

Creative research methods for tracing transcorporeality: reflections from the Eco-Feminist Art-Science Collective

cultural geographies

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journals.sagepub.com/home/cgj**Lucy Sabin** 

University of Sussex, UK

Sofia Greaves 

OsloMet, Norway

Tabitha Hrynck 

University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

Christianne Blijleven**Shachi Mokashi** 

Vrije Universiteit, Netherlands

Abstract

This article reflects on a three-day residency undertaken by the Eco-Feminist Art-Science (EFAS) Collective in rural Utrecht in July 2025. Bringing together researchers from geography, art, anthropology, history and curation, the residency created a setting to explore shared concerns about ecological change and contamination. We use Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality to examine both the material entanglements between bodies and pollutants and the exchanges that shaped our emergence as a collective. Through five creative embodied methods (body mapping, walking, kayaking, singing or sound practices and automatic writing) we trace the effects of environmental harm while also fostering collaborative knowledge-making. For geographers, the article demonstrates methodological possibilities for *tracing transcorporeality*, which helps illuminate the relational, intimate and affective dimensions of environmental issues.

Keywords

body mapping, creative methods, ecofeminist, more-than-human, PFAS, transcorporeality

Corresponding author:

Lucy Sabin, University of Sussex, Silverstone Building, Arts Road, Falmer, East Sussex, BN1 9RG.

Email: ls763@sussex.ac.uk

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Highlights

- The first residency of the Eco-Feminist Art-Science (EFAS) Collective served as a site for slowing down to engage in collaborative and practice-led inquiry.
- We sensed and traced environmental contamination through creative and embodied methods.
- We explore how bodies and pollutants are materially entangled, and how research collectives form through relational interchanges.
- We propose *tracing transcorporeality* as a future orientation for place-based, participatory research in and beyond feminist and more-than-human geographies.

Introduction

The reflections below emerged from a self-initiated residency which took place over three days in July 2025 in the Dutch village of Schalkwijk.¹ The residency was the ‘kick-off’ event for the Eco-Feminist Art-Science (EFAS) Collective, bringing together researchers working across geography, anthropology, history and science communication interested in creative practices. In our research and daily lives, we share concerns about experiences of ecological change, particularly how contaminants disperse, accumulate and alter the conditions on which life depends. In this writing, we explore the insights which emerged from our first residency through the lens of Stacy Alaimo’s concept of transcorporeality.² From *trans-* meaning ‘across’ and *corpus* ‘of the body’, transcorporeality refigures bodies as porous, dynamic and materially entangled in environments. This concept acknowledges the impossibility of ‘returning’ to a nature without human intervention,³ given the aftermath of nuclear fallout, microplastics and forever chemicals.⁴ Transcorporeality is a cross-cutting concept for researchers and practitioners working in ecological knowledges and environmental justice. This essay considers its potential to inform our collaborative exploration of creative methods within our research.

As researchers we already shared overlapping concerns and research interests prior to this first residency. Our individual work is anchored in feminist and anticolonial perspectives, as well as “more-than-human” literature which critiques the human exceptionalism underlying Euro-Western epistemologies of nature. However, members of our Collective are scattered geographically and, most of us, are just beginning to use creative methods in our research. Therefore, we designed the residency as a space for exploring creative processes rather than achieving specific outcomes, with the intention of exchanging knowledge across disciplines and contemplating how embodied experiences shape our research. We wanted to explore in a supportive setting so that we could connect in person and form a community, with discussions and insights emerging in a focused yet semi-structured and serendipitous way.

In this essay, we think with the notion of transcorporeality because it calls attention to two key aspects of our time together. As a concept, transcorporeality considers human relations with wider nature as ‘interchanges’⁵ and consequently encourages us to see environmental harm as an ongoing set of material relations and transformative effects rather than a series of discrete events. Transcorporeality also reflects our experience of knowledge exchange during the residency and our shared creative exploration as researchers with different bodies of knowledge. We hoped that our ‘interchanges’ might build relationships that could form a collective.

This work is structured around five creative-and-embodied research methods: body mapping, walking, kayaking, singing or sound practices and automatic writing. We describe how these methods were used to think about transcorporeal relations vis-à-vis pollution and environmental justice, specifically how our methods speak to Alaimo’s call for ‘rich, complex modes of analysis’ that

trace the shifting concentrations and effects of the ‘traffic in toxins’ across bodies.⁶ Drawing from residency field notes, we reflect upon our experiences of transcorporeality in practice: how our interchanges bound us together as a vulnerable and dynamic living research body. We reflect on the living and persisting nature of these relations.

