



after
a
while
Nathalie
almost
becomes
a
precious
object

Studium
Generale
Pietveld
Academie



contents

I

“after a while Nathalie
almost becomes a
precious object”

A collaborative smelling
and writing process by:

Joris Benjamins,
Angélique Farge,
Klara Graah,
Camilla Kövecses,
Meike Legêne,
Chong Lii,
Enid Lilja,
Sergey Moskalev,
Tim Neutel,
Xanthippe
Partsakoulaki,
Nathalie Sørensen,
Marijn Swildens,
Philip Ullman,
Jet van der Touw,
& Jan Wester

II

“uniform animality”

Laurent-David
Garnier in
conversation with
Amelia Groom

III

Documentation of the
workshop “I Do Not
Swallow Stories”

IV

Acknowledgements
& Colophon

after

a

while

Nathalie

almost

becomes

a

precious

object

They had met in one of those new-age citrus themed meetup mixers. The theme was blood orange. She wore her red lipstick.

2001:

It wasn't long after their breakup when Nathalie began referring to herself in the 3rd person. She thought: it's not so crazy, all the greats have done it - Julius Caesar, Elvis, The Dude. In any rare conversation that followed this decision, she grew into the habit of crafting and assembling predictions and axioms. She was not so full of hubris so as to predict events pertaining to whoever was her conversation partner. She restricted the prophecies to the intimate confines of her own narrative.

"After a while Nathalie almost becomes a precious object. After a while Nathalie almost becomes a precious subject. After a while the object becomes a precious Nathalie. After a subject the Nathalie almost becomes a while. Becoming precious. Pressurise. Pressurise the object. Objects

under pressure can become subjects, like Nathalie. After a while Nathalie is surrounded by various objects, some of them under pressure. A room full of objects, but only one of them is singing. Objects endure longer than Nathalie."

Nathalie retracts further into herself, looking to past artefacts—pieces of writing she made when she was younger,

Notebook scribble, 2004:

