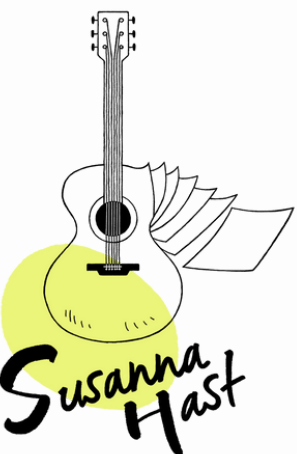




CRAFTING THEORY

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WHAT WE'LL TALK ABOUT

01 The politics (aesthetics & ethics) of writing

02 What is theory and how does the self fit in?

03 Theory as craft

04 As language

05 As tension

06 As questions

07 As structure

08 Autotheory as a research practice?

THREAD

Think of a place that is meaningful to you.

Take your mind to that place.

What do you see, hear, smell, sense, touch?

What sensations you notice while in this place?

10 min



THE POLITICS (AESTHETICS & ETHICS) OF WRITING



01

In many ways, writing is the act of saying I, of imposing oneself upon other people, of saying listen to me, see it my way, change your mind. It's an aggressive, even a hostile act. You can disguise its aggressiveness all you want with veils of subordinate clauses and qualifiers and tentative subjunctives, with ellipses and evasions—with the whole manner of intimating rather than claiming, of alluding rather than stating—but there's no getting around the fact that setting words on paper is the tactic of a secret bully, an invasion, an imposition of the writer's sensibility on the reader's most private space. Joan Didion, Why I write, 1976

THE POLITICS OF WRITING



02

I write in a way that is not very fashionable. Its rich in metafor, its rich in subordinate clause. Many folks may say it's purple, sentimental, flowery. But I was obsessed with that style because I look back further, particularly 19th century American literature, I realise that all of this gendered criticism of the style – flowery, purple, in other words, womanly, which is not direct, not straight enough, not sobering, not clear enough –all of these things were once the pinnacle achievement of men. ... When we arrived at modernism the sentence became truncated and laconic, but in order for men to move beyond or progress from one literary style to others they had to deem their old tools feminine.

Ocean Vuong in Tresholds podcast: 'delaying the dot' or writing in purple

DEFINING

Lauren Fournier: Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing and Criticism (2021)

Autotheory in many different art forms, owes to feminist art and activism

particularly appropriate term for works that exceed existing genre categories and disciplinary bounds, that flourish in the liminal spaces between categories, that reveal the entanglement of research and creation