Body mapping

At the start of the residency, we mapped our collective interests, intentions and knowledges (Figure 1). While this more traditional academic approach could have led us to jump immediately to think about potential collaborations and deliverables, we slowed down and experimented instead with building a sense community and positionality through methodological experimentation. Our first method was body mapping, which typically involves drawing an outline of one’s own body first and adding labels, colours, shapes, symbols and/or patterns to represent emotions and sensations as emergent, latent, concentrated or accumulative within specific bodily regions. After collectively reviewing the method, we mapped our own bodies, working intuitively and in silence.

Two images from this embodied exercise are featured here (Figures 2 and 3). In them, we see reflections on boundaries between the body and ‘outside’ world, both speaking to transcorporeal interchanges. Figure 2 uses colour blocking to highlight relationships beyond the skin as a boundary; this author used their existing photographs of branches and bark to further express the feeling of porosity with their environment.

The second drawing (Figure 3) similarly reimagines the conventions of the ‘body map’ with dotted and unruly lines indicating porosity rather than stable boundaries. Here, there is no distinction between the air and the skin. As the creator of this body map explains,

The question of drawing lines, stabilising boundaries, and constructing categories is a recurring one in my research. During our body mapping session, *it was almost impossible for me to draw my body with solid lines demarcating it from my environment*, intergenerational health concerns, chemical interventions, and citizenship status. I could have easily sketched my passport instead of my figure; wouldn’t it still tell the stories of where I have been, and what I have seen? Further, is imprecision better than nothing? If we agree to be imprecise, who can we trust with the task of constructing approximations and ambiguities that can propel action?

Through this exercise, we took time to reflect as researchers who are materially and affectively embedded in the worlds we research. By probing our bodies as research subjects and our environments as living archives, this exercise also generated a heightened awareness of the vulnerability such practices demand, ‘There are places in my body where I feel compromised’. By seeing and openly discussing these vulnerabilities early in the residency (day 1), we also began to be bound together as a collective ‘body’. Crucially, this exercise also set a collective intention for the residency: to attune. As one author reflected,

I wondered how the first stage of body mapping (i.e., outlining one’s body) shapes the rest of the exercise, and perhaps forecloses ways of engaging with phenomena that transcend or blur bodily boundaries. My imagination became populated with an autobiographical atlas of exposures. I charted the artificial regulation of my endocrine system that was initially, at least, chosen but could not do so without also drawing the waters that flow through my body, altering the frequency of bodies emerging at the map’s edges (here there be monsters).

Eco-Feminist Art-Science (EFAS) Residency #1

Key Theme(s): (add here)

Mapping pollution?
 Re-presentation (maps are not neutral)
 Responsibility (making things visible)

Keywords: (also concepts/frameworks)

- 4 X Cs of Curation ← Fri morn.
- Body as 'sensory data collector' (Laura Denning)
- Remediation - clean
- Semiotics of maps - legibility
- Justice - notions of
- Interscalar - between scales

Questions - add your questions here?

- What/how obr methods can be used to study [voices] pollution w citizens
- What does a map even do? Is a technology.
- Tools for auto biographical / artistic curation?
- Pollution as social and environmental?
- Art-based research to articulate complex notions of justice? (ecological justice)
- Atmosphere? - how do you integrate personal monitoring of exposure with embodied sensory?
- What are the potential outcomes (right action) of our knowledge (which futures are made (im)possible?)

Random Ideas to explore ...

- What happens when we 'infrastructure' collective sensing?
- ★ AIMS & GOALS
- ↳ STATEMENT / INTENTIONS (COLLECTIVE) - individual aims & goals for other means
- ↳ FOLLOW-UPS
 - future residencies (& other infrastructures)
 - grants & funding opportunities
 - collaborations (papers, panels, etc) anything under the sun

Case Studies / Stories

- Archival - Dordrecht? Religion & Perceptions of Nature (as altered by PFA)
- PFA's
- SouthCoastal London: 3D render (traffic flow) open mapping data. noise data map in 2016.
- "Being inside the wind tunnel" ask local residents about experiences
- Blackstock Road / Islington

Methods & Media

- Photography - Photovoice
- Archival
- Counter-mapping
- body-mapping
- sound - field recording (on walk)
- Singing (Tabi)
- Spoken - stories / statement
- performative leaves
- video library

Schedule

Thurs

AM - 9.30 - collective knowledges
 10.30 - 12.30 walk & deep listening (as research method)

PM - 13.30 - 16.30 explore creative methods - body mapping
 16.30 - 17.00 discussion - photovoice

Fri

AM - 9.30 - 4 Cs of curation sound (as above) video essay? special, post...
 - 10.30 -

Sat

AM - auto writing (M.P.) / autoethnography
 Next steps...