My mother
does not
like her.
My mother
never liked
any of my

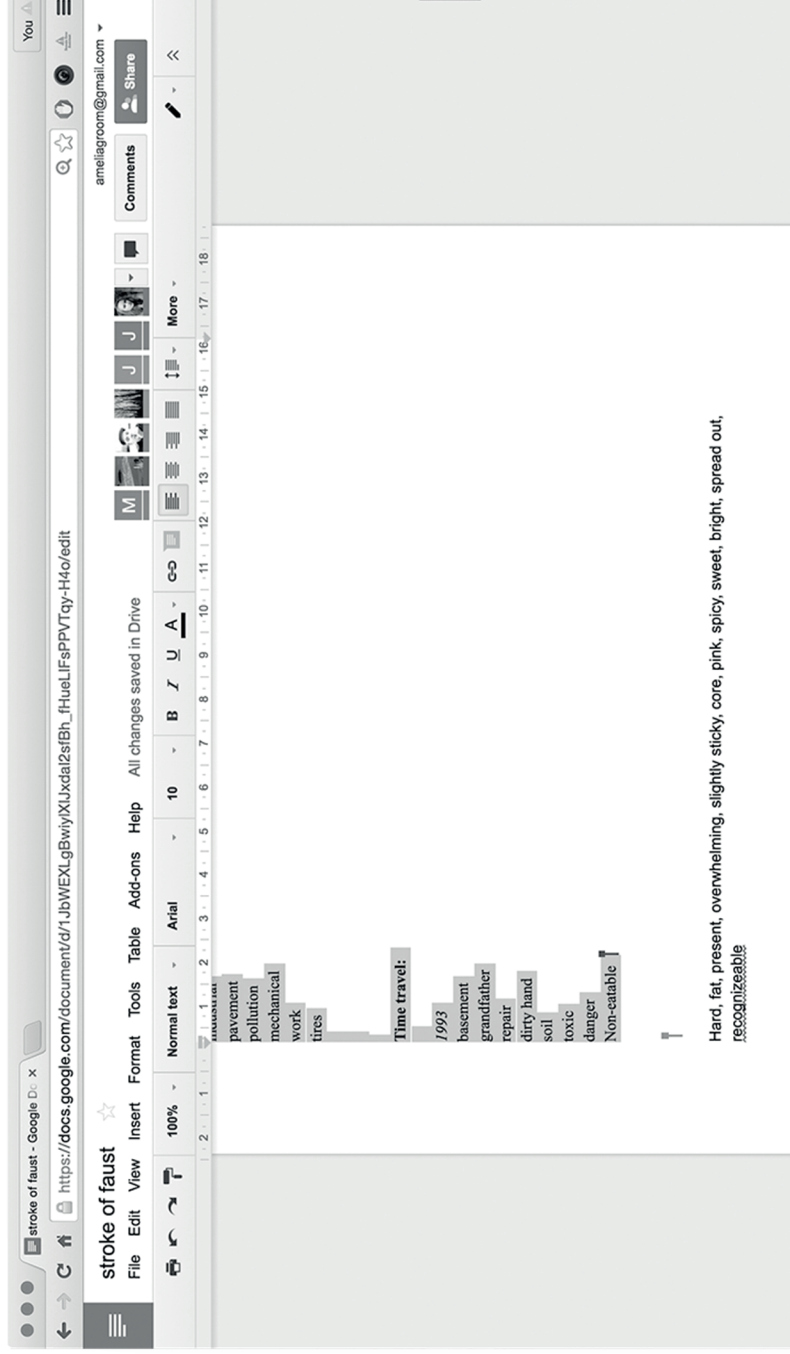
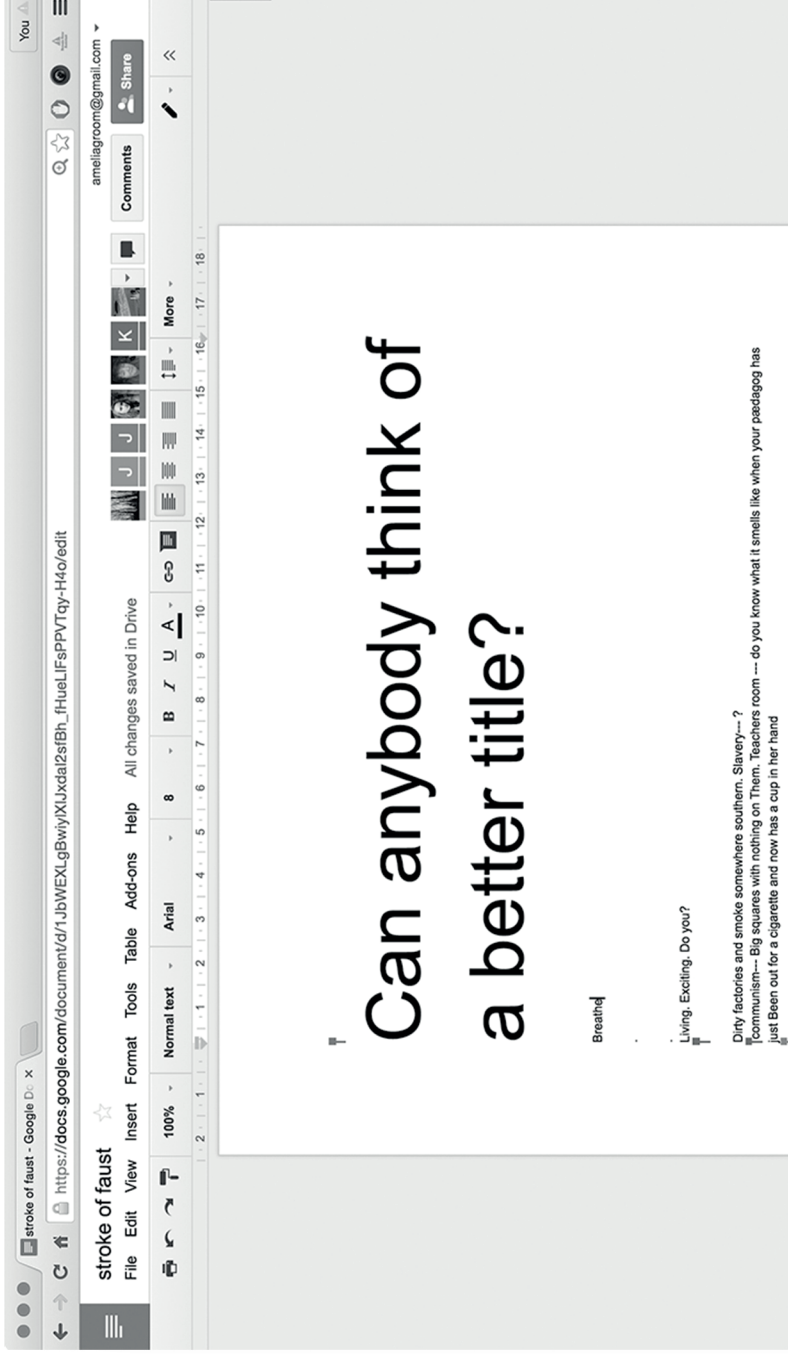
girlfriends.
I like that
she's like
my mother.
But I'd
never have
sex with
my mother.