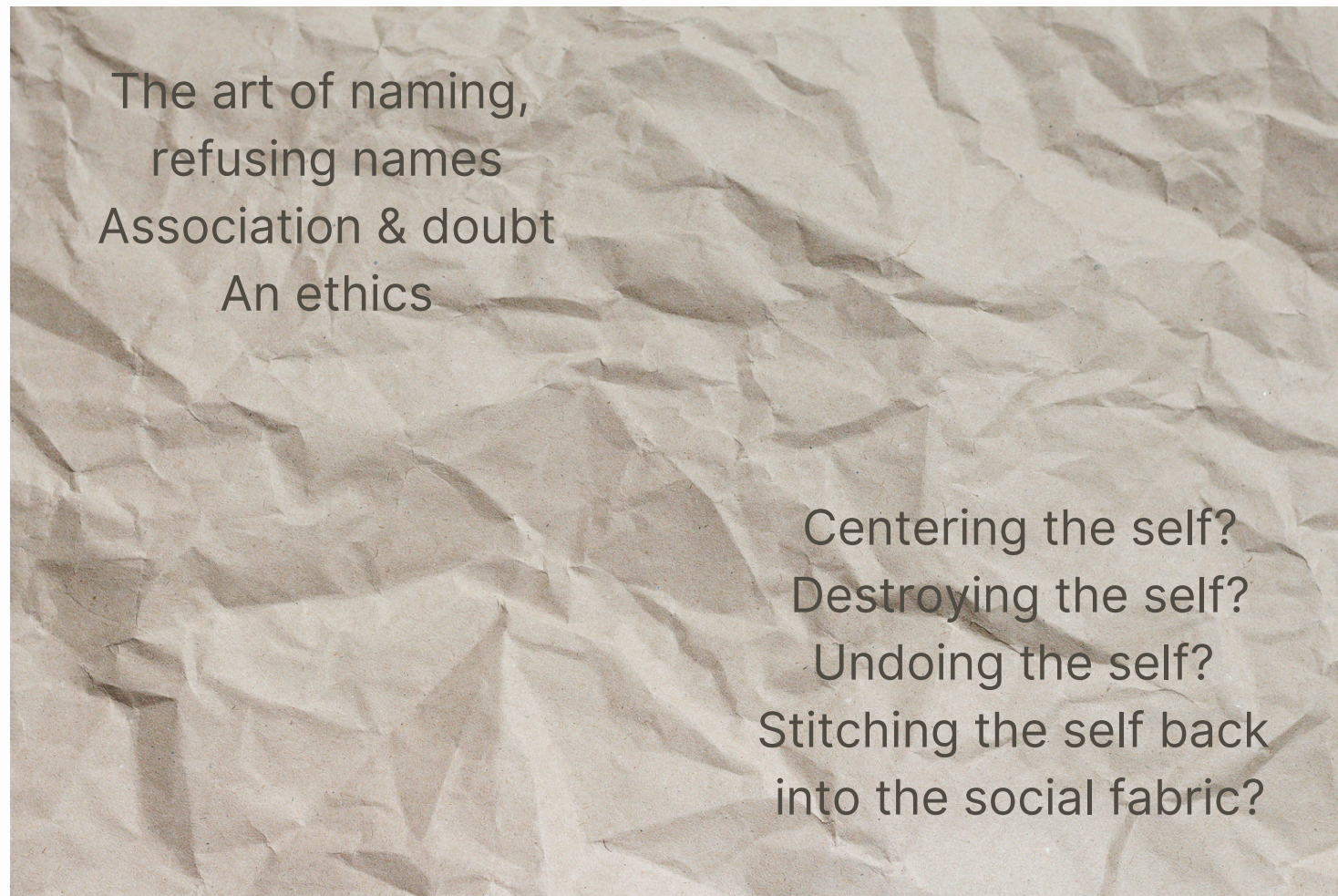
theorising from the first person

- *creative*
- *critical*
- *conceptual*
- *historical*
- *performative*
- *experimentative*



How I came to 'autotheory' was through an anti-memoir and amnesic writing - through the practice of writing and craft.

THEORY



SELF

theory is

a language for thinking with and through, asking questions about, and acting on—the experiences and happenings in our stories. (Stacy Holman Jones, *Living bodies of thought*)

Making thinking visible or as Sara Ahmed insists: descriptive is theoretical.

Is citation theory? Difficult and fancy?

following the text, writing from liminality, writing the body

Self-reflection as a form of critique

Confessions? How personal can you get?

Can you ever really write just about yourself?

A memoir should not be pinned against autotheory

NARRATIVE BRAID

Approaching a question from multiple angles, with different languages, creating several strands of stories.

Alternating but connected and recurring iterations woven together.



THREAD TWO

Write a related memory to your first braid

You can think: what is the 'quality' of the association
is it visible or almost invisible, unknown to you,
intense, soft, emotional, theoretical, material, spatial,
temporal?

OR

just write without any conscious attempt to connect
the threads

15 min





LET'S FORGET ABOUT AUTOTHEORY

AND IMAGINE HOW CRAFT DECISIONS MAKE
CREATIVE-CRITICAL-PERFORMATIVE-
CONCEPTUAL WRITING

CRAFT CHOICES COMING FROM TEXT/ETHICS



poetry & essay & memoir = lyric essay
islands of text
white space
silence
density
amplification
ephemerality
multiple temporalities
a history with other histories
abstraction, distancing - situated, 'raw'

Simply writing ethnography poetically, without taking the situation at hand into account, is pointless.
(Paper Boat Collective 2017 in Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing)



