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**conversations on swansong** 2021, notes on making and growing by alice chandler, midwinter by jess currie, messages between trees by steph hardy, unrealised public sculpture for peace by jill mcknight, your inventory has been returned to you by liv preston, flat cave by katie thompson, flatlands by daniel tuomey.

## Notes on making and growing

The smell of tomato plants. Hot. Feeling and thinking about being on the peripheries or on the outskirts of something. A place or a space or a group or a set of people and looking out at them. Outside looks fresh, soil damp from the recent rain pour. They look free out there, uncontrolled. Roaming. Like looking through a window when you are sat in the room at the same time. Perspiration on the windows. Roots not deep enough to reach underneath. Like you know what they are talking about but it's hard to truly understand what they are saying. Ear pressed to the wall. Murmurs in the soil. It is frustrating. Reliant on essential water from somewhere else. Waiting for it to come. Like you are present and connected but not at the same time. Dependant. Too much foliage. Too thirsty. Drooping. Drinking. Revitalised. It rains some more outside. Humid. It is overcrowded now. Heat rises. The door opens. Fresh air. The removal of excess foliage means finally there is room to breathe, to inhale and exhale. Whispers as the first sign of green fruits start to surface. Fresh leaves sprout, unfurl. Fruit blushes red. Promise.

Days pass. Wet and warm. The conditions are perfect for inquisitive spores, passing through on breezy gusts. You don't notice at first, it feels safe inside, sheltered, dry. But it has gotten a little congested in here again. Too busy actually, uncomfortable in the crowd. You battle your way through. Talking turns to shouting. Sweat drips from the ceiling. Thirsty. Gulping from a can you've been clutching for too long. Warm liquid splashes back onto you, drips, seeps in, permeates. You don't see anyone for a while. Just get on with it. Try and concentrate on growing, producing, drown out the noise. It happens very suddenly. The warning signs were there. Things start to disintegrate, like an argument working its way through a group of friends. If you could just... take it back, you didn't mean it, remove the infected area, the moment. I'm sorry. With no sides left to pick, one by one the rot sets in. Rotten stems and bloated fruit. Decomposition. Was it my fault? Try again next year.

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I have been thinking a lot recently about the similarities between growing and art practice. Both require time, testing, failure, happy accidents, effort, labour, resource. They are a process, craft and skill. One year you might grow or make something really successfully. Sometimes things just flourish, sometimes things just wilt. Both practices are contingent on external forces. Artists need certain conditions the same way plants do; some nurture and support. Mostly time. They don't always thrive. I often feel envious of the devotion and dedication of the hardened gardeners with perfect plots and perfect crops. I wonder if I'm just romanticising the idea of perfection. The master gardener, the genius artist. No weeds in sight. I can't even imagine what that would be like. It doesn't really exist. Instead I steal snatches at my allotment and my practice. In Summer you can go after work, for an hour, or two when the sun sets as late as ten. The weeds are endless though, they just return in different spots. Why bother, it takes years and years of hard work to even get close

to being rid of them all. Help from friends. Artists as workers. A rounded practice. Rhizomatic root systems lurk in the soil waiting to regrow, like relationships.

You never stop learning about growing or making. I think the best thing is that there isn't necessarily a correct way to do anything. Everyone has tried different things, and will happily give you tips, share seedlings, share ideas. A special generosity. You can just give it a go and see what happens. The more you try the more you will learn. My fingernails fill with mud. When I work with silver, my fingernails fill with dust, or get filed off, or covered in polish. I think about value. What it means to be able to make or grow. To produce. A glut. A collection of jam jars ready to be refilled each year. Nourishing. Pickling, preserving; in jewellery making you 'pickle' the metal to remove oxides after soldering. The silver comes out of the pickle a pale matte colour, it loses its metal-ness. Ready for finishing and polishing in a strange pursuit for shiny perfection. Why am I trying to remove flaws like weeds? Perhaps it's time to try a new recipe.

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# MIDWINTER

The final chapter of this story is set at a midnight moonlit mourning in midwinter. Imagine if Turner had painted a nuclear holocaust as opposed to ships at sea. That is the scene we are being presented with. Grab your popcorn as we usher in the end of the world. A silent funeral, as the Hierophant proclaims that God is Dead. The Hierophant proclaims; “God is Dead.” Chaos erupts as a spectacle to be siphoned. Someone finally decided to press the button that says do not press. It was always only going to be a matter of time. It is a mess. We had seen the paintings, read Dante, examined the Cuneiform. Cross-referenced Wikipedia and deep-dived on YouTube conspiracy theories backdating to the year two thousand and nine. To clarify; the year is now two thousand and twenty-one. We are in the midst of a global pandemic. And everyone has an opinion. The age of the earth is approximately four point five four billion years old. Many ancient texts are the equivalent to ancient grocery lists. Usually pragmatic, neither comedic nor dramatic. It helps us to remember it is the banalities of our daily lives that are most important. Preserved for millennia. I reminisce about the full-scale stone phallus remaining multipurpose, a fertility icon, an offering to the old gods, a tool for onanism. A family heirloom to be passed across generation for sacred masturbation. Now lives at the British Museum. It is what we call keeping it in the family. I consider how disappointing it may be for future alien-earth inhabitants to ponder over our amazon wish-lists. The surreptitious and sanctimonious seraphim squander the last few drops of Coca Cola, whilst eating stale granola and pork pies. The uninvited guests drink champagne whilst wailing, listening to The Kinks; “Lola” on a cassette player. I play cards and I always draw the joker. No poker. My late husband was a broker. We ended up bankrupt. We mold each other into shape. I think we must have always loved to hate each other. Some sort of twisted peace at last. I have always loved a spoiler. I had been