*A poem she wrote in 1999
About 1993:*

Time travel: 1993
Grandfather repairing a mechanism
Soil on his basement soles
Toxic fluid all over, non-eatable

*A haiku she wrote when she didn't
know how to write a haiku:*

Travelling
Starts out strong
Becomes more and
more pleasant
Takes you a long time
to know if you really
want this.



after a while nathalie almost becomes a precious object

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Table Add-ons Help All changes saved in Drive

100%

Normal text Arial 8.5 B I U A

Comments Share

I Think conversation in google docs makes sense in a new way

klart, klara

every morning, midday, evening
a mixture of gratitude and disappointment
it is direct and curved
acceptably sharp
brought to you by
cartons and cartons in the supermarket trolley, at least three or four every time we went
it was health we were buying - we wanted to believe that.
so sweet and cold, taking either 3 weeks or 3 days to be crushed

Some mornings I wake up with cracks in my lips, tasting a blood, it tastes like metal.

Why do I connect this memory to the sun? Why is it always so light?

dry then wet
or wet and then dry
inaccessible,
closed, closer
wet weeds between the cobblestones
Is it even edible?

a tent and
everything along the road,
framed within the field.

rain & rain and rain,
so soaked and in
the sun.

Start:

Someone who knows better

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Table Add-ons Help All changes saved in Drive

100%

Normal text Arial 8 B I U A

Comments Share

Someone who knows better

Someone tell a little joke maybe? Nathalie needs to laugh more.

Why did Nathalie leave home?

Zenobia taking, slowly, to the unknown. Careful but distinct. Why always the zebras? Black and white. White and black. Stripes?

Nathalie's looking for a man Nathalie Sarraute looking for someone who knows better. Always looking looking and never finding. How do you search?

Would this be Egypt, 1980? What happened then? A man with a voice like a tin-can

White gloved hands grabbing Nathalie's foot as she frowns.

And suddenly bright white light disappears from everywhere!

After a while Nathalie almost becomes a precious object. Nathalie always wondered why her favourite things were always found in the categories of "too much" and "not enough".

Nathalie is among other communists. And Nathalie sees a rabbit. No maybe

No No No and Yes?

Is Nathalie the same rabbit as in Alice in Wonderland?

White, furry and soft, jumping all over the place, no destination, no map.

So Nathalie is not late, then? When is Nathalie not late?

When Nathalie finds a place to belong in? Or when Nathalie see rabbits no more. (•̀•́)~

(ノ)
(ノ)
:)))
o of

Nathalie has lost words to describe. Capitalism took that from her.

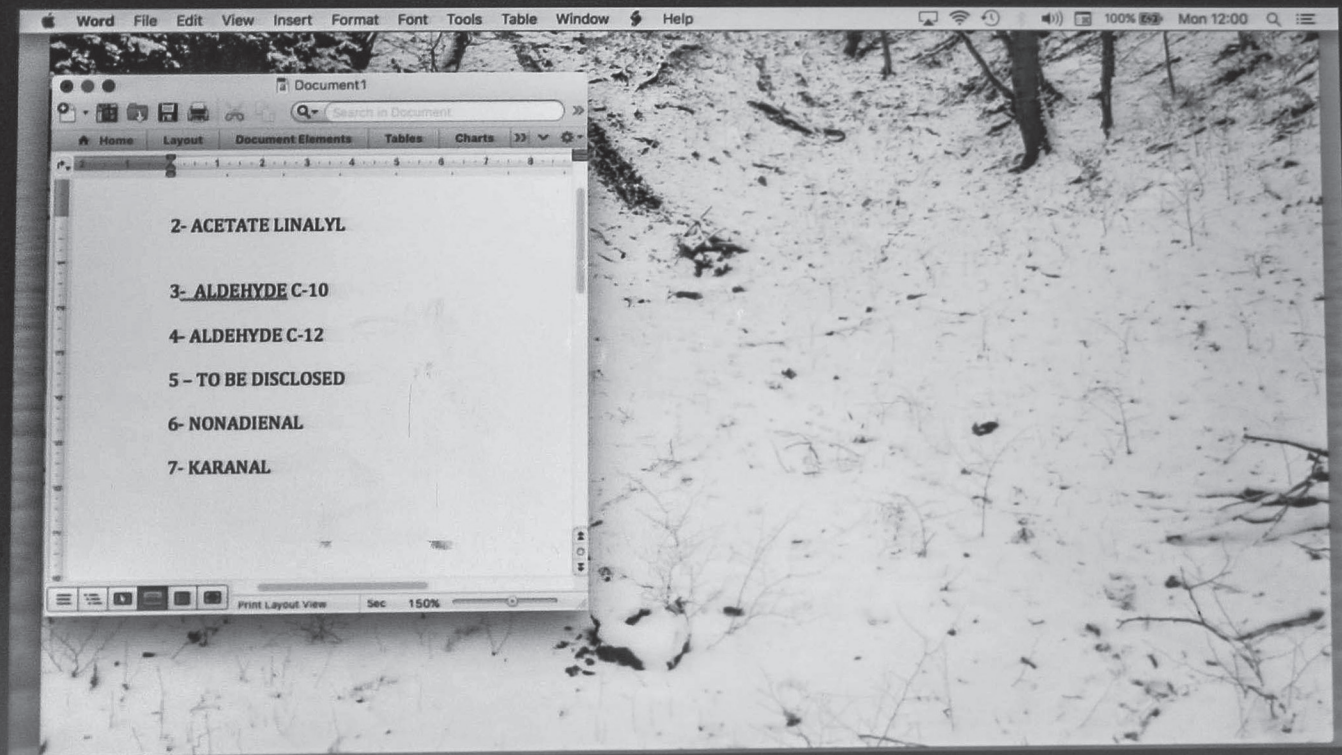
Or is description overrated?