LANGUAGE

metaphor

horizontal - lines

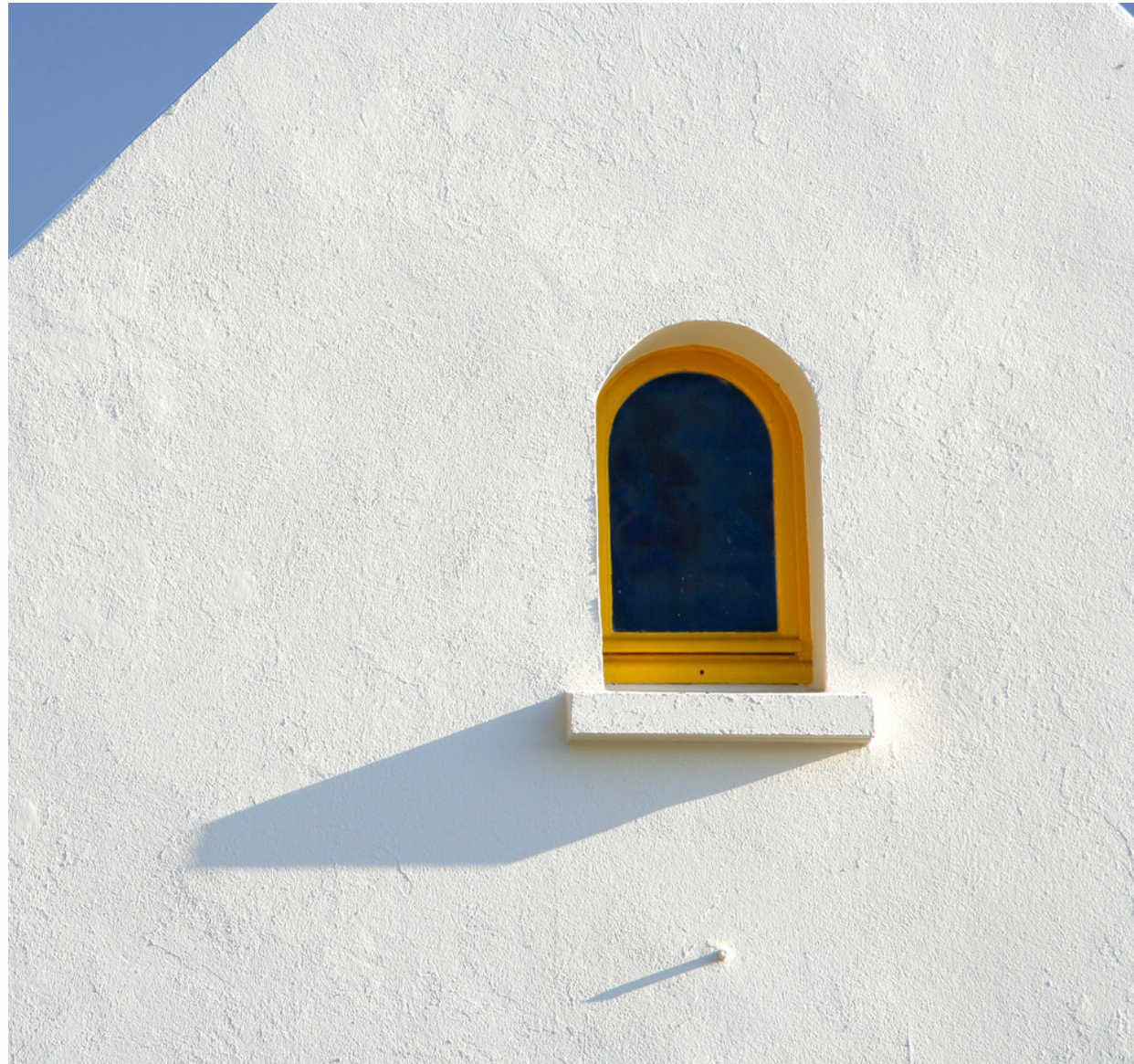
a single word, 'turn of phrase in its vital force' (T Kira Madden)

writing sparingly, compression

amplifying, doubling, repeating

delaying the dot

rhythm and sound



TENSION

Vertical pull

Unsettling the ordinary while spinning a good story (Stacy Holman Jones 2016, Living Bodies of Thought)

Set up, pay off and pivot

transitions

portals

tone: *orientation towards the world*

pacing: *modulation of breath*

(Matthew Salessess: Craft in the Real World)



QUESTIONS

What are my core questions and how do I interrogate them?

