



EASST Review 44-2 | Section: STS Events

Slow research in residence: Listening to alterlife

Lucy Sabin and colleagues explore how slowing the pace of academic gatherings can allow for what they call “acts of attunement” and more explorative modes of research and collaboration.

Reflections from the EFAS Collective’s first gathering in Schalkwijk, July 2025.

1 Introductions

In July 2025, the Eco-Feminist Art-Science (EFAS) Collective gathered in Schalkwijk, the Netherlands, for our first knowledge exchange residency. The residency was intended as a time and space in which we could come together to address themes of environmental harm and contamination through experimenting with situated and creative research methods. We are five early-career researchers working across the arts, humanities, and social sciences, drawn together by a shared interest in interdisciplinary practice, feminist STS, and environmental justice.

During our three-day residency, we walked, kayaked, mapped our own bodies, painted, photographed, and experimented with sound, slowing down to sense how industrial chemicals and contaminants move through bodies and landscapes. The residency became a space for testing creative and embodied methods, reflecting on curation, and considering the politics



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of archiving, the complexities of scale, and the arts of listening. In this report, we share our reflections on mapping as both method and metaphor, and on how such slower-paced gatherings can catalyse ethical, imaginative, and collaborative approaches to research on environmental justice.

2 Orientations

When we arrived in the Dutch village of Schalkwijk, our initial intention was not to start “producing” but to orient and cultivate “arts of noticing” (Tsing, 2015, 37). We walked the narrow paths between houses and fields, kayaked along the *sloten* (waterways between fields), paused to listen to the wind in the trees and the calls of insects and birds. We observed horses in the morning mist, geese and coots on the water, hares bounding through fields, and dragonflies hovering above lily pads.

These activities were not recreational breaks but deliberate acts of attunement, helping us notice both the vitality of more-than-human life and the subtler signs of disturbance as a context for our creative workshops and discussions. Ecofeminism gave us a shared heuristic for these collective inquiries: as curator and art critic Catherine Taft writes, ecofeminism is manifold; it is “a philosophy, a sensibility, a stance, and most importantly, a map for survival” (2025, 45).



Figure 1. Untitled, Schalkwijk. Sofia Greaves (2025).

3 Mapping pollution with creative practices

From the outset, arts-based research was central to our process (Sabin et al., forth.). Painting, sketching, photography, and sound became ways to express unresolved feelings relating to our respective positionalities,

opening space for reflection on methodology and ethics. Working with these media allowed us to layer personal experience with theoretical questions, building upon—and sometimes unsettling—prior knowledge. Sofia Greaves' painting of a scene in Schalkwijk captures this sentiment (Figure 1). Greaves writes:

It is painted over a previous painting, the texture of which you can see coming through, and I suppose that somehow represents the knowledge I gained on this residency which is stratified. Meeting with new colleagues and creating this river between us and our research, lots of currents were brought together and were at times turbulent in my mind.

Sound emerged as an especially generative mode. We speculated about treating objects as instruments in an endeavour to sonify or listen to industrial chemicals and forms of environmental contamination such as radiation: listening to the texture of raincoats, imagining the industrial rhythms of production lines, and even humming to vibrate the microplastics and synthetic chemicals in our bodies.

Inspired by acoustic practices of listening to more-than-human bodies, we explored how place-based sounding might reveal the ever-present nature of pollution. Pollution, by definition, is already in place; listening deeply to a site's soundscape can therefore become a way of perceiving its environmental histories. We asked, how could we map pollution through sound? Could binaural recording capture the affective qualities of a polluted landscape? What are the semiotics of converting pollution's sensory data into colour and tone?

These questions led us to imagine workshop and exhibition formats that merge sound and image, inviting audiences to listen as well as look, and to experience environmental data through composition and call-and-response forms, including narrative and protest songs. Here, we found resonance with Ashon Crawley's work on breath as resistance (2017) and with traditions of singing communities that hold space for resilience and repair.

We also talked about the politics of curation, drawing in particular on Hannah Rogers' framework of curation as knowledge creation in STS contexts (2025). If our work were to be exhibited, who would the audience be? Would the format be accessible and meaningful to the communities most affected by pollution? How might we balance intelligibility to power with the need to remain critical of it?

