

Spiderly Symptoiesis: Tensegral Tentacularity and Speculative Clews

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Abstract

With Spider(s) as our guide, we tentatively prod and turn felt concepts of situatedness and entanglement; stickiness and attachment; plasticity and pliability; precarity, uncertainty, and leaps of vulnerability. Inspired by multitudinal spiderly threads, we turn to spinning – not as a rote practice, self-serving tidy manipulation or fabrication, but rather as a working-with-world in care-full tending and continual creation of a supportive mesh.

The figure of the web allows a transdisciplinary, heterogenous and generative weaving-together through which to gather seemingly disparate theoretical threads, not only to consider Spider(s) anew but also to spin-with as a performative thinking-with in scholarly becomings. We follow and carry with us many Æffective encounters with tentacular companions and sticky traces. In Æsthetic (re)turning, we find value in the space for attentive, collaborative tending and response with/in the tensions of inquiry in a more-than-academic world.

Keywords

Speculative Inquiry; Aesthetic Experience; Stickiness; Care; Higher Education

Introduction

Æ is a cross-continental collaboration between artist-researchers Erin Kindlund Price (USA) and Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton (South Africa). We came to know each other, across the globe, through the *Post Philosophies and the Doing of Inquiry* webinar series' virtual debrief sessions.¹ These sessions were spaces of generative discussion, writing, and making, in which participants from diverse backgrounds shared a commitment to collective exploration toward scholarly, more-than-academic, possibilities.

In the fourth webinar session, many in our group were sparked by Alecia Jackson's reference to Gilles Deleuze's *spider strategy*. Having been moved by (more-than) personal encounters with Spider(s), our 'own' images and Spiderly evocations remained with us – niggling us. Two weeks later, as our group's attention shifted to metaphoric-relational connections of *webs*, *webinars*, and the immanent act of *webbing-together*, the 'debriefings' became aptly named *WEBing* sessions.

Our collaboration, Æ, arose in this pandemic-time context. While we remained open to learning with and from others in our group, we were sifted together in working partnership partially by interest and chance. We began to meet and correspond online, sometimes multiple times per day, in shared exploration. In playful coining of a team moniker, we serendipitously spun our first initials (A and E) into something of deep importance to us both: a recognition of the power and interdependence of affect and effect (Æffect),² aesthetic and ethical (Æsthetical); inspired by the linguistic ligature binding Æ.

Tentative Encounters

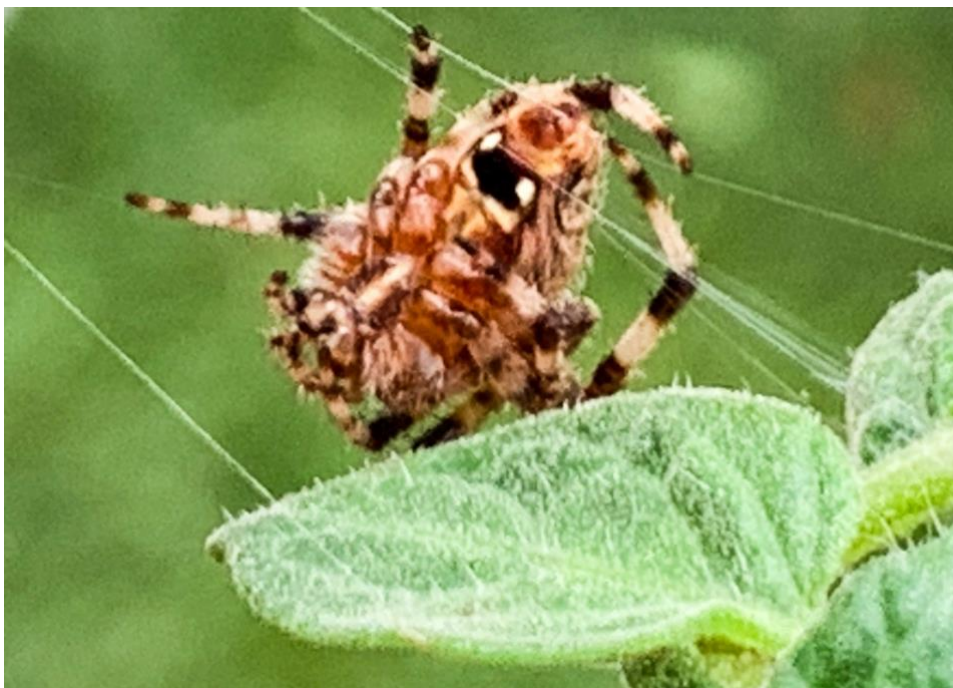


Fig. 1.

The viscosity of the lines draw me in. Holding loosely, Spider suspends her webmaking, slides quickly into hiding. Aware. She holds to her busied threads; a pause... loosely in tentative readiness, suspending lines in varied directions, slowed to feel yet vigilant to respond.

As she lurks under shelter of the leaf, her 'hands' prod gently in slowly orchestrated testings; threading and pausing; holding and waiting; maintaining her relative stillness in response to disruptive winds.

She is testing, prodding possibilities. Aware. As am I.

We have been affected by Spider(s).³ As artists and educators who value exploration and response, we are caught up in their aesthetic draw and mesmerizing habits. We commit to notice together, to become better acquainted with, to be drawn in/to the complex and oft-precarious lives of these small predators who have been relentlessly vilified and anthropomorphized – re-made as nuisances, threats, and pests; monsters, muses, and femmes fatales.

Taking pause with Spider(s) as teachers rather than subjects, we are struck by their skillful tending, leaps of vulnerability and sense-full response. We recognize the strength of Spiderly weavings – connected and connective – in their fragile extensibility, pliability, interstitial spaces, and tensile threads.



Fig. 2.

Spiderly explorations are by no means 'new' theoretical terrain, and we are keenly aware that we are not the first to t(h)read⁴ with them. We acknowledge long histories of thinking-making-writing-with spiders, particularly in feminist praxis, as well as countless arachnid⁵ re-imaginings in art, film, and fiction. The spark of Alecia Jackson's reference to spiders, prompting us to revisit the previously overlooked, now highlights the iterative, generative scholarship we hope to both take up and inspire.



Fig. 3.

In this text, as with our (re)search, we make many (re)turns.⁶ We digress and loop back, attempting to map our collaboration as we turn *to*, *over* and *'round* many concentric encounters and exchanges provoked by Spider(s). In our transdisciplinary, heterogenous and generative weaving-together, the central figure of the web serves as an unsettled mapping-in-process and assemblage-in-action, supportive mesh, carrier bag, and sticky knot from which we reach forward and back. We gather divergent threads from the *Post Philosophy and the Doing of Inquiry* webinars, WEBing sessions, and related readings, which weave into our creative-pedagogical praxis along with many questions, concerns and (unwieldy) material-conceptual filaments.



