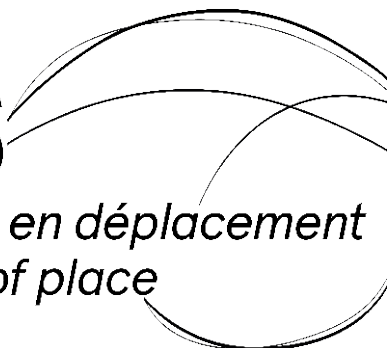


# Desire Lines

*Des espaces narratifs en déplacement*  
*Displaced narratives of place*





***Desire Lines. Displaced Narratives of Place***

Curator: Felicity Tayler

From January 20 to March 25, 2023

**ARTEXTE**

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ISBN 978-2-923045-53-5



<b>Foreword</b>	7
Hélène Brousseau	
<b><i>Desire Lines. Displaced Narratives of Place</i></b>	9
Felicity Tayler	
<b>Works cited and bibliography</b>	18
<b>Biographies</b>	21
Curator and artists	
<b>Public programming</b>	24
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	25
Felicity Tayler	



## Foreword

Hélène Brousseau

The abundance of information available today, regularly leads us to believe that it is possible to locate everything within our libraries or on the web. However, this is often far from the reality, especially for documents that emanate from communities rooted in self-management models and social movements. The exhibition, *Desire Lines. Displaced Narratives of Place* highlights a network of artists and authors who mobilized around three magazines, particularly in the period between 1976 and 1987.

The exhibition's corpus of work is comprised of three periodicals: *Centerfold* which became *FUSE* (1976-2014) [1], *Border/Lines* (1984-1997) [2], and *Fireweed* (1976-2002) [3]. The periodicals share an interest in art and social and political activism, notably through the lens of feminism and anti-racism. Their use of a language that was free of constraints, questions and criticizes art institutions, as well as the ways of doing and being in the art world, and more broadly in society.

Although these periodicals are important for art history, they are barely traceable for research purposes. The issues were not systematically acquired at the time of publication, the collections of university libraries are often fragmentary. Moreover, these periodicals are not visible in databases widely used in universities. The result is an invisibility that not only deprives researchers, but also contributes to an erasure of the legacy of those involved.

Indexation is crucial to the accessibility of content. Naming the artists and contributors is necessary to allow for the retrieval of their work. With this need in mind, Felicity Taylor

surrounded herself with a network of collaborators, leading them in a radical collaborative methodology [4] where a community was formed through this project, and where sharing of resources, knowledge and expertise was fostered. Thanks to this community, each issue in the study has been described with a level of detail well beyond the standards of a typical bibliographic record. The result is an indexing that includes all the artists, authors, photographers and the editorial board, allowing for a co-occurrence analysis and visualization of the network that is presented in the exhibition.

Five years of research, conversations and public events culminated in the exhibition *Desire Lines. Displaced Narratives of Place*. It celebrates the work of a community of artists, writers and researchers that has formed around the periodicals. More importantly, *Desire Lines* also marks a greater discoverability of these three periodicals and the work of the artists and writers who comprise them; working towards a more equitable and inclusive access to art information with a diversity of voices.



## ***Desire Lines. Displaced Narrative of Place***

Felicity Tayler

\* All quotes in this text are selected from interviews originally recorded as part of the 2021 AGYU speaker series “*Desire Lines: Mapping the Metadata of Toronto Arts Publishing*”, co-curated by Felicity Tayler, Michael Maranda and Faith Paré. Full transcripts of the interviews are available online. (see QR code to consult the transcripts).

Desire lines are paths that are created as people move through open urban areas. Well-worn tracks in the dirt show us an everyday that is determined by overlapping drive and intent, spaces carved out in collectivity in defiance of the structural forces invested in infrastructure and landscaped greenery. Similarly, arts magazine publishing in Toronto, from the 1970s onward, has been a space criss-crossed by lines of desire: the desire for access to print as a communication medium with political effect; for organizing labour through mentorship and kinship structures; and for new forms of representation through an analysis of gender, class, and race.