This conversation linked naturally to the idea of the community archive: how oral histories might be materialised in forms that communities control, and how the act of archiving itself reflects the historical consciousness of its moment. We recognised that archiving is not only about preserving the past but about shaping the present, offering tools for sense-making and solidarity in situations where industrial pollutants, legacies of contamination, ecological changes, and social transformations intersect.

3 The body as a site of knowledge

One of our most significant shared experiments was body mapping. We sketched outlines of our own bodies and charted within them the flows, exposures, and sensations connected to environmental contamination (Alaimo, 2008). This participatory method, typically used in activist and community contexts (e.g., Lockett and Bagelmann, 2023), helped us explore how pollution is not an external hazard but an embodied experience.

Tabitha Hrynick realised after the residency that her research on reparations for nuclear harm has created its own “map” which is constantly “unfurling” through her nervous system. She writes that the map is “stimulated not just by words read on pages or heard from the lips of others directly affected, but by aspects of multi-sensory encounters with landscapes, objects and sounds that carry traces of nuclear histories and foretellings of radioactive futures”.

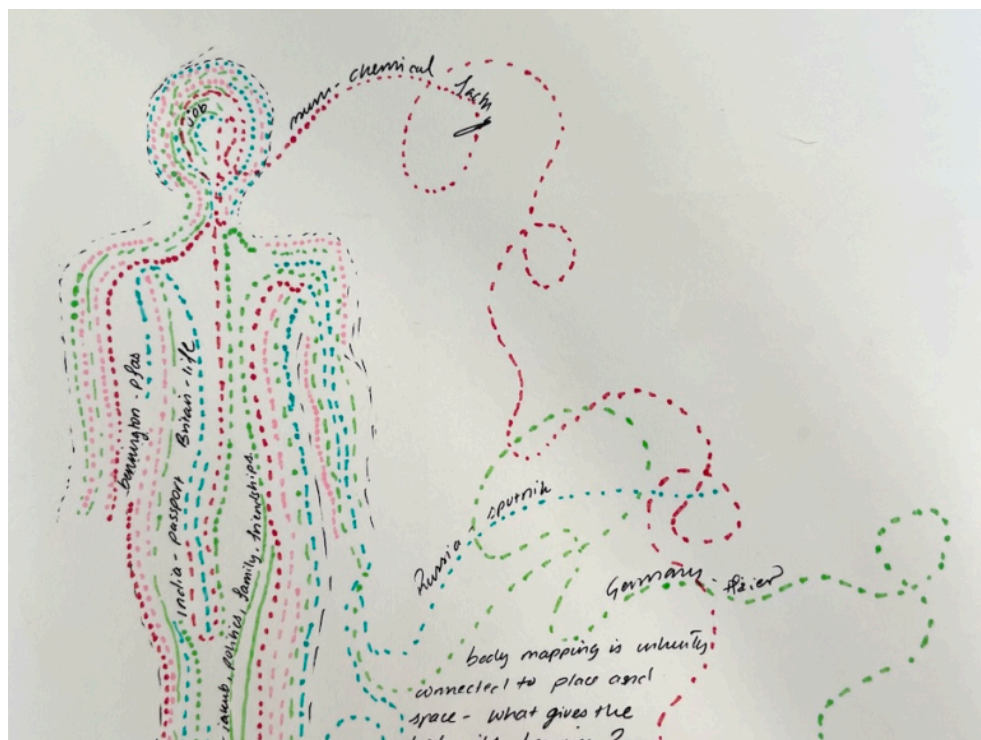


Figure 2. Alternative body map created during the residency.

We soon found ourselves asking: where do we draw the line between the body and its surroundings? How do we represent substances that cross those boundaries—hormones, pollutants, grief, breath? For some of us, this

exercise underscored the impossibility of neat demarcations between personal health, environmental systems, and political structures. The silhouettes spilled beyond the body's edges to include rivers, gusts of wind, or even imagined creatures.

This work was also a lesson in vulnerability and trust. Drawing our bodies required us to acknowledge how individual health stories connect with shared ecological conditions, and how representation, visual or otherwise, carries ethical weight. We discussed how such methods might work with communities affected by pollution, and what care would be needed to ensure they could choose what to reveal, conceal, or reinterpret.