# MIDWINTER

recklessly abandoned several times before I finally dropped the rock. Cut the cord for one last time. The tin foil, mortal coil, plants in soil, toil, and trouble. It is all going tits up now. I breathed in and out, chained to nothing, changed to nothing but my own beat. Butt on the old, cold car seat. It is quite the feat to leave something you thought you might die without. Leaving home is rarely fun, check that the laundry is done. The authorities on the radio told me where we are going, we wouldn’t need any stuff. I thought “tough” and grabbed my most expensive goods. A bougie candle, skin care made with snail slime, the keys to the car. They always tell you in the event of a fire you should leave the residence without collecting any possessions. They are idiots. There is no doubt that “Winter is Death” and a nuclear winter would potentially be death times a thousand. I do not know why we expect each other to do anything at all; except to mope under dirty duvets, crunching crumbs between our toes, farting out clouds. Metamorphosing into crowds, whilst concurrently conducting a solitary orchestra. There goes the wailing again. Drink Champagne. To be perfectly alone, restrained by our own container, sometimes I wish I could melt into everything. I meditate into you. Oblivion. In the event of a nuclear disaster. What do you do? Limbal rings remain the viewfinders of eternity, singing songs obnoxiously of what it means to be free. “You’re free to do what you want to do.” Honestly, I call bullshit. Should you remember to bring your lover to the wake? Crossing the Styx; mistaken for a lake. Cobblers stuff their faces with a Gregg’s Steak Bake. The most romantic facade is now deemed a fake. I do not remember Jesus wearing shoes anyway. Pencil it in your diary, for today is Judgement Day; as we all quit the game as we no longer wish to play. Life on earth is defined by nobody opening the curtains. I used to live in a town that was impossibly autumn, but winter was omnipresent. Winter began on December the 21st.