Fig. 4.

Emerging oft-uncomfortably with/in the world of academia, we struggle to balance pressures of standardization with creativity, care,⁷ and the ethical-relational ‘doing of inquiry’. We share a commitment to collaboration and interconnective emphases on creative praxis *and* pedagogy, as well as web-y interests whose tendrils reach far back into our early group exchanges and beyond. (As we revisited recordings and shared documents, we were amused to find such lively tangles long pre-dated our ‘official’ formation of *Æ*.)

As we follow some of these silken strands, we invite you to spin with us as you weave in your own environs. Attune to curiosity and frictional⁸ tensions. Recognize the many threads which pull and support you. Notice. Care.

Tending to Threads



Fig. 5.

Enrapt with Spider(s)’ skillful movements and responsive tendings, we pause to follow many-threaded traces with/in their web/sites.⁹ We find resonance with Tim Ingold’s reminder that the Latin roots of *attend* mean “to stretch (*tendere*) toward (*ad*)”, while the French (*attendre*) means “to wait” (Ingold, 2016, p. 19; 2018, pp. 20, 32). Drawing on Jan Masschelein’s work, Ingold describes attending as “looking after”, “abiding with” and “following”; a “practice of care” and a “longing” – as in the “stretching of a life, along a line”. (Ingold 2016, p. 19; 2018, pp. 21, 32).



Fig. 6.

Spinning-thinking stretches out, expands, covers, and winds through. Spider is not simply moving in rote pattern; Spider(s) respond to their environments as they work with/in them – leaving gaps which function not only to connect threads, but also to add mobile, tensile strength. Gaps leave space for response.

We stretch-with-Spider(s) as time stretches, too, and are compelled to likewise blur or broaden 'territories', to follow turns, to overlap. We are also mindful that in their patient, skillful and responsive tendings to gossamer-thin threads – constantly mending and amending – web-dwelling Spider(s), as predators, ultimately entangle and cocoon their prey.



Fig. 7.

As we become more observant, learning to notice and dwell with Spider(s), we grapple with the implications of this simultaneous *looking after*, *waiting upon*, and *stretching toward* for our asymmetrical relations and (re)search-with/in-world. In Spiderly tactics of responsive making-and-becoming-with — connective guylines and orientations which motivate and enrich our worlds and work — we find many tangled *clews*.



Fig. 8.

Threads become both attachment and support... Layers of entangled threads stretch to make and fit within emerging Spiderly worlds.

Clew, an archaic spelling of *clue*, is a wonderfully lineal, curious, and playful Spiderly word. A skein of yarn or ball of thread, the act of coiling or rolling into; in Greek mythology, this was also how Theseus was led from the labyrinth. In the plural, as the rigging by which hammocks are suspended, *clews* offer links to the tensions and attachments that hold Spiderly spinnings in place. As the corner of a sail or a theatrical rigging device, the verb *clew* is both a hauling up and securing down. Our use of *clew* and *clewing* evokes supportive, gentle prodding; active spinning and pulling of threads; conceptual *cluing* and *clue in*.



Fig. 9.

Following the clues of Spider's web/site during the day, I (re)visit her at nightfall.

As artists, (re)searchers and educators, we are encouraged by the emphasis across Bracha Ettinger's vast artistic-theoretical oeuvre on what we call here the *Æsthetic* and the *Æffectual*. Birgit Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele describe this as the "interwoven axes of the aesthetic, the (micro)political, and the ethical" (Kaiser & Thiele, 2018, p. 101). While for Ettinger these are primarily *human(e)* matters (see Kaiser & Thiele, 2018), we find her development of the interconnected concepts of *carriance* (care-carrying) and *aesthetic wit(h)nessing*, alongside *art-work* and *encounter-event* (Ettinger, 2001; 2006), invaluable in attending to knotty more-than-human relationalities and *Æsthetic* encounters.¹⁰



Fig. 10.

Relational and attentive, Spider(s) carry with care.¹¹ Their sac(k)s and silks evoke Ursula Le Guin’s influential *carrier bag theory of fiction* in which she (re)imagines storytelling as generous “container” or vessel, rather than the “arrow or spear” of singular, teleo-logical narratives of human mastery and domination (Le Guin, 1996, pp. 150, 152). Donna Haraway describes Le Guin’s theories and stories as “capacious bags for collecting, carrying, and telling the stuff of living” (Haraway, 2016, pp. 39, 118). In our visual-conceptual explorations our images become, like Le Guin’s stories and Spider(s)’ sacs, “A holder. A recipient” (Le Guin, 1996, p. 150) for gathering and carrying encounters with us, for opening inquiry in the Æffective felt.

“I would go so far as to say that the natural proper, fitting shape of the novel might be that of a sack, a bag” Le Guin suggests (pp. 152–153). For us, *novel* suggests not only fiction but also that which is emergent, speculative; the story of (re)search unfolding. This is *Spinning* scholarship¹² – generous in open material-conceptual wanderings in co-respondence; a carrier for care-full thought and responsive action as we stretch, gather, and weave.



Fig. 11.

Neither lure nor trap, this ‘web’ is a womb. Vessel. Shelter. World. Expertly, yet precariously, suspended as she watches over her precious cargo.

She will spin two, maybe three, such nests in her life(time); now sharing a significant portion of this with me.

On Spinning

We wit(h)ness¹³ countless hours of Spiderly *spin* – spinning bodies and threads, clinging in the wind. The unflagging, concentric pursuits and the forward-backward-sideways oscillations seem akin to the conceptual spinnings we enter.

(re)Turning to these encounters helps to connect our experiences; in the sharing – spinning together ideas and observations, questions, and concerns – we braid and stretch each other’s experiences, spurring them to ‘spin on’.



Fig. 12.

Importantly, this entails more than thinking *about* Spider(s). Drawing time and ideas out like precious thread – twisting and tugging against – in *Æffective*, *Æsthetic* tending we slow down to recognize the many tense threads we are holding and the resilient supports we too must weave from fragile, connective layers. We attune to the practice of Spinning as immanent, though not immediate; ongoing, iterative, lineal; affirmative,¹⁴ engaged, and undertaken with great care.



Fig. 13.

As we attune to Spiderly traces, we not only encounter more-and-more web/sites but learn to recognize the makers through their sticky, silken signatures.

We are reminded that, as Haraway stresses, “Critters are at stake in each other”; we (human and more-than) “become-with each other . . . in sympoietic tangling” (Haraway, 2016, p. 97). Reaching into the Latin roots of the word *implication* (*implicationem, implicatus, and implicare*) we draw out “entanglement”, “interweaving”, and “intertwining”; “braiding into”, “folding into”, and “close embrace”. As we recognize our increasing *implication* in each other’s lives, in the lives of leggy arachnid co-inhabitants and neighbors, we resolve to also *remain implicated* as we watch and pull these threads. Likewise, this article – co-composed in myriad ways – is an invitation to *become implicated* in Spiderly scholarship and all the sticky friction it entails.