Here, desire lines are bounded by metadata describing three magazines published in Toronto between 1978 and 1987: *Fireweed*, *Border/Lines*, and *FUSE* (which began publishing as *Centerfold* in 1976, but changed its name following a move from Calgary to Toronto). These magazines are acknowledged as spaces where cultural race politics and intersectional feminism were worked through as modes of activist cultural criticism. Such a framing offers a shift, in a readerly gaze, away from the better-known cultural networks of publications from the same time period, *Canadian Art* or *FILE Magazine*. Likewise, this exhibition shows you how we can read these magazines as spaces of collective production. If little distinction is made between magazine founders or attention accorded to the fame of their contributors; the emphasis is

instead on connectivity through accumulated co-publishing relationships. These relationships, however, are an incomplete representation of the multiplicity of communities from which these writers emerged; and to wish for comprehensiveness is an expression of desire that looks toward a utopian horizon.

These publishing histories are in conversation with the artistic practices of Pamela Matharu and Luis Jacob, both of whom draw upon their mediated and mentorship lineages in Toronto art scenes (and beyond) to position their repertoires of memory, identity, and agency.

“I made this little homage to the Black feminist cultural producers of Toronto.

These are all materials from my archive. Yes, I archived newspaper as well as objects, and you can see a text there and then a recording of an album. You see a VHS tape and an audio tape, and then two articles, and then where I use some vinyl. My collaborator, Marilyn Fernandes, is a graphic designer. I asked her to do this, and the idea here is that I am basically coming out around my affiliation with Black feminist cultural producers. How do you actually visualize intersectionality as a visual artist?”

**Pamela Matharu, *Setting a Tone***

“I am keenly interested in narratives of place. How do available narratives enable us to understand (or misunderstand) a given place? By which processes do places generate their own stories and, conversely, by which strategies do stories *produce* the places they narrativize? What counternarratives exist to relativize existing dominant narratives and allow other

models to emerge?”

**Luis Jacob, *Repeating Refrains***

Matharu’s detail of the larger installation, *One of these things is not like the other* (2019), unfolds her personal archive of memories of mentorship by Black women at Sister Vision Press and Fresh Arts. We see the importance of media in this uncovering of her artistic lineage—as well as in the selection of documents, available in the book cradle next to the wooden benches, for your leisurely reading. *stuck between an archive and an aesthetic* (2019) is a video essay layering moments in Matharu’s artistic and social justice practice with references to figures who influenced her mode of working, such as a soundtrack of Lillian Allen’s iconic song “Riddim an’ Hard Times” (1982/1983).

Jacob’s pendulum drawing *On a vacant lot (Harold Town)* (2020) indexes the ephemeral connections made through a “tangled garden” of affective and aesthetic practices in urban spaces. These tracings resonate with the six books that, when paired, become “borderline cases”—print-based imaginaries which, Jacob argues, have produced both “virtuous” and “vicious” disidentification with sensations of place.

Matharu’s and Jacob’s practices resonate with my own experience of finding my positionality within a network of relations, real and imaginary, of cultural production. My mother’s family is a multigenerational Euro-Canadian settler family in Toronto; the city that this exhibition conjures for me is not their city. Instead, this reading of alternate kinship networks is indebted to stories that artists and writers have gifted to me in informal conversation and oral history sessions; through friendships and queer community formations in artist-run centres, museums, and

galleries; and over years of stewardship responsibilities for the physical collection and digital systems at Artexte and, more recently, the University of Ottawa, which houses the Fireweed fonds and the Women's Archive.

Here, these stories and voices are remediated across different publishing platforms and spaces of display and reception, as they accumulate over time. A network visualization, co-created with librarian colleague Tomasz Neugebauer from e-artexte magazine metadata related oral history transcripts and response pieces, is accessible live via web platforms, while excerpts from interviews and data visualizations are displayed in the exhibition space. Materials from the physical collection simultaneously exist as metadata within the digital infrastructure of the e-artexte catalogue. Because of the limitations of computational networks, narratives of place expressed via other modes afford sensations of community that expand infinitely through time and space.

As Rinaldo Walcott has observed, Toronto is a global city produced through the continuous displacement of localized cultural centres that are simultaneously diasporic in nature. This version of the city overemphasizes claims to political representation from marginalized groups at the expense of an authentic engagement with aesthetics on the artists' and their communities' own terms. In the documentary video *Lillian Allen, Riddim an' Hardtimes MIXDOWN*, edited by Clive Robertson and recorded in 1983 at Robertson's Voicespondence recording label, we see musicians Quammie Williams, Devon Haughton, Clifton Joseph, and Lillian Allen socializing as they listen to a recording of De Dub Poets released on the Voicespondence label. Here, Afro-Caribbean rhythm resistance and European avant-garde-influenced media arts practices collaborate and produce a narrative of place that pushes against Allen's

memory of Toronto as an “apartheid city.” An invitation into each other’s cultures continues in the pages of *FUSE* magazine, through music reviews and advertisements for Allen’s media production and affiliated distribution projects: Verse-to-Vinyl, Pyramid Associates, and Domestic Bliss Publishers.