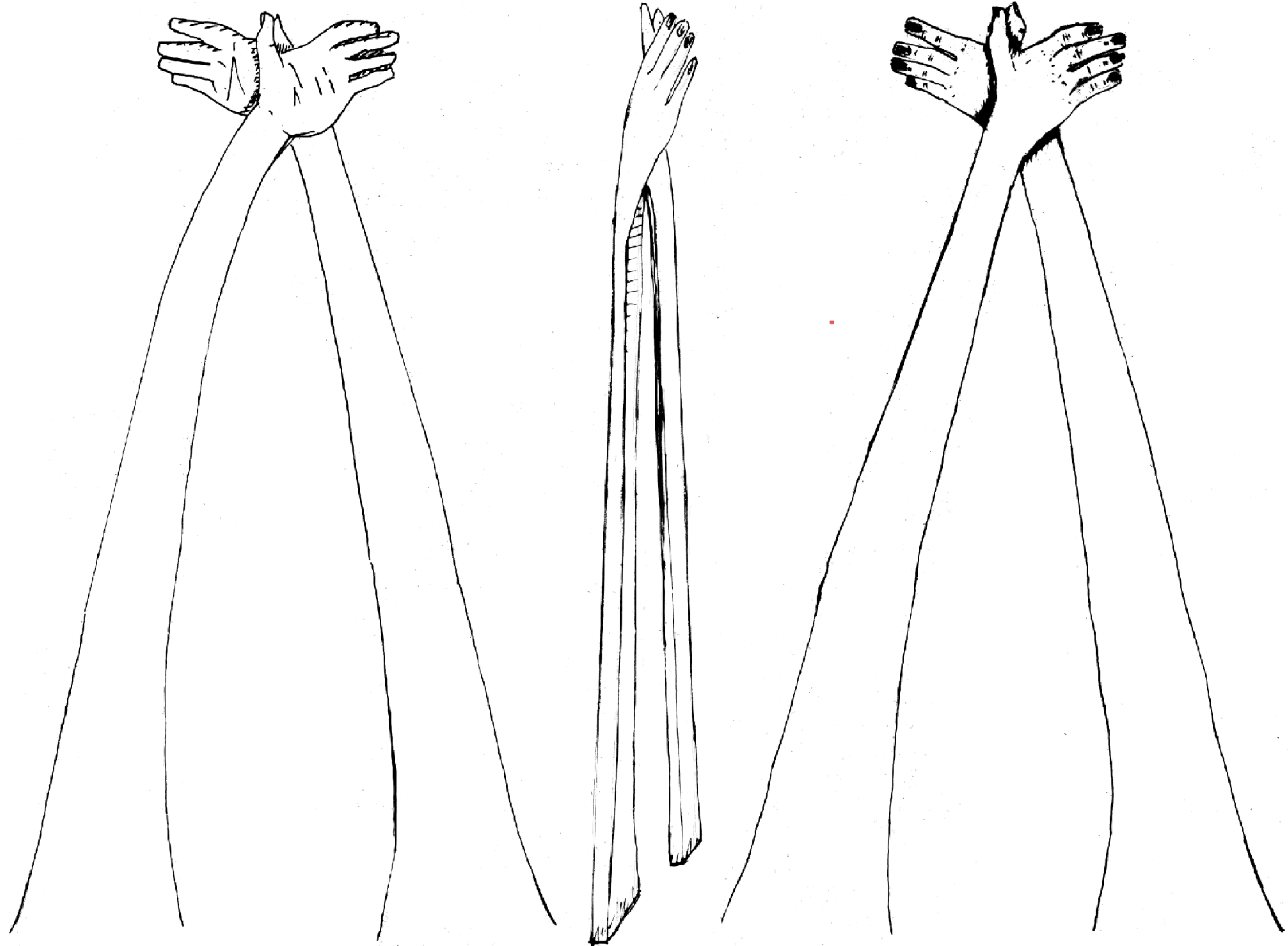




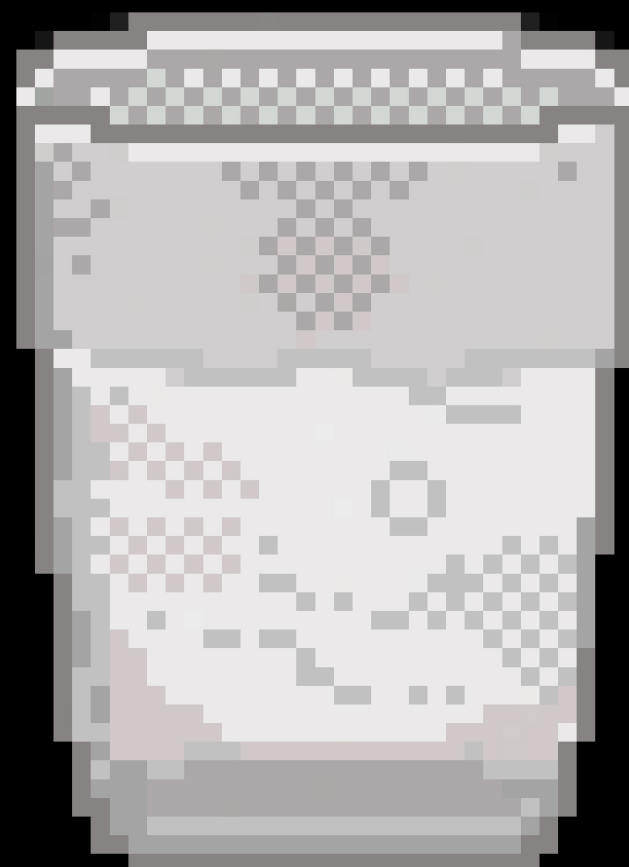










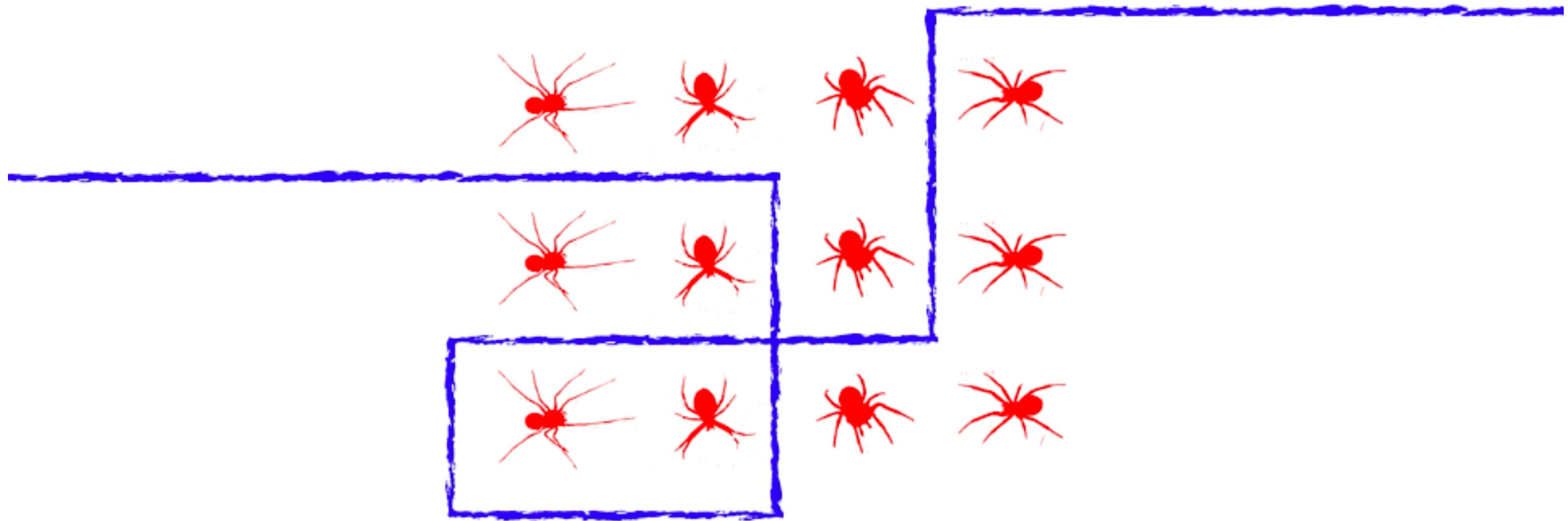








a thread is a map we can lay down ourselves



a thread is a map we can lay down ourselves



the stars • a custom • a spindle • a labyrinth is a  
single long line  
offering • strung through  
a shield to dance on • a hammer • an ever-living