On Coming Together and Sympoiesis with Spider(s)



Fig. 14.

I marveled at the action for quite some time – the multitude, the speed... The Spiders worked so stealthily, focused on the task. By morning, I found only lifeless webs. I can only assume the Spiders (re)turn by night to mend, spin, pick back up.

Æ Spinnings developed in a cross-continental context of out-of-sync pandemic-time. As days, weeks and seasons blurred and swapped, we worked together frantically at times – sometimes overlapping, sometimes criss-crossing in shifting day-night cycles. While technology provides many opportunities for connection and collaboration in generative and thought-provoking ways, our always-situated relations within specific contexts and ecologies both *matter* and give us space to think-with the concepts and images we carry from the contact zones of online convening. Our ‘virtual’ Spinning-together in turn compels us to ongoing engagements with/in ‘real’ web/sites.



Fig. 15.

As artists, we cultivate habits of noticing nuance, recognizing and making connections with/in the world, and sustained investigative (re)turn. Over the course of our making-thinking-writing-together, we realized we both joined this exploration midstream, having long engaged with Spider(s) and webs in various æsthetic and conceptual forms. Rummaging through our respective photographic ‘archives’ we found, much to our delight, tracings of Spider(s) from months and years past.



Fig. 16.

Although often regarded as a solitary creature, Spider never works alone. Rather, she works with the world...folding in leaves, fenceposts; seaming together supports, responding to changing conditions and blowing winds. Her web-weaving, though it may seem rote, is far from the senseless process it appears at first glance. The plasticity of her making is keen with response. Awareness and support co-mingle in sense-full spinning; this tensegrity of environment, resource, and skill.

We are, in turn, called to response. As we think-with word *and* image, bringing minor¹⁵ gestures and inquiries to share, we weave into a conceptual, relational *webbing* of sorts – not only as interlaced threads, but as connective, strengthening stitching. Likewise, the webinars and WEBing sessions *reinforced* our interests and allowed us to (re)turn, collaboratively, to connections between these encounters in shared lines of open inquiry.



Fig. 17.

This is scholarship that “draw[s] us into a correspondence *with* this world” (Ingold, 2018, p.30), that enlarges and attunes our “capacity to respond and to be responded to” (p. 5), and is found in “participatory practice . . . in the ways [beings] are made present, and above all answerable to one another” (p. 17). While desiring to learn from-and-with Spider(s), we realize that in our attempts to think-and-make with them, we impose all-too-human assumptions – confining them to inevitably anthropocentric and reductive interpretations and descriptions as we try to ‘make sense’ of these encounters, ‘capture’ them in our images.¹⁶ As we grapple to resist ‘domesticating’ Spider(s) – conceptually, relationally, from our limited human view – we recognize potential consequences of our attentions while seeking to become more *respect-full* co-inhabitants and neighbors.



Fig. 18.

I find myself (re)turning to the remains.

It's been nearly eight months since I first started photographing this Spiderly assemblage. A folding-in, folding-together. Trace evidence of lives which 'were lived'. A battered mnemonic – obscured by relentless winter storms – of fragile food webs in increasingly out-of-balance ecologies, of deadly entanglements.

Seeking out sticky web/sites of encounter, we enact *making-with* as we wit(h)ness Spider(s) so visibly making-with-world. Haraway (2016) calls this making-with *sympoiesis*: the “dynamic, responsive, situated”, contingent, relational, and consequential messiness of “worlding-with, in company” (p. 58), of “multispecies becoming-with” (pp. 63, 71, 78). Such co-habitation is seldom smooth, and often quite frictional.



Fig. 19.

The more we turn to the makings of Spider(s), the more we are drawn into further *clews* and proddings with theoretical threads. Our conceptual tendings and image-based sensations send us back to web/sites to keep learning anew. This cycle ‘spins on’ as lines of attention(s) push and pull, knitting us in. Spider(s) criss-cross our paths when we least expect, weave through our minds when we close our eyes...

A Commitment to Emergence



Fig. 20.

She only works at night, the evidence all but gone by morning. I watch her cast her lines in the light breeze; waiting for them to snag on the nearby tree as they are carried by the currents. Expertly threading the silk as she twists and turns her body.

Sensing my presence, she freezes; retracts her legs. I step back, watch from a distance.

In matters of (re)search and in life we recognize power and potential in the *Æ*ffective, *Æ*sthetical, and the *Æ*sthetical. It is *care* that motivates these emphases and also causes us to (re)turn. We intentionally retain a commitment to creative-speculative structure and emergence – to take risks, explore potentiality, negotiate unpredictability and tensions; to marvel in hope-full paths of possibility. Neither offering a discrete solution nor defined path, emergent praxis demands responsibility¹⁷ in the speculative and disrupts traditional hierarchies of thinking and making. In the *doing* of inquiry, we seek to (re)turn to that which *matters*, even when the way is unclear. Entering into a tentative partnership necessitates becoming increasingly vulnerable and flexible as we rub up against and mark each other in frictional close-contact. Like Spider and web, we stretch together in resistive tensions.



Fig. 21.

Committing to work together in this manner requires a leap of faith, a willingness to engage in what Ingold (2015) calls the “entwining of lines” (p. 3) necessary for us to cling together. “Nothing can hold on,” he explains, “unless it puts out a line, and unless that line can tangle with others” (p. 3). Likewise, the initial silken lines Spider(s) cast into the daunting open are intended to snag, to attach; to become new anchor points. Such risky leaps – even when preceded by sense-full, testing prods – offer no guarantees, no certainty of outcome; yet they are never ‘unattached’.¹⁸

We share a tendency to digress, to explore... to get lost in a thread. Each of us was compelled by our ‘own’ wandering / wondering Æffective arachnid encounters, as well as the embodied knowledge and response-ability which image and experience evoke. In long-spent, slow wit(h)nessing of web-making, mending, and alteration, we see in Spiderly tendings a commitment to the speculative and an openness to what might emerge.



Fig. 22.

A Moth flies into her sticky threads. She darts over, envelops her spinning prey in silk, carries this (other) body to the adjacent tree.

As she returns to repair the gaping hole in her web, the wind picks up – leaving her work in tatters. Using a guyline as tightrope, she carries one more ‘catch’ with her, dragging the remains of her web along. Gathering the last broken strands, pulling them into herself, she uses the line to propel her into the cover of darkness.