What does this mean?

Is this honest (for me)?

Are these words necessary?

Questions can get really detailed:

Are things really similar (similes) or a sentence with 'a little silence trailing after'?

(Matthew Zapruder, *Story of a Poem* 2023)

What does my experience say about the place and time I come from?

How to honour your subject and your writing?

What are your artistic tools?

THIRD THREAD

Write another piece, picking up from either thread or the space between them.

Change the language to sociological, philosophical, religious, medical, biological, psychoanalytic, artistic, historical or anything

- you can search for material online

20 min





STRUCTURE

you create a structure, a building, an architecture

a movement of orientation (departure-directions-arrival)

text as body

a pattern for the reader to follow

fragment - a space of responsiveness

fragment as a *structure in construction or construction already turning into ruins*

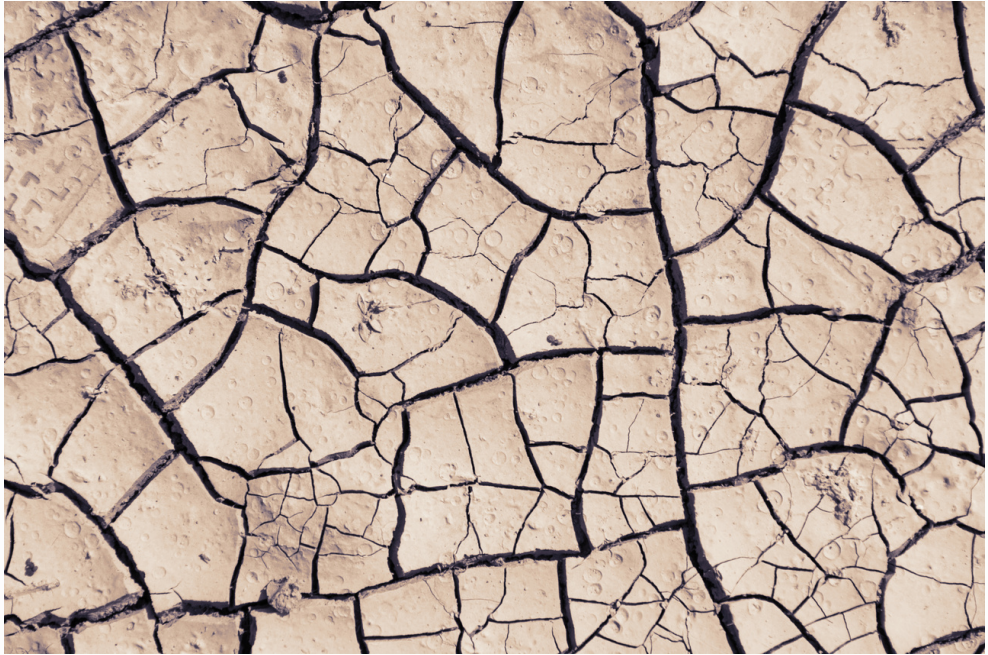
(Kristian Blomberg & Olli-Pekka Tennilä in "Itseään täydentävä raunio: fragmentin poetiikka", Poesiavihkot 2023)

GROUNDS



♡ failure is an opportunity for craft

♡ to theorise is to feel dizzy



KEEP GOING

Another thread - returning to discover a portal (line with energy or an intense image moment), playing with another language, picking up something left behind, looking for silence...

15 min

you can go on and on until revision calls

Revision is the craft through which a writer is able to say and shape who they are and what kind of world they live in.

