

t a m i n g _ t h e
h o r r o r
v a c u i



issue #7
a matter of scale

EDITORIAL

Scaling is to move across different dimensions: a firm might be scaling down, nearing bankruptcy—its new dimension is to reach rock bottom; a doll house might be a scale model, where dimensions are kept proportional but decreased compared to a real house; a hand touching a map is, to paraphrase Tom Holert, a scaling device, where the graspable dimension of the map makes available the experience of exploring, traveling and possessing lands.

For this publication of *Taming the Horror Vacui*, which includes content from three different sessions in the program, we put the wind and its manifestations through a process of scaling. We navigate across cultural and scientific interpretations of this physical phenomena so central to Ahmed's practice and his program at Rib, showing how the wind changes dimension in the eye of the beholder. It is small on the anatomical level but it can grow to encompass the city, the planet and even God and the cosmos.

Increasingly zooming out, this publication starts with the wind in the body, following up on the breathing exercise organized last May by Leen Scholiers. It continues with a tale from an inhabitant of Charlois in Rotterdam, whose recount of the city's "resistance" gives a picture of the wind at the urban scale. The artwork of Saadia Mirza, which she presented for *Taming the Horror Vacui* last April, as well as an original contribution by independent curator Francesco Tenaglia, takes us to the dimension of the planet: the changing climatic conditions of the earth, especially modeled through sound. Lastly, we reach the cosmological dimension of the wind through its symbolism in art and culture, recently exposed by art historian Barbara Baert in her lecture for the program.

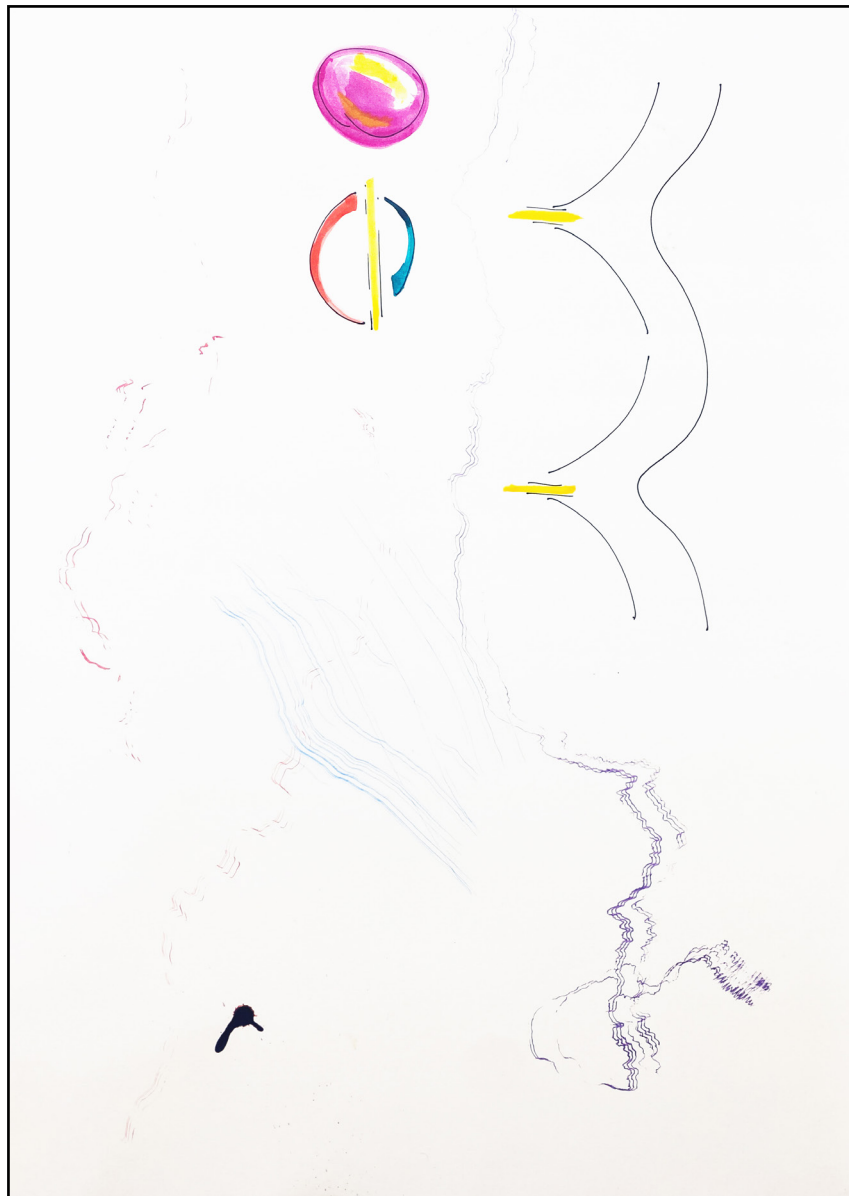
The scaling of the wind from bodily to cosmological closes with Ahmed's installation at Rib—the last page of this publication presents a detail from the artist's series of