References:

- art & creativity in an era of ecocide
- 4 Cs of curation - Hannah Rogers
- Free the Map (book on counter-mapping / border-mapping)
- Max Liboiron on metaphors of mapping
- Small Pittsburgh (Lisa WA) raising smells
- Toxic Town (Netflix) Darkwaters (Netflix) - making artwork
- Map paper's circular Ella's Law
- art in an emergency
- Bad new days, H.L. Foster

LUCY SABIN · SOFIA GREAVES · CHRISTIANNE BLITZLEVEN · SHACHI MOKASHI · TABITHA HRYNICK

Figure 1. Eco-Feminist Art-Science (EFAS) Residency 1. Our first map. Photo by Sabin.

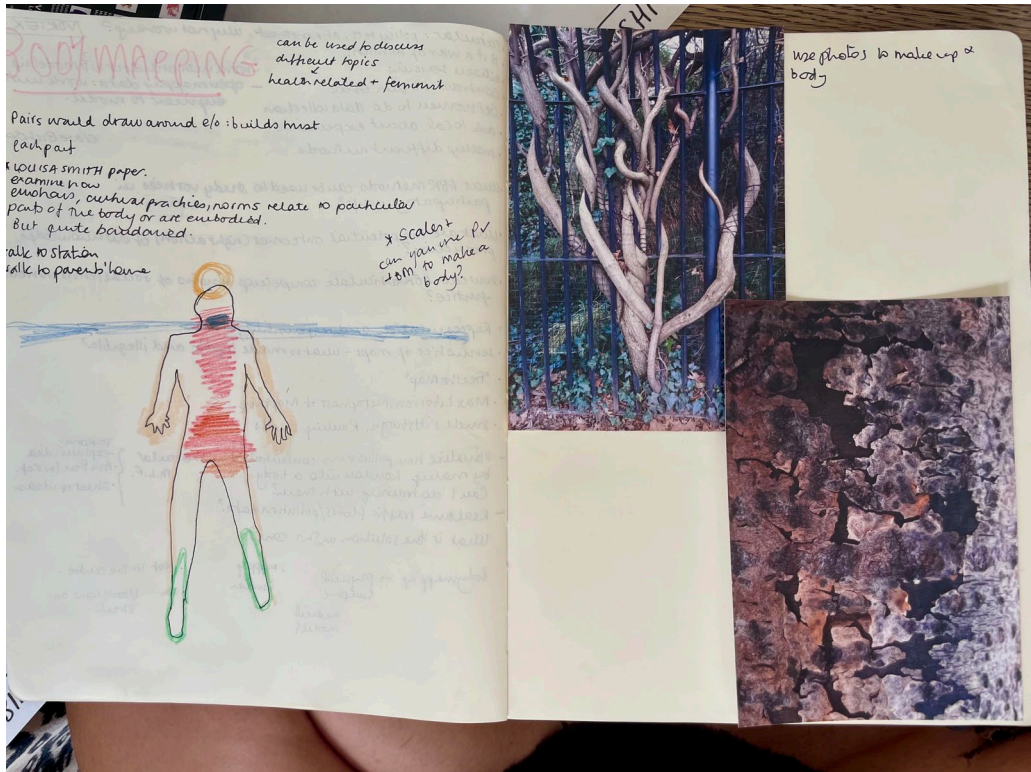


Figure 2. Body mapping. Artwork by Greaves.