4 Memory, storytelling, and environmental harm

Our reflections also turned to how pollution permeates language, memory, and family stories. Christianne Blijleven shared her experiences growing up in a town that was later found to be contaminated. Blijleven described how the news that Chemours (DuPont) had polluted air, soil, and water for decades was met in her family with a variety of responses, including dark humour: jokes about mutant rats or glowing-tailed catfish. GenX, the replacement for PFOA, sounded more like a science fiction villain than a purportedly safer chemical.

We connected these stories to our earlier discussions of archives. Artistic methods can serve as archival practices, Shachi Mokashi suggested. Rather than aiming for definitive closure, we might focus on creating records that demand immediate repairs and invite future reinterpretations, making it possible for new meanings and solidarities to emerge, allowing space for speculation, uncertainty, and contradictions. And yet, as Mokashi ventures, "If we agree to be imprecise, who can we trust with the task of constructing approximations and ambiguities that can propel action?"

5 Redefining our local, living in alterlife

Throughout the residency, we questioned what "local" means as a sphere of study and intervention, given that pollutants and radioactive materials leak through air currents, water systems, and global supply chains. How might we still speak of "local" in a way that honours the particularities of place and the possibilities to intervene, while recognising connections to distant causes and consequences? Of course, the answer varies according to our unique research contexts.

In group discussions, we continuously circled back to concepts from anticolonial and feminist scholarship in STS; these bodies of literature helped us redefine notions of ecological change and care. For example, as

Michelle Murphy describes, we are living in “alterlife” that is, life transformed by ongoing chemical entanglements (2017). Nature, in this view, is not a pristine realm separate from humans but something long shaped by political, technological, and chemical systems, with uneven distributions of harm across multiple scales.

For our Collective, acknowledging this does not mean resignation. Rather, it pushes us to be precise about where we intervene, whose knowledge we value, and how we connect personal experience with broader collective struggles. Indeed, Murphy claims that the conceptualisation of alterlife calls for “alter-concepts of care and responsibility [...] calling forth alter-modes of collaboration and study that simultaneously aim at world-building and dismantlement” (2017, 496).



Figure 3. Walking amid high grasses in Schalkwijk.

6 A space of (re)connection and experimentation

The residency created a bubble of trust and space to experiment. Academic life often fragments our attention into individualised tasks, but here we could work in a slower, more exploratory mode. Context was important: to step outside the physical institution and sense our bodies in a multispecies landscape (Figure 2).

Birdsong accompanied our conversations; flies (multitudinous!), rabbits, alpacas, and sheep were companion species (Haraway, 2003). Listening together to the surrounding soundscape attuned us to subtleties we might otherwise overlook: the hum of distant traffic, the echo of wind along canals, the low murmur of livestock. As Lucy Sabin mused in her residency diary, “It is all vibrating, this sea of shared substances, and we must listen. Other bodies demand to be heard”.

These rhythms helped quiet the “voices” of deadlines and administrative demands. At the same time, we acknowledged the difficulty of sustaining this way of working once back in our everyday environments. In our closing

conversations, we wondered, how can we integrate more sustainable, generative, and collective practices into academic life, rather than reserving them to the rare sanctuary of retreats?

7 Our next steps

We left Schalkwijk with a sharpened sense of what such residencies can make possible. They are catalysts: spaces for building relationships, testing methods, and reimagining how research might unfold when care, creativity, and criticality are equally valued. Our next steps include exploring future residencies, developing community archives, and experimenting with formats—whether exhibitions, digital platforms, or local interventions—that keep our practices accountable to their intended communities and contexts.

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Lucy Sabin is an artistic researcher trained in geography and communication design. Her work explores atmospheres, weather, participatory arts, and the cultural dynamics of nature recovery.

See also:

<https://lucyrose93.github.io/aerography/>



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Shachi Mokashi is a doctoral researcher working at the intersections of anthropology and science and technology studies. Her work focuses on contestations around chemical contamination and remediation.



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Sofia Greaves is an artist and researcher situated in urban studies. She is currently developing creative methods to research pollution dispersal and turbulence.



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Christianne Blijleven is a museologist with an interdisciplinary background in the humanities and a specialisation in science museums. She has a particular interest in generative curatorial approaches for science museums, drawing from art-science practice to experimental media archaeology.

Tabitha Hrynick

Tabitha Hrynick is an anthropologist whose doctoral research focuses on repair and reparation for people affected by nuclear harm. Her work is embedded in collaborative approaches that center community-based and situated knowledges and engage creative methods.