artworks in the Rotterdam art space, showing that all the scales of the wind can be present at once. As *Taming the Horror Vacui* has almost come to its end, this publication functions as a preliminary wrap up presenting its main topics—wind, its narratives, its role as medium for an art practice—through the concept of scaling.

Rotterdam, June 2021

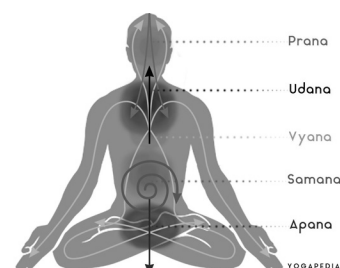
"Few of us ever consider how the nostrils of every living person pulse to their own rhythm, opening and closing like a flower in response to our moods, mental states, and perhaps even the sun and the moon. [...] Thirteen hundred years ago, an ancient Tantric text, the Shiva Swarodaya, described how one nostril will open to let breath in as the other will softly close throughout the day. Some days, the right nostril yawns awake to greet the sun; other days, the left awakens to the fullness of the moon. According to the text, these rhythms are the same throughout every month and they're shared by all humanity. It's a method our bodies use to stay balanced and grounded to the rhythms of the cosmos, and each other."

"Therapeutic Breathwork has evolved as an art and science since the late 1970s and is used directly and as an adjunct in a wide variety of healing professions. Breath awareness and breathing techniques have been used for thousands of years for health and human growth. Therapeutic Breathwork's faster than normal breathing focuses on newly evolved techniques that help release cognitive and emotional blockages to healthy and optimal functioning often related to trauma and developmental dysfunction, as you saw in previous chapters. As such, Therapeutic Breathwork and similar dyadic forms of breath..."



The collaborative table top drawing by Haseeb Ahmed and Leen Scholiers, May 2021. The artwork is inspired by the workshop Scholiers, a Tantric yoga teacher, led on "prana," which in Sanskrit means breath, vital principle, and life force. The workshop explored the movement of air through our bodies and its five vayus (Sanskrit for winds), which can open people for emotional release, subtle sensations, and even mystical experiences.

We asked Leen Scholiers to send us quotes relevant to her workshop on "prana". The two extracts here above are from James Nestor's "Breath" and Jim Morningstar's "Break Through with Breathwork".



The five vayus. Image source: Yogapedia.



CHARLOIS (WIND)TALE

It's interesting to think of my movements in connection to the wind. Rotterdam is the first city in which I have experienced this much resistance towards the system—and I have moved a lot. I moved to Rotterdam a year and a half ago to join a Masters program here. I felt resistance to how the program was shaped after a year there. I had a clash, and so I quit, which is not an easy path. It brings along a lot of turbulence.

This is a resistance I felt to a more or less invisible force which is how I connect to wind. With the wind you're resisting with your whole body to move forward, or you're pushed to one direction whether you want to or not. The trajectories that take you between spaces daily are shaped by the wind—I may take longer or become more tired physically depending on the wind. It shapes the way we move. I learned this in Rotterdam. I've never lived in a city with such a strong wind. Actions that resist such invisible forces are part of the research in my work as an artist and educator.

This story is told by Carmen, inhabitant of Charlois, Rotterdam. Edited and transcribed by Jakob van Klinken.