Despite the tentacularity of Alecia Jackson’s verbal description which returned us to previously overlooked texts, concepts became far more ‘alive’ for us after countless hours of Spinning and spiderly (re)turns. Though we committed throughout to speculative wonder and emergence, we now look back at the irony of Spiderly strategy-shapings. Jackson puts forth a Deleuzian *spider strategy*, wherein the spider “does not know it at the beginning, he learns it by following different rhythms, on very different occasions” (Deleuze, cited in Jackson, 2017, p. 2), stressing that strategies “are not known in advance” and “do not come from predetermined, stabilized forms of method” (Jackson, 2017, p.2).



Fig. 23.

Camouflaged, she remains hidden in plain sight (site) in her ever-expanding assemblage. How easy it is to overlook such skill.

Our meanderings and (re)turns to (re)search-with-Spiders in *Æsthetical* encounter led us on the very spiderly paths to which Deleuze and Jackson refer.¹⁹ We did not set out to follow; we unwittingly enacted the emergent strategies in what Jackson describes as “relations of force” (Jackson, 2017, p. 2). Drawn into relation with Spider(s), we *experienced* “not a plan or a starting point” but rather a strategy that is “emergent and revealed in fragments along the way” (p. 2). Sticking with Spider(s) brought new possibilities of *sense-full making* and Spiderly praxis.

Fernand Deligny (2015) likewise describes the *Arachnean path* which, unlike “thought-out projects” (pp. 50, 53), is “rich in endless detours” (p. 62); it is “not traced, no more than is a spider web, which is spun without preliminary drawings”

(p. 50). Following responsive strategies and detours, and doing so *with* Spider(s), creates ever-expanding opportunities to wit(h)ness, enact and respond.



Fig. 24.

I look for Spider daily, find her lurking as if waiting for me... I wonder if she made it through the storm. I am relieved to see her [spinning in a new locale]. It is ironic I have never touched her, as much as she 'touches' me.

With/in our commitment to the speculative is a commitment to openness, arising from the care that motivates our work within pedagogical, creative praxis and multispecies contexts. Having experienced the potential of *Æsthetic encounter*²⁰ and desiring to (re)imagine both education and the world *differently*, we commit together to remain open; to resist the urge to tidy, to reduce, to control toward an end.

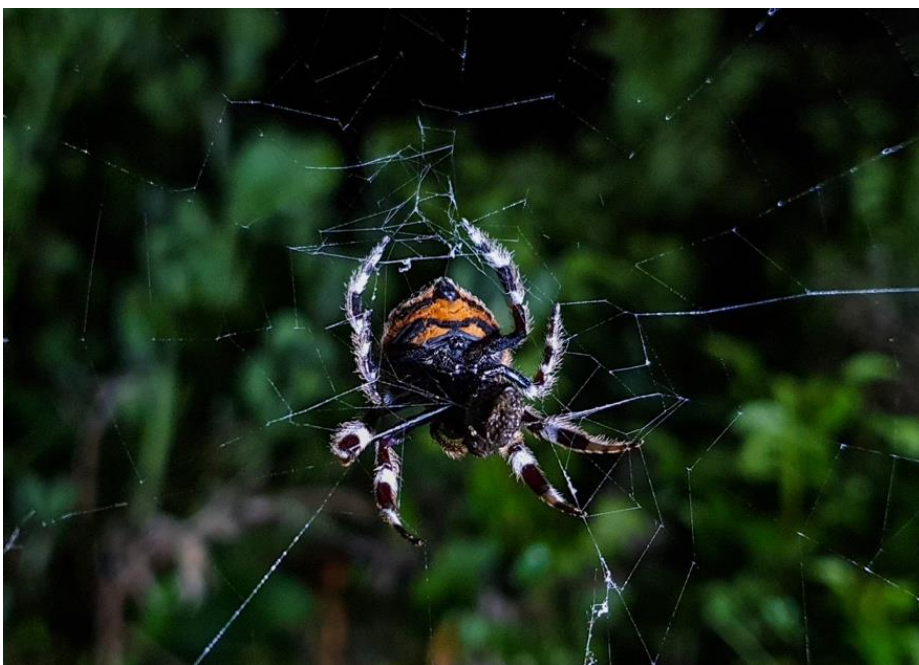


Fig. 25.

Stephanie Springgay offers a charge to “become accountable to speculative middles and (in)tensions during the research process” (Springgay, 2019, p. 60). We are encouraged by this “stretching out, a space of encounter” (p. 67), continuing to seek out such transformative events in both ‘real’ arachnid *web/sites* (offline) and ‘virtual’, collaborative Spinning sessions (online). Even when our burgeoning (re)search assemblages are untidy, unpredictable, messy, risky – we linger in the middle, in the *felt*.

Tentacularity and Touch

Spider(s) and images are ever-prodding us, pulling us back: wrapping filaments around us while continuing to *clew* us in. We cannot help but notice our own ‘reaching out’ to each other is equally tentacular – stretching toward, grasping, snagging, through many other commitments, entanglements, and thoughts. In a time during which opportunities for physical contact remain limited due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we are touched – in encounter – by the *spinning* \AE ffects of Spider(s), by the residual \AE ffects of the stories we share. They / we leave vital impressions on \AE .



Fig. 26.

The ‘lace’ enchants me, draws me in; so much so that I overlook Spider. I dwell a while in her elegant space. Her foldings-in are strung camouflage, and I wonder at her transversal. We, too, lace back and forth – amassing points of encounter at which we form, shift, and are spun.

It is tempting to dwell on spidersilk in terms of Haraway’s generative, variegated conception of *string figures*²¹, but here we resonate with her vivid explorations of *tentacularity*. “The tentacular ones tangle me”, she writes, “make attachments and detachments; they make cuts and knots; they make a difference” (Haraway, 2016, p. 31). Though unexpected knots are so often viewed as requiring undoing, we embrace these tangles with Spider(s) which grab our attentions as they attach to concerns.



Fig. 27.

We turn to Spider(s) in simultaneous witness and embodiment of this open / knotted act. Our encounters provoke for us the importance of what Haraway calls “a certain suspension of ontologies and epistemologies, holding them lightly”, the holding open of space to make room for the “venturesome, experimental” (Haraway, 2016, p. 88). Like the iterative, tentacular makings we encounter, we invite you to t(h)read with us in the looped connections and interstitial spaces of Spinning scholarship.



Fig. 28.

Despite the intrusive beam of my flashlight, she holds her ground. A night-dwelling hunter, I watch her negotiate the terrain in purposive, yet care-full, haptical exploration. Feeling. Sensing.

The tentacular is interwoven and incessant. Beyond the tentacular reach of Spider(s) in our thoughts, we recognize an inextricable link to the *felt* and to touch. Reaching back to the etymology of *tentacle*, Haraway reminds us of its Latin origins: *tentaculum* (“feeler”) and *tentare* (“to feel”, “to try”) (Haraway, 2016, p. 31). Our together-noticings circle around the ways in which Spider(s) *feel their way* – tentatively probing, prodding, turning.



