

THE POOL

Artist Statement

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Figure 1.

Screen capture from *The Pool* (2020).

The Pool takes the form of a video essay, in which the shore, symbolic of limit, incursion and threshold, is explored as the site par excellence for incantations of or encounters with Otherness. The camera that insists on capture discovers that landscapes are agentic, generative bodies, evading fixed explanation and instead appealing to fluid modes of fictioning. First presented as an installation at Vartai Gallery in 2020, the video essay is based on Elaine Tam's *The Pool* (2020)—a tripartite piece of performance writing comprising *Sessions*, *Diagrams* and *Afterword*. The text interweaves theory and fiction through the form of transcribed interviews charting a series of shore-side events recounted by an unidentified Narrator. A moving image version of *The Pool* was created driven by a desire to translate the text's fictional and theoretical dimensions that approach the shore as a demarcation, a place where the classical, idealised voyage must risk subversion by Jacques Derrida's unforeseen counterpart: the *arrivant*.

The video's affective landscape is woven as a movement between the inner and outer landscapes, making up its experiential texture. *The Pool* engages with the material specificities and complexities of a moving image as a haptic and somatically engaging medium, which enables embodied and material relationality and exchange (Bruno 2014). In this instance, the screen itself becomes a kind of material topography—a pleated surface, that is in dialogue with the inner archi-

texture of our bodies and its manifold pleats, folds, and textural membranes. Through this material dialogue, *The Pool* engages with the psychic and physical boundary crossings while exploring the pull of “the unknowable gravitational core” which is approached by Tam in the text in relation to Luce Irigaray’s three hospitable relationships: Nature, Lover and Mother (Tam 2020, 57). In the video, this seductive pull recounted by an unidentified Narrator manifests as a desiring movement that exposes boundaries between multiple interiors and exteriors of both the landscapes and the self: “As with the inner core of the earth, it cannot be seen nor touched, but is nonetheless the deep centre around which molten layers encrust and stratify—its latest expression being the outer-most surface upon which we walk.” (57). This aspect is emphasized in the choice of the filming location itself, a volcanic island—an inversion of a molten centre—its shore caressed by the approaching, overflowing and receding waves. It sets a premise for *The Pool*, which takes the form of a voyage exploring the paths towards the core of the self as always in relation to exteriority.

In this context, Jean-Luc Nancy’s reconceptualization of corporeality beyond dualisms of mind and matter is useful for considering the shifting centre of the self, which is expressed in terms of intimacy as always taking place in relation to exteriority (Nancy 2008). Nancy approaches the self beyond the notions of absolute interiority and identity, thus privileging a notion of being in terms of exteriority, exposure, and ontological plurality. Considering bodies as multiple limits exposed to each other and always already outside the logic of one’s own body (*corpus meum*), corporeality is reconfigured as a multiplicity of intersecting bodies, human and nonhuman. Therefore, the ideal of integrity, an absolute sovereignty of the self is compromised when existence is thought in terms of originary co-existence and co-belonging, which rejects *the* universal body defined by the onto-theological logic.

Throughout the video, a gesture of folding between the inside and the outside meets at the edges of the self through various encounters with nonhuman entities, the oceanic limitlessness, and the *subterranean*. These encounters are explored through an unfolding movement towards an experiential manifestation of existence as relational. In other words, following Erika Balsom’s thought on the cinematic image as oceanic, this video essay attempts to create an opening where one can “leave *terra firma* and delve into the liquid flux of oceanic feeling [which] is to undertake a radical reorientation of perspective.” (Balsom 2018, 10). Therefore, *The Pool* creates an affective movement through which the gravitational pull towards relationality can be sensorially explored. It is an invitation to plunge—*deeper, deeper, deeper*—reaching the most intimate exteriority of the self beyond terrestrial biases.

By plunging into the oceanic where gravity can be defied, *The Pool* participates in the debates on the amorphous term of the posthuman by mapping the edges of the self in relation to the deep time of geological formation of the earth. Following Kathryn Yussof’s analysis of the inextricable links between geology, slavery, and the Anthropocene, it is significant to address that geology as a category of knowledge allowed transactions between bodies and materials, a process during which

“the inhuman categorization and the inhuman earth” were pressed into intimacy that served “as a node of extraction of properties and personhood.” (Yusoff 2018, xii). Therefore, by focusing on the landscapes as generative bodies that appeal to fluid modes of fictioning, *The Pool* attempts to contribute to an ontological reconsideration of the ‘human’ via the figure of the *arrivant*, which exposes the limits of human mastery and unsettles proprietary relations. In this video essay, the *arrivant* embodies the unforeseeable future events, as well as an invitation to affirm what is excluded, forgotten, other.

The Pool was made and exhibited just before the pandemic unfolded in 2020. In an exhibition review of *smooth space, pleated*, Jogintė Bučinskaitė addresses the effects of *The Pool* as transposing “nature’s indifference and foreignness to humans onto us, asking where this feeling begins and ends when we consider ourselves. Where do our human feelings as well as bodies begin and end? Does human necessarily mean terrestrial, and vice versa?” (Bučinskaitė 2020). After the past few years of unfolding uncertainty on a global scale, this video essay has acquired an additional dimension for an interpretation. The time of crisis exposed forgotten material and immaterial networks of relationality, unsettled the integrity of the onto-theological body, and compromised the self-sufficiency of a neoliberal individual. Therefore, to address the increasing awareness of co-existence and co-dependency that became even more exposed since *The Pool* was made, I invite you to write your own subtitles. They can take a form of a response to the shifting perspective of what it means to be ‘human,’ taking into account the networks of relationality that fold the self and constitute a shared sense of existence.

The Pool (2020)

UHD single-channel video, stereo sound

Duration 14 min.

<https://geistekincinaityte.com/The-Pool>

Camera, video and sound editing by Geiste M. Kincinaityte; sound by Simon Allen, Jan Hendrickse and Sandro Mussida; story and script for subtitles by Elaine Tam.

References

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Exhibitions and Screenings of *The Pool*

The Pool (2020), *smooth space, pleated*, 7 Feb–13 March 2020, Vartai Gallery, Vilnius (Lithuania). Production and exhibition of *The Pool* was funded by the Lithuanian Council for Culture.

The Pool was screened as part of a performance lecture with Elaine Tam at the conference *Tactics and Praxis: Creativity, Pleasure and Ethics in Academic Work*, 5–8 July 2021. CRASSH, University of Cambridge (UK).

The Pool (2020), *we are made of star stuff*, 4–27 March 2022, 253 Hoxton, London (UK).

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