Walking

Taking inspiration from both cultural geography and environmental arts practices, the following morning we experimented with movement and walking as methodological tools for situating ourselves within the local environment.⁷ We walked village paths, past greenhouses and open fields, and along an avenue of poplars. We crawled into remnants of WWII bunkers, scattered along a trench, now overgrown and lush, its apple trees full of leaves. We observed the daily activities of animals in the garden and surrounding fields, listening closely to the wind, insects and ambient sounds (Figure 4). These time-based activities allowed us to explore how noticing subtle shifts in sound, movement or smell could register both the vitality of more-than-human life and the legacies or trajectories of industrial byproducts and emissions. Walking was done both in company and silence, which fostered attunement. As one author describes:

I arrived in Schalkwijk having just attended the Degrowth Conference in Oslo. My mind was full of ideas not yet settled. I will move to Oslo to study turbulence in fluid dynamics. 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. Slowing down and walking through the grass and sitting in the kayak, seeing the horses each morning, thinking about these problems slowly in a context, I felt that our movement within this house and our surroundings helped things make sense for me.

This author subsequently produced a painting based on memories of the sensory walks: a response to place and time for synthesis and reflection (Figure 5). In the ethos of transcorporeality, which

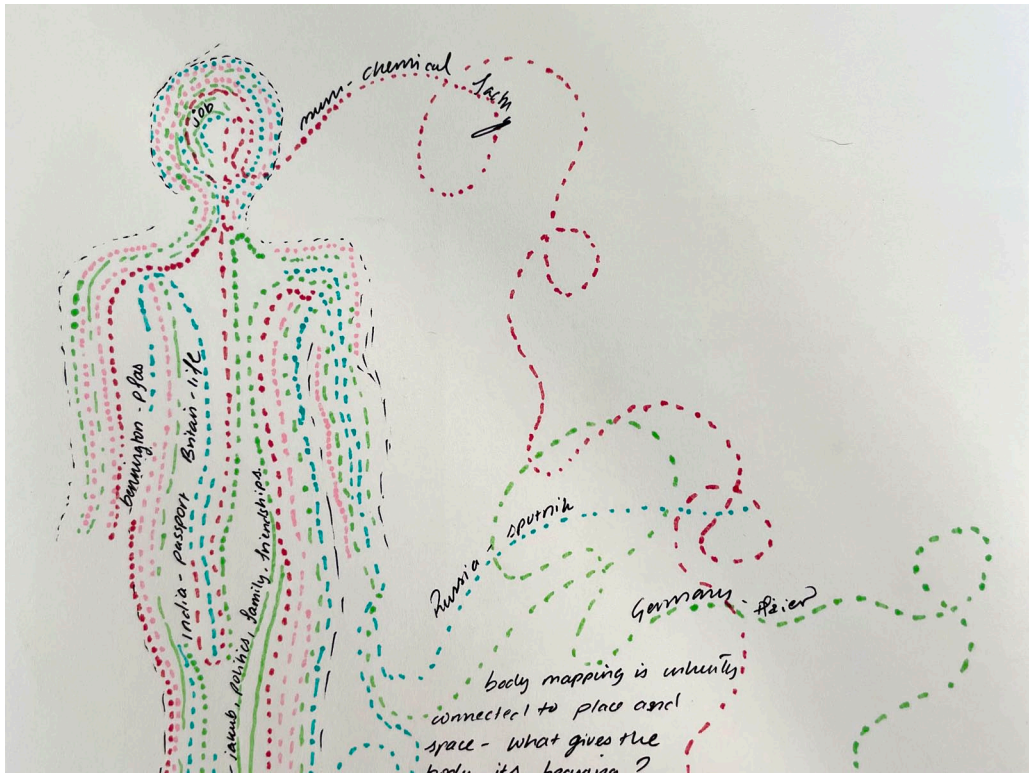


Figure 3. Body mapping without solid lines. Artwork by Mokashi.

might suggest that bodies and landscapes are inscribed with and weathered by previous exposures, it is painted over a previous painting, the texture of which you can see coming through.

Kayaking

At dusk, we kayaked along the *sloten* in and around the boundaries of the residence property. These slow running canals became pathways for exploring our surroundings from a novel perspective. We consider this to be an embodied research method separate to walking because we were situated on the water, splashed and pushed by it. This negotiation with a more-than-human body was an invitation to playfulness. Equally, it brought contradictions to the surface, like the blooming white lilies anchored in concealed sediment. How polluted was this body of water? What toxic histories might be out of sight? Some of us opened up about past experiences, and fears related to personal histories of exposure:

When the news broke that Chemours (DuPont) had polluted the water, soil and air of my hometown near Dordrecht for decades (1970s-2012 with PFAS, GenX since 2013), the conversations in my family took a strange turn. A funny turn. Jokes about mutant rats running around the docks, visions of the legendary catfish in our bodies of water now swimming around with glowing tails . . . fantasies, even, about ecstatic mass hallucinations in our orthodox riverside town. GenX, the name given to a new chemical compound developed by Chemours, was supposed to conceal that we were still dealing with something as toxic as PFOA but reminded us more than anything of the potent chemical disruptors straight out of old sci-fi



Figure 4. Photograph from a walking/listening session. Photograph by Sabin.

stories. It did not take long, however, before more serious ways of talking about environmental pollution seeped into our family lexicon.