Fig. 29.

Eva Hayward’s neologism *fingeryeyes* is a powerful evocation of the “haptic-optic” and “tentacular visibility” of attentive arachnid movements (Hayward, 2010, p. 580). Fingeryeyes, Hayward writes, are the language of the “in-between of encounter, a space of movement, of potential”, and the “transfer of intensity, of expressivity in the simultaneity of touching and feeling” (p. 581). For us, the intensity of this felt in-between is both carried and amplified in *Æsthetic* meeting. In collaborative Spinning scholarship, our own attentive praxis is *clewed* into responsive potential as we feel-through myriad encounters with Spider(s), prod them as we too attempt to ‘make-sense’.



Fig. 30.

Touch is all-too-often violent, albeit sometimes unintentionally so. Touch also changes trajectories: when an errant arm or a body running through the trees collides with unsuspecting silky tendrils between, this incidental touching sends Spider(s) scrambling. At times, our own trajectories are similarly set spinning askance. Like Spider(s), we scramble to reorient. We work with what is around us. We begin spinning anew.



Fig. 31.

While searching through photos for web/site encounters, I find with amazement this image from around the time I began my PhD. The threads draw me in. I feel the remembered-mist and cool Fall air on my skin... but the chills are for all the life lived since then. All the paths that I have traveled, the mending and stretching I've had to do...The image reaches out to grab me; reminds me I'm stretching again.

On Stickiness

Stickiness is avowedly relational – it binds us together in encounter, clings to us, travels with us. It is ambiguous, unpredictable, and uncomfortably in-between. Viscous and malleable, stickiness contrasts with rigidity, solidity, and stability. Stickiness, proposes Eleanor Morgan, “is more than a property of a material or a method of making”; rather, it allows us to “think through desirable and undesirable attachments” – this is “how we share the world with others” in which contact, friction, attachment and connection are “unavoidable and frequently messy” (Morgan, 2019, n.p.). Our images, both glimpses of and invitations to encounter, are sticky remnants. We remain attached – to Spider(s), to each other – as the residues of \AE ffective experiences both adhere to us and bind us in ongoing exchange.



Fig. 32.

“What sticks?” asks Sara Ahmed throughout her nuanced explorations of the interrelationship between the principles of *cohesion* (“sticking together”) and *adhesion* (“sticking to”) (Ahmed, 2014, p. 15). Stickiness, she asserts, involves “*histories of contact*” (p. 90) and the “*transference of affect*” (pp. 91, 97); thus “to get stuck to something sticky is also to become sticky” (p. 91). In our Spinning scholarship, we “remained tied together by sticky threads” (Haraway, 2016, p. 138) and a commitment to keep on *sticking with the trouble* (to paraphrase the Harawaian mantra). Even when spinning-together is uncomfortable or untidy, in both *implication* and *sympoiesis* we are bound.



Fig. 33.

Connections of Care and Æsthetical Matters

Spider(s)' co-constitutive tending – to the world, to their webs – evoke powerful parallels across the many sticky web/sites with matters to which we are simultaneously tied. As we think-with Spider(s), we enact Spinning as perpetual assemblage – a constant negotiation of what matters, remains, is altered, and is woven in. The care we bring to attuned response is an Æsthetical matter.



Fig. 34.

For Spider, spinning and weaving are not separate activities. Drawing the viscous silk from her body, her web becomes an extension to which she remains intimately connected – sensing every tremor, quiver. She is knotted into the fabric of the world. And the world is caught up, as it were, in hers.

“Mattering”, Haraway urges, “is always inside connections that demand and enable response, not bare calculation or ranking” (Haraway, 2008, pp. 70–71). Ingold calls this *attentionality*. It is the *with-ness* of bringing the other “alongside as a companion or accomplice” (Ingold, 2018, p. 26), rather than the *of-ness* that “makes an object of that to which one attends” (2016, p. 24) so that it can be “ticked off, removed from our list” (2016, p. 20; 2018, p. 28). *Attention* holds within it *tention*, as an alternate spelling of *tension*.



Fig. 35.

We find Vinciane Despret’s conceptualisation of *attunement* and “affected and affecting bodies” (Despret, 2004, p. 125) strikingly Spiderly. In *attuning* to Spider(s) and web/sites, we simultaneously wit(h)ness and enact a practice of “embodied empathy”, where bodies “undo and redo each other, reciprocally though not symmetrically” (Despret, 2013, p. 61). Such a “becoming-with”, and “think[ing] with the body” (p. 71) also speaks to the uneven bodily entanglements of care-in-relation.

Attunement’s musical and rhythmic resonances evoke Spider(s)’ web-y, vibratory sense-worlds: ‘holding the threads loosely’, they sense (*feel*) whether vibrations are caused by the entanglement of live prey, debris, or the wind. In tending – mending and amending their webs – Spider(s) actively (re)tune their embodied ‘instruments’ for response.



Fig. 36.

With this Æsthetical charge, we look to Spider(s) for *clews* – as both attachments and threads – not of discovery and conquest, but of frictional care-in-relation. We are grateful to Spider(s) who tolerate our intrusions and inspire more-than-academic scholarly tendings; emerge from hiding as we attempt to learn-with their spinings in concentric relation with ours. Attuning to their responsive and purposive *knowing-in-doing* gives us space to trouble many lines of inquiry; our ‘own’ trajectories loop and shift as Spider(s) challenge and change our paths.

Emergent Structure and Co-Responsence

We take Spiderly cues to put out our lines while also tracing them, forming attachments and *clewing* both material and concepts; entwining and rolling in. Spider is not the only one feeling her way; we, too, are tentatively probing, prodding, turning. We are indeed *thinking through doing* in this *doing of inquiry*. Having cast guylines of shared interest, we follow Spider(s) together. With/in our image-encounters are opportunities for *response* into which we wish to spin, together.



Fig. 37.

We find clews in the Latin roots of *respond* and *correspond* – “to answer to”, “to promise in return”, “to reciprocate”, and “to harmonize”. After the generativity of our enthusiastic initial 'show and tell' sessions wherein experiences and theories tumbled together in swift flow, we commit to communicate via correspondence in the form of electronic, *POSTcards*²² to share image and story with each other in slow response. Like Spiderly webs, these *lines of co-responsence* create an open yet supportive structure which provides space to articulate and honor (offline) web/site encounters between our (online) Spinning sessions.



Fig. 38.

Our ongoing co-resurgence through POSTcards enacts, diffracts²³ and makes visible the relational, responsive knottings of Spider(s)-with/in-world. The images are not intended as a ‘capturing’ in the sense of pinning down, but rather offer glimpses (albeit reductive) of encounters to which we can (re)turn – springboards and waymarkers for continued engagement. The POSTcards became ‘postings’ of ongoing sentient articulations of experience, woven into conceptual makings-and-readings-together.