“And so, we, you know, we, there’s a sort of a collaboration that started to happen. My connection, because I was already rooted in the community and trusted by my community, facilitated other people to make that connection too, because before that, remember, Toronto was a little apartheid city. The collaboration that we were able to build, the trust that was offered to us, and the ease with which we were able to move among people, that went beyond bureaucracy and went into friendships, I think, for me, is what gave me the strength to keep working across cultural and racial lines. And I hold these people in my heart.”

**Lillian Allen, *Riddim an’ Resistance***

The desire lines traced through these publications disidentify with the history of colonialism in Canada, but they are also produced through structures that uphold narratives of the displacement, assimilation, and erasure of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, their languages and cultures. Because of this shared colonial history, the absence of Indigenous voices is notable in this exhibition as well.

“Who was the audience, and what was the publishing targeted towards? How do we remedy or reconcile the gap?”

Or do we need to remedy, when the absence is so

significant? Pointing to or highlighting the void or avoidance can help us, all of us, understand how colonial residue lingers.

Reading and referencing what the land will tell us has and will become useful and, at times, critical for the future of, mainly, politics, planning, and place-keeping, given Toronto's historical precedent is scattered and embedded within the colonial framework that began in a not-so-distant past."

**Ryan Rice, *Making a Network of Relations Visible***

In preparing *Desire Lines*, we asked ourselves the question of how we might address this significant absence. It is important, if something is absent from the exhibition space, that we not say that it is present. A commissioned piece by poet Liz Howard responds to this absence, by calling out to the exceptional presence of voices in the guest-edited issue of *Fireweed 22: Native Women*. Rather than appear in the exhibition space, Howard's writing will be performed live during the exhibition and will be published on *articles*, the Artexte blog.

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For the librarian, curatorial practice and data infrastructure necessarily centre the ethics of access to information, to the technologies of memory and identity-making. There is an ethics of care implied in giving access to this social imaginary, as well as in its reception. The displaced narratives in *Desire Lines* afford us privileged access to a sociality produced through relationships between people, cultural infrastructure, and political activism, and enacted through writing, artistic production, and parallel community action against structural inequalities. Often, I am asked to add the

Toronto-based magazine *Parallogramme* to this network visualization. This magazine, first published in 1976, was a listing of activities taking place across the national ANNPAC network of artist-run centres [1]. ANNPAC was disbanded in 1993, as it was unable to respond effectively to the Minquon Panchayat collective's challenge to the privilege of whiteness in artist-run culture. This exhibition shows us that prior to the cultural diversity policies implemented in the 1990s, the network was not able to orient itself in equity-seeking directions without explicit debate, internal conflict, and the deep commitment of key individuals to equity and political action, supported through established long-term reciprocal relationships. From the perspective of today, we can acknowledge these diasporic and transnational discursive communities, their politics, readerships, and self-defined aesthetics, as they include contributors to the publications *Contrast*, *Spear*, *Share*, or *Tiger Lily*, as spaces significant for the development of aesthetics and critical voice for Black cultural producers. Similarly, including the networks around the publications *Asianadian*, *The Body Politic*, or *Broad Side* would shift the weight of connectedness in other directions.

"The approach of *FUSE* was different. It defied the practice of the slow, indefinite drip, drip, drip of Black contributors, instead deciding to welcome an explosion of them. As if that wasn't enough, *FUSE* allowed them significant latitude in what they could submit for publication.

*FUSE*'s first Black columnist was the esteemed Norman 'Otis' Richmond who began writing for the magazine in its debut year of 1980. Throughout that decade and beyond, there is an impressive group of talented Black writers whose work is presented in its pages: Dionne Brand, Marlene NourbeSe Philip,

Marva Jackson, Richmond, Richard Fung (a Trinidadian of Chinese heritage), Clifton Joseph, Cameron Bailey (before his time at Now), and Rinaldo Walcott.”