Now her fingers are sticky

Nathalie hates it when it's sticky.

Where did the rabbit go? Xanthi Pa

Chong!!! lie a communist?



“uniform animality”

Laurent-David Garnier in conversation

with Amelia Groom

“As a species we have really lost a lot of our capacity for smell. We are still losing it, you know. With the mass production of food, the trend for ready-made dinners, everything comes already flavoured. Raw ingredients are industrially grown and transformed in such a way that they lose their subtleties of flavour. And if you don’t know it, you don’t have the feeling of missing it. For me it’s highly political. This is biopolitics.”

AG: You’ve talked about your work in terms of ‘Olfactive Objects’, and it seems to me that what you do is very much involved with materiality, with specific materialities (obviously coming out of your background in chemistry) – but at the same time there is this immateriality; it’s intangible, vaporous. How do you think about objecthood and materiality in your work?

LDG: I mean, it’s highly material, it’s about nanoscale molecules which hit receptors made of proteins inside the nose. We can say that without this materiality there’s no such thing as smell. But then we can also dream of smell. And people with anosmia [who do not perceive odor] will describe reminiscences of smell, without an external stimulus ...

AG: This question of recollection is interesting – I personally find it very difficult to remember smells. I mean, smells are completely bound up with memory – the smell of sawdust immediately takes me to a very specific time and place in my childhood, and yet when I try to recreate the smell of sawdust now, it falls short. Maybe I can remember some sensations and associations, but I can’t recreate the direct olfactive information. I think that part of what is interesting about working with smells as your material is that they don’t lend themselves to being recorded, represented or archived – at least not in the way that visual information does...

LDG: Well, when you say you’re bad at imagining a smell, it might just be because you’re very good at it. You’re not satisfied with what you are able to create in your mind, because your parameters are always changing. It’s very relative. I mean, you can describe a smell with molecules, we can quantify it, but there is something else, and that something is always shifting. The fact that you’re not able to articulate it does not mean that you’re bad at remembering it.

AG: So smell is resistant to language. It doesn’t like to be described. We rely on association because in our everyday speech we don’t have much of a vocabulary for the smells themselves. I’ll say something smells “like strawberry”, because I don’t have a word for the smell itself... How do you name and categorise the smells you work with?

LDG: This is my professional deformation in a way; I am just using the technical language I was taught and raised in. Of course these categories are not sufficient – you can identify a smell as fruity or floral, you can say “strawberry” or “rose”, but how old is the strawberry, what kind of rose it is? You have Damask rose (mainly Bulgarian, or Turkish) and Centifolia rose (Moroccan, French) to name the most common ones. Then different extraction processes lead to an essence or an absolute, and there’s rose water. So, ok, there are multiple references within the name “rose”. But is that enough? Is it sufficient?

AG: Things fall outside the standard classification system?

LDG: Of course, everything falls outside it, in a way.