Fig. 39.

This is making-with as reciprocal *relay*: Aesthetic; engaging, consuming, shared and felt. Even in the passing-off, we each remain attuned. As we (re)turn to POSTcards in Spinning scholarship, we are encouraged by Haraway’s description of the relay patterns, “passing on in twists and skeins that require passion and action, holding still and moving, anchoring and launching” (Haraway, 2011, p. ix). Such loops are not of closing, but of ongoing, knotted connection – even though (as

with this article) the threads may at times require a tentative, plastic ‘tying off’, or ‘casting off’ so we can gather, together, and test our boundaries, before we shift again.



Fig. 40.

Turning to the Latin roots of *interest* – *inter* (“between”) and *esse* (“to be”) – Ingold suggests correspondence (co-response) not as “oscillation between two points” or a “connection of points” (shared interests), but rather a “binding of lines” (Ingold, 2016, p. 18). We are both curious wanderers / wonderers; often lagging behind or circling our walking partners as we find ourselves pulled into minor inquiries and -encounters; tending and treasuring findings along the way. If, as in Deleuze’s oft-cited provocation, “Something in the world forces us to think” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 139), you might say we are keen to notice many *some things*, prone to spinning these lines of wonder *inter-esse-ingly* and together.



Fig. 41.

In the POSTcards, we write and image our encounters, generating iterative response. In the sharing, spinning-together, we braid and stretch each other's experiences spurring them to 'spin on'. Each POSTcard inspires burgeoning beginnings, informed and shaped by other not-quite-endings, as we weave from new angles, clewing in sticky material-conceptual filaments. In unexpected and untimely knots, *Æ* co-responsence expands and converges across time zones and continental divides, carries on even as we are virtually apart. While *A* is searching for Spider(s) by night, *E* is enamored by the interplay of silk with sunlight and the clinging morning dew.



Fig. 42.

Co-responsence requires moving and being moved, wherein “points are set in motion” from which divergent threads “wrap around one another like melodies in counterpoint” (Ingold, 2013, p. 107). We find ourselves ever-spinning these encounters and thinking-making-becoming-with tentacular companions; between storied counterpoints to which we continually (re)turn anew.

On Tensegral Practice

As we attempt to enact the speculative, tensile strength and responsive tending of Spiderly spinnings, we are drawn into lineal, iterative assemblage which holds ever-loosely yet care-fully to its own emerging creation. The Spider's *work* of art is at once process and product, simultaneously shaping and being shaped. We are struck by the tensegrity²⁴ of the manifold web/sites we encounter – the co-dependent interplay of compression, tension, and flexible support. We see tensegral strength as formed in openness, (re)turn, and response.

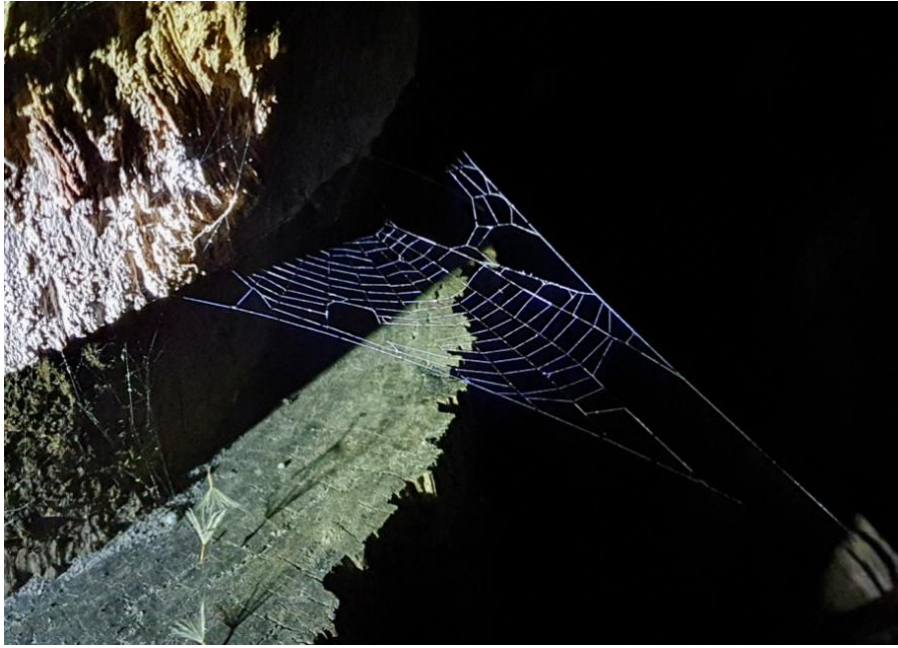


Fig. 43.

In our Spinning practice, this became the tugging thread of *Æsthetic* encounters and co-respondence in relation with many concepts, with intentional interstices to think-between and with images of encounter to which we could frequently (re)turn. The gaps for thought between our many entangled threads were inspired by the qualities of Spider(s) web/sites: tensile rather than unyielding; flexible and pliable rather than impenetrable. These tensegral guylines provide the means to hold matters inten(s)ion, to allow tending and shifting attachments in productive, supportive strength.



Fig. 44.

Spiderly spinnings are always *in media res*, quite literally ‘in the midst of things’ – situated and attached, but neither static nor settled; responsive and always involved. They are neither set out in advance, nor free-floating and disengaged. This is

also how we learn: both in encounter and in (re)turning to encounters as we *inhabit* these experiences, *longitudinally* (Ingold, 2015). Lingering in the tangle of tensions, we leave space for *Æsthetic* response in vulnerable yet productive and generative ways. Transformative Spinning scholarship, with all of its tendings, takes place in the *between*.

Spinning as Immanent, Responsive, and Iterative Method

With a speculative commitment to inquiry, we are resistant to Method (singular, capitalized) as prescribed, prescriptive, scripted. Just as we see Spider(s) artfully and skillfully becoming-with the world, we too engage in an active Spinning – immersed, situated, and responsive to our threads. Spinning-with images allows us to return to *Æffect* in full-force; to support the richness of inquiry with *Æsthetic* tending and care. In this *Æsthetic* exchange, we are enticed to (re)enter our (more-than) ‘personal’ encounters, to (re)consider relational attachments.



Fig. 45.

I grab the guylines, follow the threads, as the image pulls me back in. It holds me long; I dwell in thought. Transversals begin to emerge.