**Klive Walker, *A Lit Fuse***

“But you have Cameron Bailey and NourbeSe Philip writing together, monitoring the changes to the Toronto Arts Council, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Canada Council, in terms of the moves that they’re making to create as they, in their terms: *diversity* rather than *equity*, or at least initially. And so, *FUSE* is a critical place.... There are political effects.”

**Clive Robertson, *Riddim an’ Resistance***

Transparency in the histories of institutional collecting, the labour involved in building the technical infrastructure, and the data visualization methods employed here—all of these are important to offset bias in the metadata. There are many more oral histories that could and should be collected, because it is through listening to the recounting of feelings and their associated memories that an understanding of the relational dynamic emerges, as it is shaped by material conditions or sociocultural frameworks.

In *Desire Lines*, the city is foregrounded as a site of print production; we see a process of continuous displacement of narratives of this place: tsi Tkarón:to, Toronto. This curatorial mode is a response to exhibitions like *Form Follows Fiction: Art and Artists in Toronto* (2016), curated by Luis Jacob at the Art Museum of the University of Toronto; *Gchi-Oodenaang: Ezhi-Mina-Waajimong Eni-Naabiischigeng = Toronto: Tributes & Tributaries, 1971–1989* (2017), curated by Wanda Nanibush at the Art Gallery of Ontario; and *Is Toronto Burning? 1977/1978/1979: Three Years in the Making (and*



*Unmaking) of the Toronto Art Scene* (2014), curated by Philip Monk at the Art Gallery of York University. These exhibitions took similar approaches to personal storytelling as doing so tends to reveal communities, scenes, and creative lineages. Printed matter was acknowledged as a key agent in the formation of artistic communities and their cultural politics.

The representational relationship between people and collectives, and their symbolic existence as metadata in relational computational systems, mirrors the continuous displacement of narrative in personal storytelling. Patterns emerge as desire lines. Collectivities have formed as individuals worked alongside one another, in collaboration, and through conflict to produce new forms of representation as aesthetic and critical practice across the pages of these magazines. These stories resonate with the power dynamics of colonialism, gender, class, and race as they continue to play out in arts publishing today.



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### Foreword and curatorial essay

#### Foreword

Hélène Brousseau, work cited

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Felicity Tayler, work cited and bibliography

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## Biographies

### Curator and artists

**Felicity Tayler**, MLIS, PhD lives with her family on unceded, unsurrendered Algonquin Anishinaabe territory. She is the Research Data Management Librarian at the University of Ottawa, was the Interim Head, Research Services (Arts and Special Collections), 2021-2022, and an Information Specialist at Artex, 2010-2016. Her research, artistic, and curatorial interests include art historical metadata modeling, data visualization, and the print culture of artistic community. The *Desire Lines. Displaced Narratives of Place* exhibition first took form as part of a Fellowship in the Department of History of Art at the University of Toronto. It is informed by her work as co-applicant on the SSHRC-funded SpokenWeb partnership, which foregrounds a coordinated and collaborative approach to literary historical study and digital development, with diverse collections of spoken recordings from across Canada and beyond. Tayler's critical and scholarly writing has been published widely and related exhibitions have been funded by the Canada Council for the Arts, Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, and have taken place at the National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, among other venues.

**Luis Jacob** is a Peruvian-born, Toronto-based artist whose work destabilizes viewing conventions and invites collisions of meaning. Since his participation in documenta12 in 2007, he has achieved an international reputation – with exhibitions at the Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Austria; Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, Germany; and the Toronto Biennial of Art (all 2019); La Biennale de Montréal (2016); Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York (2015); Taipei Biennial (2012), among others. Recent published writings include “*Cross-Eyed and Painless in Toronto: A Borderline Case*” (Afterall Journal 53).

**Pamila Matharu** is a settler of Panjabi, Indian descent (Jalandhar City and the Village of Bhanolanga in the district of Kapurthala), born in Birmingham, England, and arrived in Canada in 1976. Approaching contemporary art from the position of critical pedagogy and using an interdisciplinary and intersectional feminist lens, Pamila's work culminates in a broad range of forms including installation art, social practice, and experimental media art. Recent exhibitions include; *Where Were You in '92?* at Agnes Etherington Art Centre (Kingston, ON), *Sensing of the Wound at Or Gallery* (Vancouver), *Archival Intimacies: Queering Asian Diasporas* at One Archives at USC Libraries (Los Angeles), *the heart is the origin of your worldview* with Cooper Cole at Art Toronto, among others.