*I build my home very slowly and all at once.*

*It is a home that I remember.*

*I know many others have homes like me.*

*When I build my home I start at my body.*

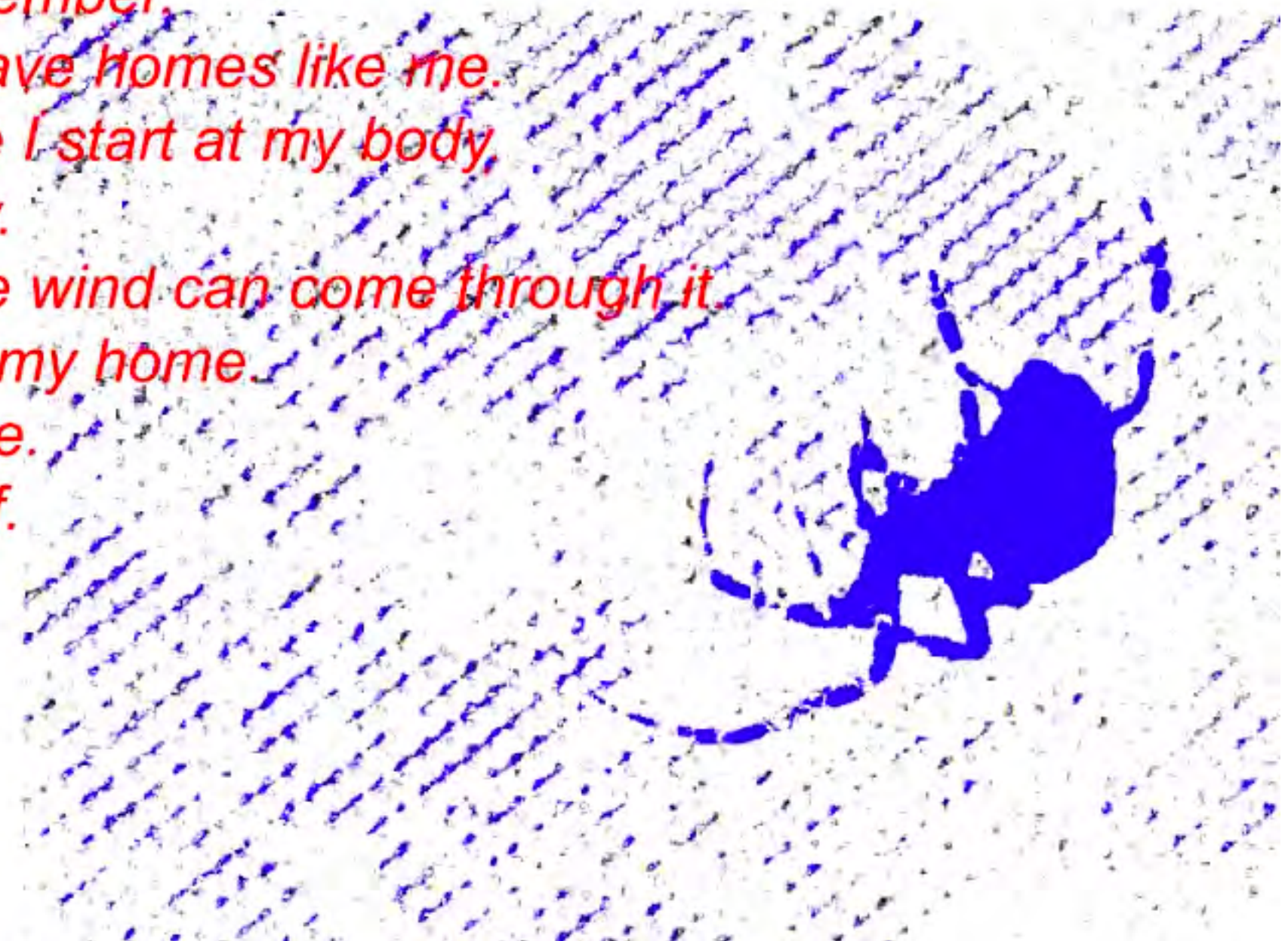
*I build my home lightly.*

*I build my home so the wind can come through it.*

*I live in the corners of my home.*

*I am proud of my home.*

*I built my home myself.*



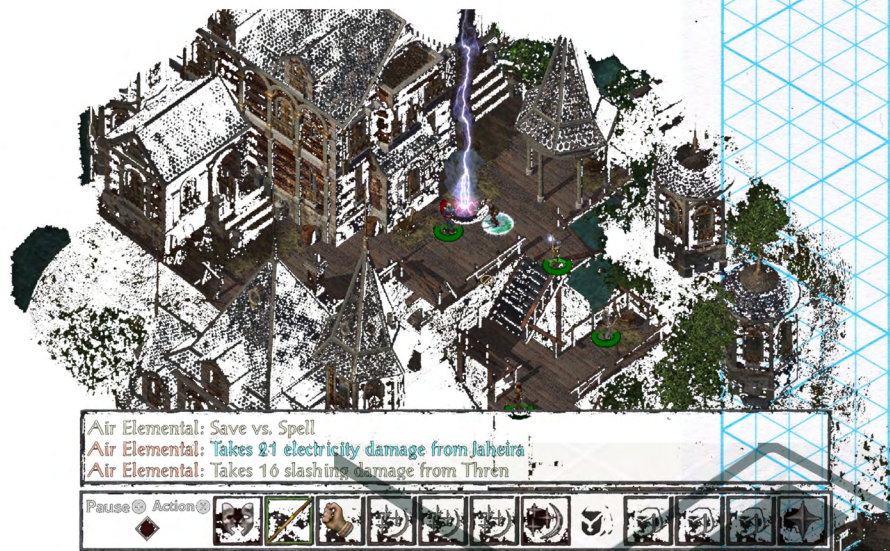


*you can care for knitted things by adding.*

*you can't always reuse the same material. sometimes it thins  
to nothing.*







# FLATLANDS

You enter a space without perspective. There's a hard glow coming from the screen.

You are a paper doll being shuffled across the screen. You have built yourself up from nothing. You have always had heat and water. You have had hard days just like anyone else, you have felt that you were the most truly wretched creature in the world. But you have never known true hardship. And now you are strong.

What do you do?

You move into a landscape without elevation. A uniquely flat territory.

You're afraid that your attempts to build a better world will result in a worse world. You know that through inaction you are part of the problem. The streets outside your window are changing, filling with newly dreamed luxury housing developments and more people who look like you. Like you, but richer: the people you've paved the way for.