Our emergent, inten(s)ional ~~method~~ develops as the pulling of entangled threads of inquiry in relational, *Æsthetic* thinking-with; the attention to material-conceptual tangles; and the making-mapping of knots. Our thinking spins constantly among and together-with what may be called *conceptual*, *virtual* and *actual* encounters, enmeshed in *Æsthetic* response. These are, of course, not easily delineated spheres – we find that we engage with/in some of the most real moments of our scholarly trajectories in this layered space of virtual encounters.

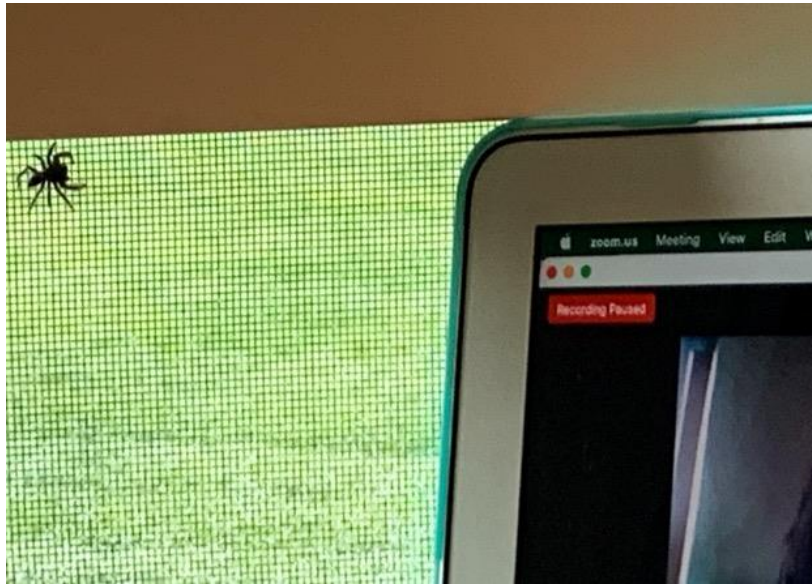


Fig. 46.

Sharing experiences in both synchronous and asynchronous modes, we continued Spinning-with Spider(s) in collaborative online sessions of diffractive discussion and Æsthetic (re)membering – spurring an iterative process of delving into oscillating concepts, readings, and many-threaded entangled thoughts. We began with fruitful, open sessions of mapping what *matters*, what stands out in encounters with Spider(s); we spun at length conceptual generativities and meshy interconnective co-response. The strings of our ‘own’ attentions and lines of inquiry slipped, knotted and folded back; delighting us with the emergence of a flexible fabric of relational interweaving.

Spidersilk is by no means a homogeneous substance and not all Spider(s) create webs. Different species spin vastly different threads, none of them equally viscous or sticky; and most spiders have multiple spinnerets, each pair capable of producing a distinct type of silk. Some threads remain tacky, some function like velcro, some have minute gooey blobs, others hold things together as a delicately woven mesh.



Fig. 47.

Smaller than my thumbnail, she shares 'our' study with at least two (much larger) Spiders. It's been almost three weeks since she spun her silken womb, I dare not open or clean the window ... not yet.

As artists we are both comfortable and practiced with speculative, responsive inquiry and the persistent embodied negotiation which creative praxis entails. However, we must also be clear that such habits are neither the sole realm of 'creatives', nor do they 'just happen'. We have experienced this both in our own praxis and with students who did not think they were 'capable' or 'oriented' to what Anna Tsing calls the "arts of noticing" (Tsing, 2015). These are habits to be cultivated, tended to, expanded. Simultaneously process and 'outcome', they are imbued with Spiderly *sense*.



Fig. 48.

Our motivation to explore these conceptual lines is woven with inseparable threads of praxis and *response*. Sticky. Expanding. Negotiated. We prod (and plod) tentatively, persistently toward this middling mesh. For while we know each foray is always-already entangled, we also tend to the trajectories of lines of attention in the mes(s/h)y weaving of more-than-human social fabric and the ever-present tugging and niggling as these multi-threaded forms take shape. There are 'implications' for opening up potential in *Æsthetic* encounters. Like Spiderly tendings, they are not always cozy and come at a cost: the experiences of becoming-with Spider(s) and making-with-image *Æffect* us even as we work ideas-with-words.

(Re)Turn and Continuing Entanglements

Continually negotiating a commitment to stick with what's difficult, to resist the urge to tidy and sweep away tangled cobweb lines, we (re)turn to the stickiness and salience of conceptual connections; even as their isolation and explication is difficult, tricky, enmeshed. As with Spiders(s), we are constantly remaking as we pull threads into rearrangement while gylines tug against and threaten collapse.



Fig. 49.

Even as we experience the strength of these Æsthetical connections, a commitment to the openness of emergence and what *matters* keeps us in uncomfortable 'spin patterns'. Holding loosely to what resonates deeply, we take leaps of vulnerability to both release *and* allow ourselves to follow tentative filaments cast out in the wind; to be carried and to tune-in.



Fig. 50.

As a multitude of newly-hatched Spiderlings are sent scrambling by the vibrations of my approaching body, I stop; turn around. Behind me is another silky sac – now long-abandoned– tiny, translucent exoskeletons still clinging on; moved by the wind as if alive.



Fig. 51.

Spin patterns continually shift boundaries and Spidersilks are often difficult to trace, easy to overlook. To parse these lines directly and cleanly, in authoritative permanence, imposes a cutting and crushing rigidity which undermines their tensile, *Æsthetic* strength. Conversely, there is the risk of becoming so engrossed that we miss opportunities to make clear our trajectories. And so, with this productive tension, we (re)turn, (re)attune to shimmering interests; to images as both interstitial *Æsthetic* connection-to-encounters and invitations to encounter-*anew*.



Fig. 52.

Our dwelling-with Spider(s) is by no means over, and calls to mind Haraway's cogent reminder that these *companion species*, co-inhabitants and neighbors in 'our' homes and gardens, are "here to live and die with, not just think and write with" (Haraway, 2016, p. 125). We have become implicated with Spider(s), as we are implicated with each other and our

(re)search. While aware of the fraught nature of our relations with Spider-teachers, we are also encouraged by what we have learned. Their doings inspire many entangled *clews* as to how we might prod-together in more-than-academic inquiry – to (re)shape, support, and mend. Speculative yet pragmatic, acts of care-full, sense-full (re)turn and ongoing attention multiply (octoply!) strength, flexibility, and resonance within oft-windswept worlds.



Fig. 53.

We invite you with us – to dwell in sticky spaces, open to trouble; to embrace unexpected knots and loose threads even in purposive tasks. (re)Imagine inquiry as Spiderly Spinnings: viscous, tensile and supportive; situated and attached, but neither static nor settled; speculative, yet pragmatic; present and always in the midst of things.

May you carry-with matters that are ever-tended; negotiated; (re)visited, with ongoing attention and care.