**Tomasz Neugebauer** is the Digital Projects & Systems Development Librarian at Concordia University, where he participates in the design, development, and implementation of various research and library applications. His current research interests include information visualization, linked open data, metadata interoperability, open-source software systems used for digital curation, preservation, and the building of digital repository infrastructure. In 2013, he helped to launch the e-artexte open access digital repository. He has been collaborating with the SpokenWeb research project since 2016. Tomasz is the editor of the *Photography Media*.

**Clive Robertson** is a performance and media artist, and former artist curator, critic, and publisher whose works continue to be featured in domestic and international museum surveys, alternative venues, and art research projects. Clive is a founding editor and publisher of Centerfold/FUSE, ARTON'S Video Publishing, and the audio art/music label VOICEPENDENCE. His book on performance art *w.o.r.k.s.c.o.r.e.p.o.r.t* (1975, with Paul Woodrow) has recently

been digitally republished by Artexxe Editions (2022).

## Public programming

### ***Desire Lines: poetry reading with Liz Howard***

*An event in collaboration with the Atwater Poetry Project*

Saturday, February 25, 2023 - 2:00 to 4:00 pm at ArtexTe

With: Liz Howard, Faith Paré, and Felicity Tayler

**Liz Howard** is a poet, editor and teacher. Her work explores Anishinaabe ways of knowing, cosmology, ecology, and the philosophy and neuroscience of consciousness. Howard's poetry was awarded the 2016 Griffin Poetry Prize and was shortlisted again in 2022, she has also been shortlisted for the 2015 Governor General's Award for Poetry and the 2022 Trillium Poetry Prize. Howard will be joining Concordia University's Department of English as an Assistant Professor of creative writing in June 2023. She is of mixed settler and Anishinaabe heritage.

**Faith Paré** is a poet of Afro-Guyanese ancestry born on Dish With One Spoon treaty territory. Her writing has appeared in *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Guts*, and *The Capilano Review*, and she has performed at Canadian arts centres such as the Art Gallery of York University, the Harbourfront Centre, and the Winter Garden Theatre. Faith is the curator of the Atwater Poetry Project, a Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyang/Montreal-based reading series founded in 2004. In 2021 she was an honourable mention for the League of Canadian Poets' Pavlick Prize, awarded for an outstanding portfolio and significant commitment to national poetry communities.



## Acknowledgements

Felicity Tayler

For the informal conversations: Rosemary Donegan, Lisa Steele, Peter Fitting, Tanya Mars, Monika Kin Gagnon, Lynn Fernie, Lianne Moyes, Richard William Hill, Andrew James Patterson.

For the gifts of your stories: Lillian Allen, Clive Robertson, Klive Walker, Makeda Silvera, Andrea Fatona, Pamila Matharu, Kass Banning, Will Straw, Rinaldo Walcott, Ryan Rice, Constance Crompton, Deanna Fong, Tomasz Neugebauer; and for your responses: Britta B., Faith Paré, Joy Xiang.

The Art Gallery of York University and Jenifer Pappararo, for hosting the “Desire Lines: Mapping the Metadata of Toronto Arts Publishing” speaker series. Michael Maranda and Faith Paré, for co-curating this series with me. And the respondents, for participating in it.

ArtexTe, including all the people who contributed to this work over the years: Mojeanne Behzadi, Anabelle Chassé, Jessica Hébert, Manon Tourigny, Jonathan Lachance, Hélène Brousseau, Sarah Watson, John Latour, Corina MacDonald. I would also like to thank to the technicians Mark Lowe and Chris Lloyd (Centre VOX), Edwin Janzen for the revision, as well as Marie-France Thibault for the translation.

The University of Ottawa Library, including Sarah Simpkin and the Content and Access team; and Marina Bokovay and Archives and Special Collections.

The Spoken Web Partnership, especially Jason Camlot, Faith Paré, Deanna Fong, Karis Shearer, Mathieu Aubin, Marjorie Mitchell, Jasmin Macarios, and Anne P., for providing the materials and the creative and intellectual space to develop

this methodology of oral history interviews and network visualization. This exhibition draws on research supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Barbara Fischer, Elizabeth Legge, and the Faculty of Arts Fellowship at the University of Toronto, for supporting the early phases of this work, especially the Toronto Urban Imaginaries Working Group at the Jackman Humanities Institute, 2017–18.

For the warmest hugs: Chris and Daimon McLeod.





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