themes of memory and place in photographic practices.