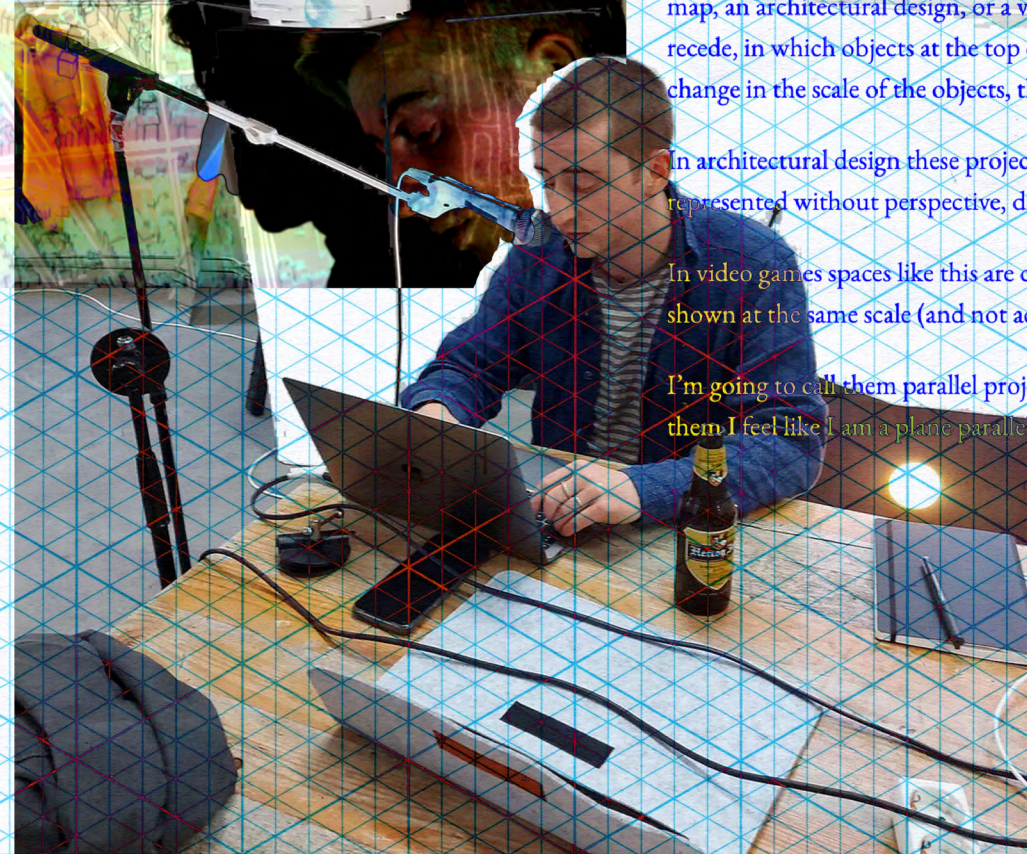
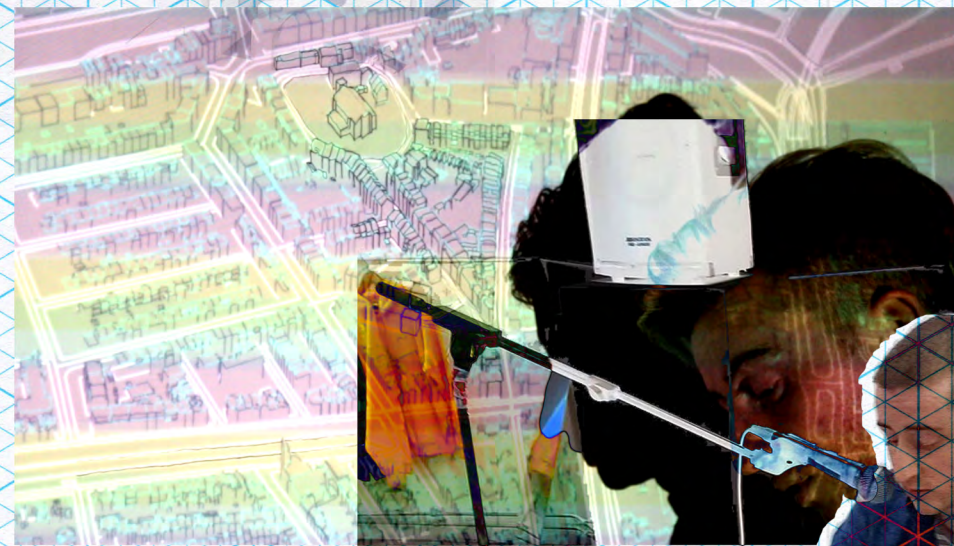
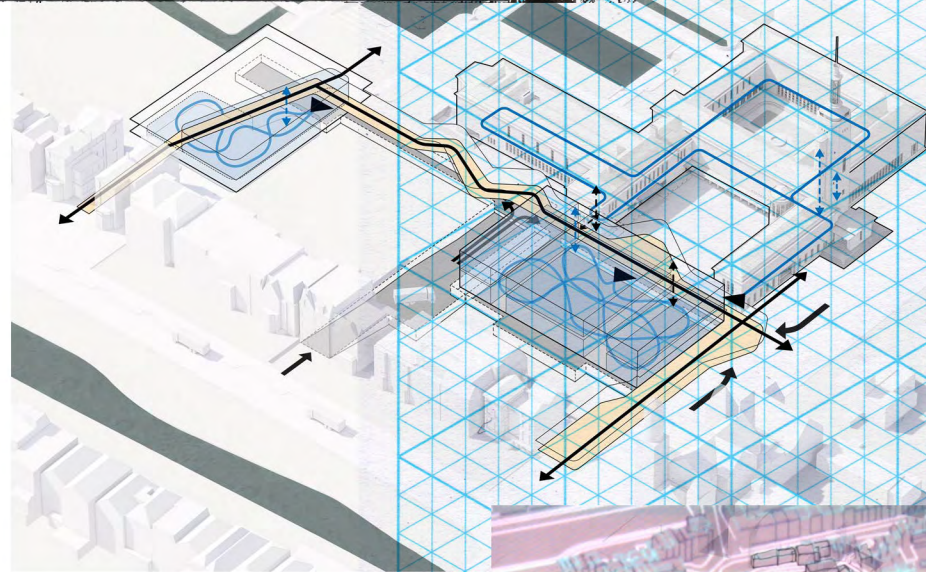
You see all this being dreamed into existence. You float above an endlessly unfolding, ever-new ever-eroding flat land.

If you've ever looked at a picture made of rhomboids that don't get smaller as they get further away then you'll know what I'm talking about. If the buildings are splayed out before your eyes and the ground goes on forever—no horizon and no stars but the ones reflected in the puddles—, if you've ever looked at a museum map, an architectural design, or a video game landscape showing a space that's tilted away from you but doesn't recede, in which objects at the top of the image are understood to be behind objects at the bottom, without any change in the scale of the objects, then you've probably seen a parallel projection.

In architectural design these projections are categorised as axonometric drawings. The three cartesian axes are represented without perspective, drawn at a consistent measurable scale across the whole image.

In video games spaces like this are categorised as "isometric": a specific projection in which all three axes are shown at the same scale (and not actually the projection these games typically use).

I'm going to call them parallel projections. My heart tells me they are parallel projections because when I look at them I feel like I am a plane parallel to the plane of the world, but I don't think this is actually why.





The earliest parallel projections are found in Chinese painting, with elements appearing as early as the work of Gu Kaizhi in the 4th century CE. Classical Chinese painting made a stylistic distinction between meticulous “*gongbi*” painting (which employed the earliest use of strict parallel projection), and “*xieyi*” painting, which used more flowing, intuitive lines. This opposition was partly understood as a distinction between *xieyi*’s sketching of

thoughts, vs *gongbi*’s more tangible relationship to reality. This tension will persist, but parallel projection will rarely unproblematically occupy this side of the divide again.