Sharing a kayak moved us to share personal, embodied histories and experiential knowledges. It highlighted not only transcorporeal relations between human and non-human, pollutant and life forces, but also – by describing these relations – we were building solidarity with others and amongst ourselves (Figure 6).

Singing/sounding

On day two in the afternoon, we gathered to explore how the less tangible dimensions of environmental toxicity might be expressed through sound practices. Inspired by artist Jemma Woolmore,⁸ who facilitates workshops in which participants hum to communicate with the toxicants in their own bodies, we sat in the shade beneath a tree, eyes closed. This required trust as much as choosing a pitch, volume and breath: creative choices which reflected to how we wanted to speak to non-human entities within us. Some of us (accidentally) harmonised with attention to qualities of sound; others hummed very quietly, ‘I was humming for myself, and not for others’.

Afterwards, one of us led the group in song, choosing a call and response format with a tradition in protest and solidarity movements. In this exercise, we sang to build transcorporeal relations through dialogue, as if we could also consequently listen for a response from our bodies. For one of us, this was particularly clear: ‘It is all vibrating, this sea of shared substances, and we must



Figure 5. Painting. Untitled, Schalkwijk, 2025. Artwork by Greaves.



Figure 6. Swimming in the hinterlands of Dordrecht. Photography by Blijleven.

listen. Listening to my own body, other bodies demanded to be heard'. For another member of our group, this increased attunement to sound and subtle vibration became clear during their free time, when the buzzing of the flies-in-residence reminded them of the invisible yet persistent and pervasive force of nuclear radiation:

I swatted away another pair of mating flies, buzzing frantically on my knee, while reading the book I'd brought along about the destructive power of nuclear weapons. Despite their nuisance, I realised the flies, in their buzzing passion, had ushered me back into my body through their sensory intervention. Away from the injustices of nuclear harms past and the dark threat of future atomic warfare with its promise not only to instantly vaporise, but to invisibly radiate surviving human and more-than-human bodies and systems. I shut the book.

Automatic writing

We finished our residency with an automatic writing exercise: five minutes of continuous writing without editing to unearth unconscious feelings and thoughts. This exercise exposed perhaps our strongest feelings, 'Justice for artists! What does it mean to be creative? You can't just "make a thing." / An industrial chemical and an engineered cow, who is dropping dead and whose death is valued? / I only want to sing songs that make sense to me!' The act of sharing these reflections was a choice which spoke to the trust and relationships we had built during our residency. Some texts gave voice to personal tensions and desires, others registered sounds and presences, attuning to more-than-human life:

My hand conjured birdsong followed by a list of companion species in Schalkwijk: flies, water dwellers, lily pads, wind-in-trees, dry-grass, sheep, alpaca, coots, herons, geese, morehens, dragonflies!

Conclusion: lasting relations and new research questions

Through this residency, creative methods facilitated interchanges that fostered our sensitivity to material flows across more-than-human bodies and helped us communicate those shared sensitivities. We frame these experiments using the heuristic of transcorporeality, because it expresses the nature of these interchanges which include the knowledge shared amongst ourselves. The reflexivity of this sharing brought many more questions to the surface. These new research questions and avenues speak to the living and lasting nature of the residency which established our collective as a body in the making rather than a finished monument or event. Combining transcorporeality with creative methods has potential to further geographers' affective ways of knowing and sensing more-than-human relations, as well as for supporting friendships that inform research. Our fieldwork and jobs may have scattered us around the globe, but the sense of community forged in our residency persists. We look forwards to the residencies to come.

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Author contributions

Lucy Sabin: residency organiser, co-author.

Sofia Greaves: co-author.

Tabitha Hrynick: co-author.

Christianne Blijleven: co-author.


Shachi Mokashi: co-author.

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ORCID iDs

Lucy Sabin  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9682-196X>

Sofia Greaves  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3657-9344>

Tabitha Hrynick  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9571-5874>

Shachi Mokashi  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1797-3177>

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Author biographies

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

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

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.

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.

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.