Seek out that which is nearly imperceptible yet shimmering. Hold it loosely. Turn it ‘round’.

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Notes on Images

All images are our own. We have chosen not to include image credits within the body of the text as we feel this would be counter to the aims of our collaborative writing as the Æ Collective and undo the deliberate blurring of voices woven throughout our work.

Image credits:

Erin Kindlund Price: figures 1, 8, 14, 16, 24, 26, 29, 31, 35, 38–40, 44–46, 49, 53

Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton: figures 2–7, 9–13, 15, 17–23, 25, 27–28, 30, 32–34, 36–37, 41–43, 47–48, 50–52

Endnotes

¹ Erin is a PhD candidate at the University of Missouri, supervised by Candace Kuby, and was the webinar series' co-ordinator and co-host. Adrienne joined the WEBing sessions as a member of the *Reconfiguring Higher Education: Doing Academia Differently* project, led by Vivienne Bozalek.

² In our use of Æffect (affect and effect in a doubly-implicated sense), we suggest a Spinozan-Deleuzian trajectory in which bodies (as neither singular and contained, nor exclusively human) are simultaneously affecting and being affected, in unequal and contingent ways. Æffect in/as relating alerts us to “potentiality and resonance” (Stewart, 2007, p. 3); troubles easy re-presentation; is always-more-than; and requires “learning to hold possibilities open” (Despret & Meuret, 2016, p. 35).

³ Our use of *Spider(s)* respectfully denotes the collective of individual spiders we have encountered, rather than generalized conceptions of spiders.

⁴ T(h)read is our seaming-together of simultaneous treading-with, following, and weaving of material-conceptual threads.

⁵ Our use of *arachnid* refers to spider(s) / spiderly, rather than Arachnida as the class of arthropods which includes scorpions, mites, and ticks.

⁶ Here, we think-with Karen Barad's powerful conceptualisation of *re-turning* – not as “reflecting on or going back to a past that was”, but as “turning it over and over again” (Barad, 2014, p. 168).

⁷ We are indebted to Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's work on the complexity of *matters* of care as we consider what care-in-relation may mean across various contexts. She encourages us to “embrace its ambivalent character” as at once “affective, practical, ethico-political” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 11).; to grapple with care as a “noninnocent but necessary ethos of always situated implications” (p. 24).

⁸ Anna Tsing conceptualizes friction as “awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (Tsing, 2005, p. 4). Aspects of friction are t(h)readed through this text: in the uncomfortable tugs resistive tensions and productive stretching-in-encounter; the stickiness of ‘not letting’ go as we are consumed by matters that niggle us, pull us back in; navigating and relaying as we grapple with expressing to others and negotiate attentions in tension.

⁹ We use *web/sites* to suggest sites of encounter with 'real' Spider(s). Many of the Spider(s) in this text are, however, *not* web-dwellers and spin silk for other purposes such as protective egg sacs.

¹⁰ We recognize, in this, the Æffectual potential of creative praxis as well as the interdependent tanglings and exchanges in the care-full *work* of Spider(s). The ethical, as always-in-relation, is embedded in ongoing aesthetic creation-and-encounter, the immanent *work* of art. Likewise, the aesthetic is not an after-the-fact, frivolous addition to ethical concerns: the critical aim of (re)imagining different futures is creative-speculative, Æffective *work*.

¹¹ Ettinger offers this moving summation for her nuanced conceptualization of *carriance* (care-carrying) as “responsibility-in-act” (Ettinger in Kaiser & Thiele, 2018, p. 104): “We are here, hence we have been carried. Each one of us” p. 106). Expanding on the salience of this, beyond the *human(e)*, Ettinger also points to our interdependence on “what silently carries us: the ocean, the forest, the night” (p. 123).

¹² In our use of scholar / scholarship, we lean towards the Old English *scolere* (“student”), as ones who are always *learning-with-and-from*.

¹³ We think-with Ettinger's neologism *wit(h)nessing* (witnessing-together) throughout this text. Witnessing as *aesthetic wit(h)nessing* is “dwelling with your subject-matter, taking your time, giving yourself time, remaining with it, in your body” (Ettinger in Kaiser & Thiele, 2018, p. 105). Alongside *with-ness* (see Despret, 2004; Ingold, 2016, 2018) and the manifold implications of *witnessing* in terms of scientific observation and juridical testimony (see Haraway, 1997; Oliver, 2001), this helps us unpack Æsthetic encounters which are observant rather than objectifying, relational and embodied rather than safely distanced.

¹⁴ Hope-full and supportive, affirmation is also a critical tool. “Affirmative critique”, Thiele suggests, requires “an eye schooled in detecting inequalities, asymmetries, and the never innocent differentiations we live”, all the while “always need[ing] to do the work of envisioning transformation and change” (Thiele, 2017, p. 26). This *seeing* takes time, attention, and care.

¹⁵ See Manning (2016); Mazzei (2017).

¹⁶ We thank Maggie MacLure for pointing us to the importance of allowing Spider(s) to *defamiliarize* our relations and *estrangle* our thoughts. We are encouraged and challenged by MacLure and Riika Hohti’s development of “insect-

thinking” as a methodological direction that involves “letting go of master fantasies” and “getting ourselves exposed to forces that we know little of, that are not controlled or surveyed by ourselves” (Hohti & MacLure, 2022, p. 330).

¹⁷ See Haraway (1992; 2016); Barad (2007).

¹⁸ See MacLure (2021) for a discussion of Isabelle Stengers’s concept of the “precursive” jump in speculative practice and thought.

¹⁹ We diverge from Deleuze in some of his perceptions of spiders in which their actions may come across as ‘mindless’ or rote, as well as the notion that such strategies are “almost mute and blind” (Jackson, 2017, p. 2).

²⁰ Both in our ‘own’ praxis and in teaching-learning environments, we have witnessed the many ways in which image and artistic engagement weave and support affective and ethical entanglements.

²¹ In Haraway’s compelling summary, string figures are a “theoretical trope, a way to think-with a host of companions in sympoietic threading, felting, tangling, tracking, and sorting” (Haraway, 2016, p. 31).

²² In our use of *POSTcards* we playfully suggest the image-text interplay and delayed correspondence across distance of physical postcards; *posting* as both marking and sending off; as well as the manifold implications of the prefix *post-*, including ‘post philosophies’.

²³ We think-with Haraway and Barad’s influential conceptualization of the phenomenon of diffraction as a methodology for “mapping of interference” (Haraway, 1992, p. 300), and as “provid[ing] a way of attending to entanglements” (Barad, 2007, p. 30).

²⁴ A portmanteau of tension and integrity (or, tensional integrity), the neologism *tensegrity* was coined by interdisciplinary design theorist Buckminster Fuller to refer to the structural principle of integrity (thus stability) and strength in response to constant compressional force.

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