Parallel projections can have an alienating effect on the viewer. It feels like floating in some abstract version of the sky, an indeterminate distance off the surface of the earth, looking down at a beautifully laid out and legible landscape. No amount of reaching out could allow you to touch that parallel plane. Depth is shown but not felt.

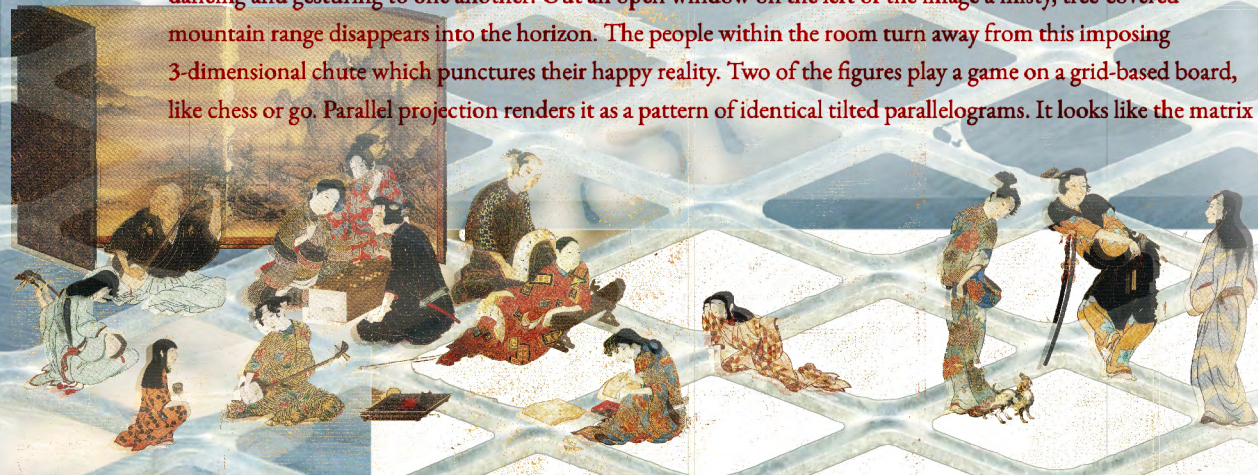
I’ve spent a lot of the last two years in this kind of space.

Rotterdam was carried down the Maas as silt from the rest of Europe. Over centuries the dirt was squared off into bricks, and canals and drainage ditches were carved from the water. Charlois—my neighbourhood—once sat at the edge of this spreading patchwork of managed land, but has slowly been swallowed on all sides by industry, and by now has been drawn almost to the centre of the city’s composition.

The land was built like an oil painting that never dries, a huge flat wet work under constant revision. Silt slips and is absorbed into the deltas. Sand from deep under the North Sea is dredged up to reinforce the beaches. There is constant cycling of land and water, the lines of the soggy plane are retraced again and again, shifted and adjusted according to the needs of the market at any given time.

Seamless coexistences of parallel projections with foreshortened perspectives often appear in Japanese ukiyo-e prints and paintings of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and onward, where identically sized figures are arranged on axonometric planes in the “foreground”, while objects outside this space diminish in size in accordance with their distance.

In the earliest surviving example of the genre—the anonymous Hikone screen—a group of people are scattered without perspective across an undifferentiated surface of floor and wall, playing games and music, reading, dancing and gesturing to one another. Out an open window on the left of the image a misty, tree-covered mountain range disappears into the horizon. The people within the room turn away from this imposing 3-dimensional chute which punctures their happy reality. Two of the figures play a game on a grid-based board, like chess or go. Parallel projection renders it as a pattern of identical tilted parallelograms. It looks like the matrix



upon which a contemporary axonometric drawing would be made. The folds of the screen and the crackles in its gold leaf surface give the only hint of depth to their pleasure plane. A space divider depicting flattened space.

Ukiyo-e often shows scenes of the sex workers, sumo wrestlers, musicians and actors who populated the Yukaku: legal red light districts in Japanese cities. Other prints show scenes from myth and folklore. Some combine fairy tale scenes with Yukaku scenes.

When you’re controlling it, parallel projection feels intuitive. You don’t think about the fact that nothing gets bigger or smaller. You click and drag to extrude a surface, you click and your little guy shuffles across the map. You move from point to point and things are the same scale. Your attention frames what’s relevant. In a way it’s how the world actually feels, or how objects appear floating in your imagination.

In a museum I gaze in wonder at a visualisation printed and cosseted by its handsome architecture of perspex and painted MDF, my mind wandering through the virtual space in anticipation of my encounter with its actuality. My eyes glide through the galleries, drifting between the well-curated centuries. My little avatar hovers in the imaginary air between me and the apparatus.

By the 15th century the Dutch were using windmills to pump and drain water, drying out significant areas of wetland and creating polders: flat tracts of industrially useful land whose existence relies on constant human management. The earliest surviving polder is Achtermeer, drained to expand the city of Alkmaar in 1533. Intentionally flooding this polder was later instrumental to the reconquest of the city from the Spanish during the Eighty Years War.

Google translate gives ukiyo-e as “*fleeting life*” or “*transient world*” but I first heard it translated as “*floating world*”:

a term which suggests worlds of possibility and imagination. This “floating” presumably belongs to the consumer rather than producer of this world, as while the material base of sex work and theatre may be precarious, they are certainly as grounded as hunger to the people on the production side. For the client, the audience, the experience of art and sex is an unmooring, as provisional, mutable, dreamlike as folklore. These spaces—when entered as a consumer—are outside the regular dimensions of manageable, measurable space. They are spaces of “pure” pleasure, and pleasure—apparently—lets us float.

In 1602 the Dutch East India Company was founded, and the Dutch West India Company followed in 1621. By



marrying the shipping of goods and enslaved people to military-political power and cartographic research, the Companies claimed capitalism as a total system for mastery of space, society and subjectivity. Wherever they went they left behind carbon copy place names (New Amsterdams, New Zealands, etc), Dutch colonial architecture, and maps that fixed the importance of these constructions. Theirs was a project of performative, dynamic, brutally violent worldbuilding: forcing a New World into the gashes they ripped out of cultures they exploited, using the same rhythm of erosion and re-constitution familiar to the Dutch from their eternal dance with the sea. Their project treated human lives and cultural artefacts simultaneously as semiotic material and capitalist resources, nothing escaped their attempt at mastery.