AG: This is why the relationship between smelling and writing is interesting for me, I think. For the collaborative writing group I did with the basisjaar students as part of the I Do Not Swallow Stories workshop, everyone brought along 'something that smells', so we had these objects – a basketball, fresh mint, gaffer tape, some unidentified substances in bottles – and we tried to write with them and through them, as sixteen people in one shared Google Doc ... Hey, I know we said we wouldn't go too much into personal biography here, but I'm very curious about your transition from the perfume industry into being an artist. What happened?

LDG: While I was a student at the Institute in Science and Engineering, I did my research on the analytical and organoleptic quality of saffron from different origins. I then studied perfumery at ISIPCA, and I worked as a perfumer in the fragrance industry for several years. Eventually I realised I wanted to work in another economy. To use my brain for something more useful.

AG: It's nice you think of it in terms of being useful.

LDG: I don't know if now being an artist I am useful, but, at least I feel better about what I'm doing. And I was always working with artists, doing side projects. When I was a student I was also working at the Opéra National de Paris, for money, and I could attend all the productions and rehearsals. I could also spend time at the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra National de Paris, a very nice library, where I found out about the first opera in Paris that was perfumed – in 1952, it was Les Indes Galantes by [Jean-Philippe] Rameau, staged by Maurice Lehmann.

AG: So they had a script with different smells at different times?

LDG: No, there was only one, a rose fragrance, for a scene with flowers. So it was totally literal, very basic. I found records in the archive about the soprano complaining that the perfume was jeopardising her voice on stage.

AG: Initial attempts to introduce olfactive cues in the cinema were problematic, because it's so difficult to synchronise. I read that with this film *The Scent of Mystery* in 1960 they tried to release certain smells, but when the image on screen changed but the smell from the last scene was still there. How do you get rid of it? Scent and cinematic vision have incompatible temporalities. Smells move and spread and take time – there's no such thing as an olfactive montage ... Or is it just that our sense of smell is so feeble that we can't handle the information? Compared to other animals, the human olfactive system is extremely weak, right?

LDG: Yes, I mean, there are also animals with no sense of smell, as far as we know. But dogs, for instance, have a sense of smell that is way beyond ours, and obviously their threshold of detection is much higher. You know, speaking of animals ... We are so concerned with being clean – we wash away all the bacteria, the colonies, who live in our sweat, feeding on our warm wet skin, creating very different odours on different bodies. We use body washes that are highly perfumed, mostly with clear, fresh, ozonic and watery notes. But then we add perfumes with leathery, animalic notes. So after washing we want to re-gain an animality, but this animality is more generalised, it's not your bacteria colony or my bacteria colony, it's a kind of acceptable, uniform animality. It's an animality, but at least it's not yours – it's one that you bought.

AG: Ha. You know, dogs can't recognise themselves in a mirror. They can recognise a dog, an other, but there's no idea of the self as a delineated image. Humans recognise themselves, but then we only pick up on a tiny fragment of the olfactive information that our canine companions deal with. So they don't see themselves in the mirror because the mirror image doesn't offer anything to smell, it doesn't register for them, it doesn't matter, because they're perceiving the world in a different way. Do you think human animals have an over-reliance on vision?

LDG: Yes, sure. As a species we have really lost a lot of our capacity for smell. We are still losing it, you know. With the mass production of food, the trend for ready-made dinners, everything comes already flavoured. Raw ingredients are industrially grown and transformed in such a way that they lose their subtleties of flavour. And if you don't know it, you don't have the feeling of missing it. For me it's highly political. This is biopolitics.

AG: Before you go, it would be nice to hear about what you're currently working on.

LDG: Right now I'm working with the Department of Chemistry at the University of Cambridge on an iridescent material.







Publication produced
on the occasion of
'I Do Not Swallow
Stories', an olfactive/
cocktail workshop
conceptualised and
guided by Laurent-David
Garnier for the Gerrit
Rietveld Academie
basisjaar students
as part of Studium
Generale, April 2016.

Designed by:
Mees Joachim van Amesfoort
& Carl Herner

Illustration by:
Josefina Anjou, p.1
& Marijn Swildens, p.23–24

Photography by:
Amelia Groom, p.11–12
Menno van Winden, p.17–18, p.19–20
& Xanthippe Partsakoulaki, p.21–22

Thanks to:
Gianmaria Andreetta,
Hansje van Ooijen,
Jorinde Seijdel,
Jort van der Laan,
Eric Kameron,
Emilie Ferrat,
Nic de Jong
& Niels Albers