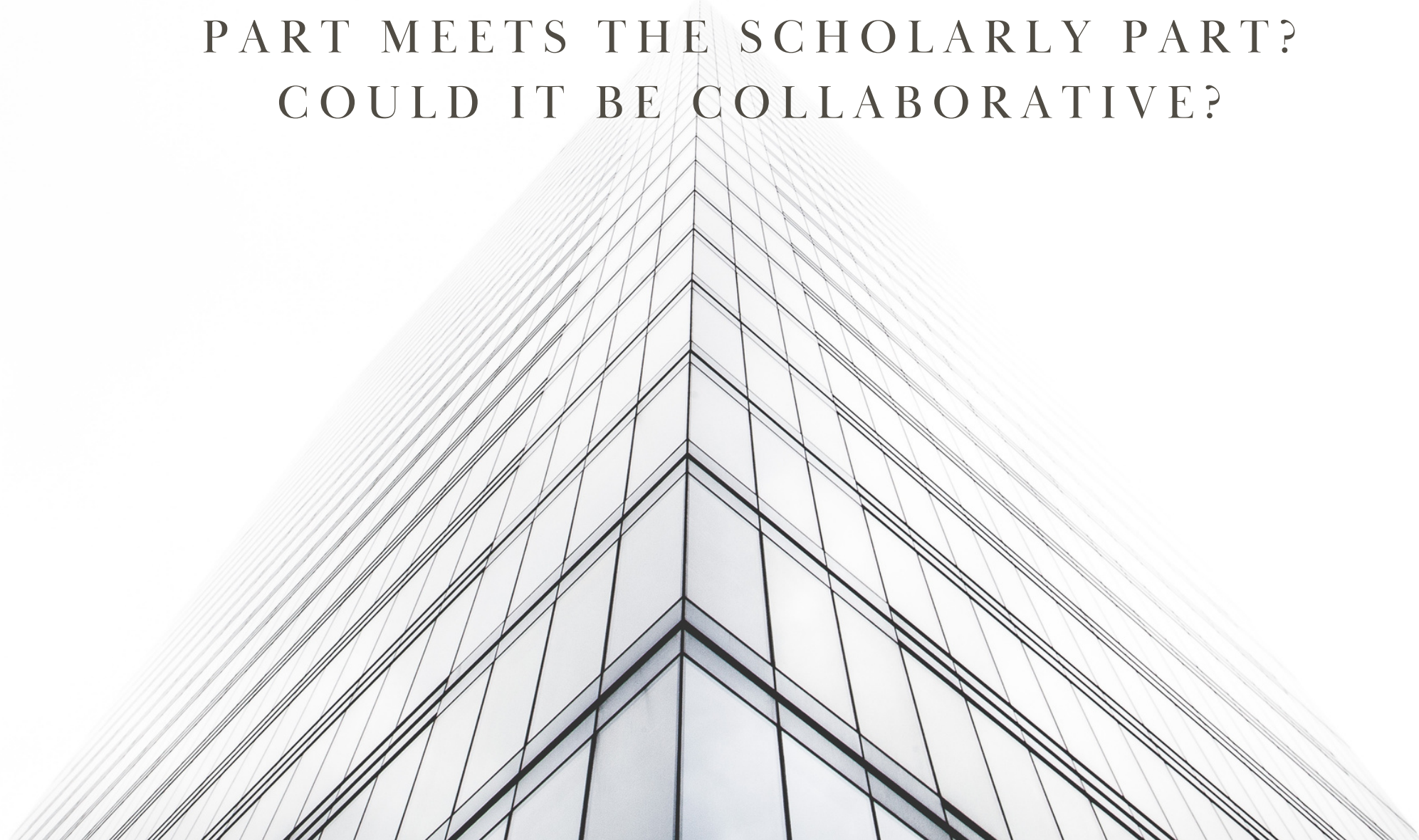
-Salessess

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AUTO THEORY IN ARTISTIC RESEARCH?

IS IT DIFFERENT FROM AUTOETHNOGRAPHY?
COULD IT BE A SPACE WHERE THE ARTISTIC
PART MEETS THE SCHOLARLY PART?
COULD IT BE COLLABORATIVE?





Proposed readings for inspiration:

Maggie Nelson

Rebecca Solnit

Carmen Maria Machado: *In the Dreamhouse*

Elissa Washuta: *White Magic*

Gloria Anzaldua: *La Frontera*

&

Arianne Zwartjes

Under the Skin: An Exploration of Autotheory

<https://www.assayjournal.com/arianne-zwartjes8203-under-the-skin-an-exploration-of-autotheory-61.html>