The video games parallel projection is used in are typically fantasy role playing games. I sit at my computer night after night and move little gnomes and elves through endless landscapes without skies. My perspective floats as I hunch in my cheap office chair. In these games you can always pause and give commands to everybody, you never have to feel pressured to solve problems in real time. We kill monsters and resolve trite moral dilemmas, my little guys fall in love with each other and help each other confront their demons.

Since at least the eighteenth century crude parallel projections were being used in the design of military technology and fortifications, where total mastery of three dimensional space must be reducible to paper. However the official European beginning of accurate isometric projection—in which all three cartesian axes are represented on the same plane with equal foreshortening—was its development for technical drawing by the

English engineer William Farish in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Contrary to what you might think, he used it to ensure that the complex three dimensional models he used in his scientific demonstrations could be taken apart and put together in his absence. These early isometric drawings often show industrial machinery in a state of controlled explosion. Rationalisations of new technology like the steam pumps that would replace windmills in draining the polders.

Parallel projection produces a space which is paradoxically both impeccably measurable and radically abstract.

One of the little guys is me, this one here, this gnome in the black armour. This little fella I made myself. He is me. "I wouldn't dream of refusing," he says. I click and he follows. The floating hand in the gauntlet, that's like... my hand. That's like the way the cursor is always your hand,—your hand in the never nowhere space of the computer. The little gnome is me but the little hand is my hand and the interface it moves around and clicks on to direct the actions of the gnome: that's like a specialisation of my mind, my mind conveniently condensed to a few pre-packaged commands. The gnome is my stand-in, like my avatar. "Of course" he says, when I click again for him to go somewhere else. He is my avatar but he talks a bit like a servant. But also—somewhere in my



Gnome: To the task at hand.

Zrinkle: Something you need?

Gnome: As you will.

Zrinkle: Yes?

Gnome: Of course!

Zrinkle: Mhmm?

Gnome: I wouldn't dream of refusing.

mind—he is my friend. These are my little guys. I move them across the screen when it's dark outside. We go on adventures together. I am the reason they survive. I can see the space in its entirety, I can pause time and plan everybody's moves. They are down there embedded, entangled in it. I have the view from above, from the impossibly tilted parallel projected god's eye view. But I am not a god, I am a controlled explosion. I am him, he is me, he is my guy. The cursor is my hand. The screen is my mind. The gnome is me.

Outside my window the Charlois dawn greys the sky once again. I have forgotten to eat dinner or sleep and now it is tomorrow.

Outside my window kids and teens are playing around, making a lot of noise which makes it difficult to work. This could also just be the day I'm having. I've mostly had my studio at home since I finished my masters four years ago. The kids are mostly Turkish, Surinamese and Caribbean Dutch, second or third generation immigrants. I am white, western European, first generation. I recently went to a neighbourhood meeting in which a private developer and an architect outlined their plan to build luxury apartments on the patch of grass beside the playground, cutting down several tall trees and building over some of the limited parking spaces in the neighbourhood. I stood with my neighbours facing these rich white people across a table covered in architectural drawings, and felt lucky to be on the right side of the table for once. Briefly I believed I had escaped the bourgeoisie, that by living in this neighbourhood for a few years and going to a few meetings I had become not just an ally but a full, successful class traitor.

The tension between the measurable and the abstract wasn't fully exploited by anyone using parallel projection until the Russian Constructivists—especially El Lissitzky—began to employ it. Like the Japanese prints, Lissitzky rarely stuck to a single projection of space within a single image. But unlike the disorienting but coherent floatiness of ukiyo-e compositions—where parallel projected rooms coexisted with perspective landscapes—, constructivists shifted the angle of projection several times within an image.

So: while space in ukiyo-e seems to be composed of several semi-dependent realities which drift across and touch one another, bridging the transcendent and the material; in constructivism space folds and reels, measurable and comprehensible but never fully exhaustible, always gesturing towards its untapped imaginary potential. Where ukiyo-e's space is one of theatre, sex, spectacle and fetish, constructivism's is built for a fully electrified revolution. Both insist, in different ways, that the daily experience of life and labour are not a complete picture. That there is another world, a real, material, spatially comprehensible world, which must be dreamed into existence.

• Holocene well under way  
• Doggerland poss best hunting/fishing ground in Europe



The shining houses in the developers' renders cast no shadows. Past the patch of grass out my window there is a neon artwork with a quotation from the late local poet Rieneke Grobben-Minderman — tot kijk in de wijk: "see you around, in the neighbourhood", basically. My line of sight to this work would be blocked by the new housing development. I often say that the presence of the playground out my window is one of my favourite things about the house, and about working from home. Hearing the kids playing makes me feel like less of an isolated monk, reminds me that I am a real person and part of a real community. But today it feels abstract, untouchable, I feel like a stranger in a strange land. I've lived here six years. I don't speak Dutch. I am a global gentrifier, neo-colonialist, a destroyer of worlds.

During the pandemic, as the world shrank, I spent nights drifting through weightless, horizonless, skyless dreamworlds, with no sense of perspective and no stars but those reflected in the puddles.

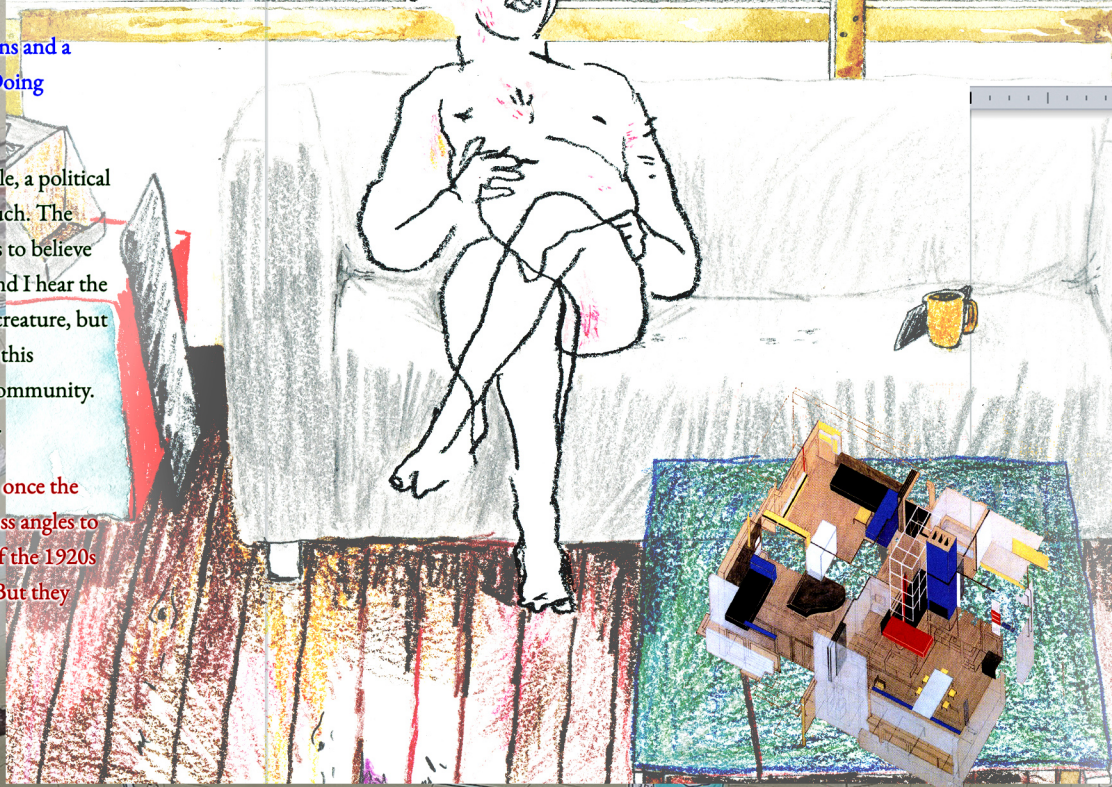
This was my fantasy: a world beset by moral problems which I could put right. Deep, unpackable conspiracies, and complex statistics that made me more powerful rather than less.

Being a silver-tongued lady with a sword who steps into a crisis and sets it right with two conversations and a combat encounter. While I sat inside my flat and whiled away the greatest political crisis of my life. Doing nothing. The power fantasy is a saviour fantasy, a salve for those of us too scared or stupid to act.

Outside my flat's window the world rolls on forever. This little crooked space is measurable, knowable, a political fiction which it is easy to believe in. I often think of Preciado high on testosterone, theorising his couch. The couch is an architectural institution that allows us to forget we are precarious and placeless, allows us to believe that these little rented rooms are our own. This house is my emotional property. I lie on my couch and I hear the children playing outside. Their cries allow me to feel that I am part of a community, not an isolated creature, but they also remind me that I am lazy, privileged, do not speak Dutch and do not do enough to protect this neighbourhood that I love. I barely speak to my neighbours and barely participate in the life of the community. I'm like Josef Albers explaining his attraction to parallel projection: "I prefer to see with closed eyes".

The Constructivist project of exploring the poetic, spatial possibilities of this engineer's tool ossified once the Dutch got their hands on it. In drawings by Van Doesburg and Rietveld planes of blue slide in at cross angles to panes of red, casually encompassing the multi-purpose living room of the future. Dutch architects of the 1920s reimagined the functionality of domestic space, poked at its meaning and assumptions about itself. But they

never unpicked it, never created a contradiction or a crinkle within the projection. De Stijl's parallel projections



never suggest that space is anything other than rationally manageable.

The mastery and management of space are serious business in the Netherlands. Here the notion of building a new world is not a poetic proposal, the Dutch are always already intimately aware that the existence of the world is the result of an engineering project. The quantifiability of space, the resolution of logistical problems of today, have always been more important than floating propositions about tomorrow.

Of course new problems will arise, and in order to continue to *doe normaal* we will have to do things a little differently. We manage and manicure the edges of normality, smiling and nodding and chewing as the oceans rise and total ecological collapse looms on the ever-higher horizon.

I slip through and into a horizonless space where nothing touches anything. The room is the same but I am not. My mind is a plateau. I am as thin as a piece of paper. My body is pure current. I am made of light. I am not my spinal column or the mush of my brain, I am not my fingers or the grime that comes off them and grots up the narrow spaces in my mouse. I am nothing and no one. I am a user, a player, a hero, a function, a frame. Nobody wants me, nobody needs me, I am alone and free.

The space I take up is not here, not seen by anyone. Somewhere out there in the night my details sit in belastingdienst databases, being chewed through gently by a large, calm computer. I am the leaf which the caterpillar eats. I am a flicker across the square from someone's window. I am stunned by the swirling green and pink lights of the screen. Held in stasis.

Sometimes I feel trapped here. Between the criss cross lines drawn by the familiar coughs and arguments and favourite songs of my neighbours. The space feels small and flat. I hide from the windows. I stay low on the couch. My mind feels foggy. The city is far away and inside my skull. The shouts of the kids in the playground are clearer than my own thoughts. I do not want to do anything useful. I want to be sucked into the vortex of bright colours and rising numbers. The world out the window is dying. This world cannot be saved by a silver tongue and a sword, or any kind of white saviour. This world should not be saved, we must destroy this dream of a world if we want to survive, if we want everyone to live. We cannot do this with a silver tongue and a sword and a screen. I will get what I want. I will be swallowed by the rising.

The black swivel chair in front of the computer screen has a tidal pull. I find I'm always kind of thinking about it, thinking about when I can next go and isolate myself and sit on my own in that uncomfortable chair looking into the depthless dream of that big screen.

Darkness falls and the world out the window slips away. The living room turns yellow. Shivers pass through his skin and his mind ripples and turns smooth. He sits in his warm yellow living room in a world where he helps no one and does nothing. He slides into the spaceless.





2021