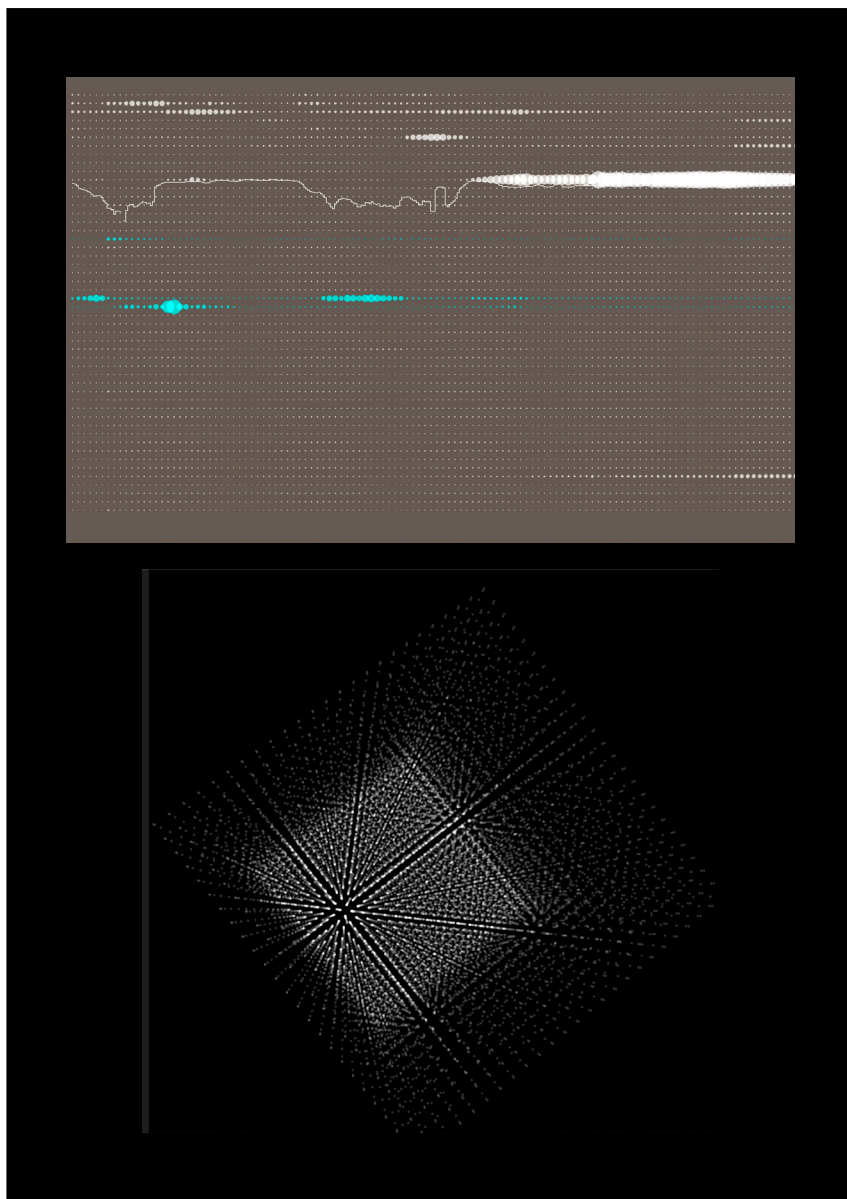
Suspected wind devices in the city of Rotterdam. Photo by Sander van Wettum, 2020. Wind can be scaled to the urban dimension. A previous publication explored wind in the city through a walk in Rotterdam led by city planner Emiel Arends. Wind tales from the neighborhood of Charlois have reported on the different experiences of its inhabitants with the natural and cultural phenomenon of air and its movements.

Charlois (Wind)tales are first person experiences of the wind in the neighborhood of Charlois in Rotterdam. Here the scale of air is the urban environment.

ECOSOUND by Francesco Tenaglia

Phonography has, notoriously, always dabbled in the preservation of the existing—or, at least, with its debris. Let's here remember the vivid interest of its pioneer, Thomas Edison, in Spiritualism. Or the story of Nipper the dog, who recognized the voice of his deceased owner through a speaker. That scene became the logo of the Gramophone Company, replacing the even more emblematic Recording Angel: a seated cupid tracing concentric grooves around himself. He is in turn a variation on the angel who, in the Abrahamic religions, keeps track of human affairs and words (Gabriel being the most famous specimen).

Recorded music has flourished over its history in league with other ecologically unsustainable industries such as the automotive. Yet while it was pursuing a new cadre of consumers—namely teenagers—after World War II, it also produced a few ecological reflections and practices. One of the most extraordinary cases was the Canadian environmentalist, theorist, and composer Raymond Murray Schafer, who extensively conceptualized sound environments ("soundscapes") and celebrated the aural richness of specific areas and their sound landmarks ("soundmarks"). The World Soundscape Project, launched by Schafer in the late 1960s, centers on education regarding these environments, their impoverishment, the effects of noise, and above all the recording, cataloging, and preservation of them. Since its founding, the project has produced an immense and highly interesting online archive and given momentum to related acoustic ecology groups. Although one cannot imagine that all the musical production that spread from field recording techniques—that is to say, the recording of a soundscape, left unaltered or used as starting material in musical reconfigurations—has an equally programmatic political purpose, it is impossible to imagine

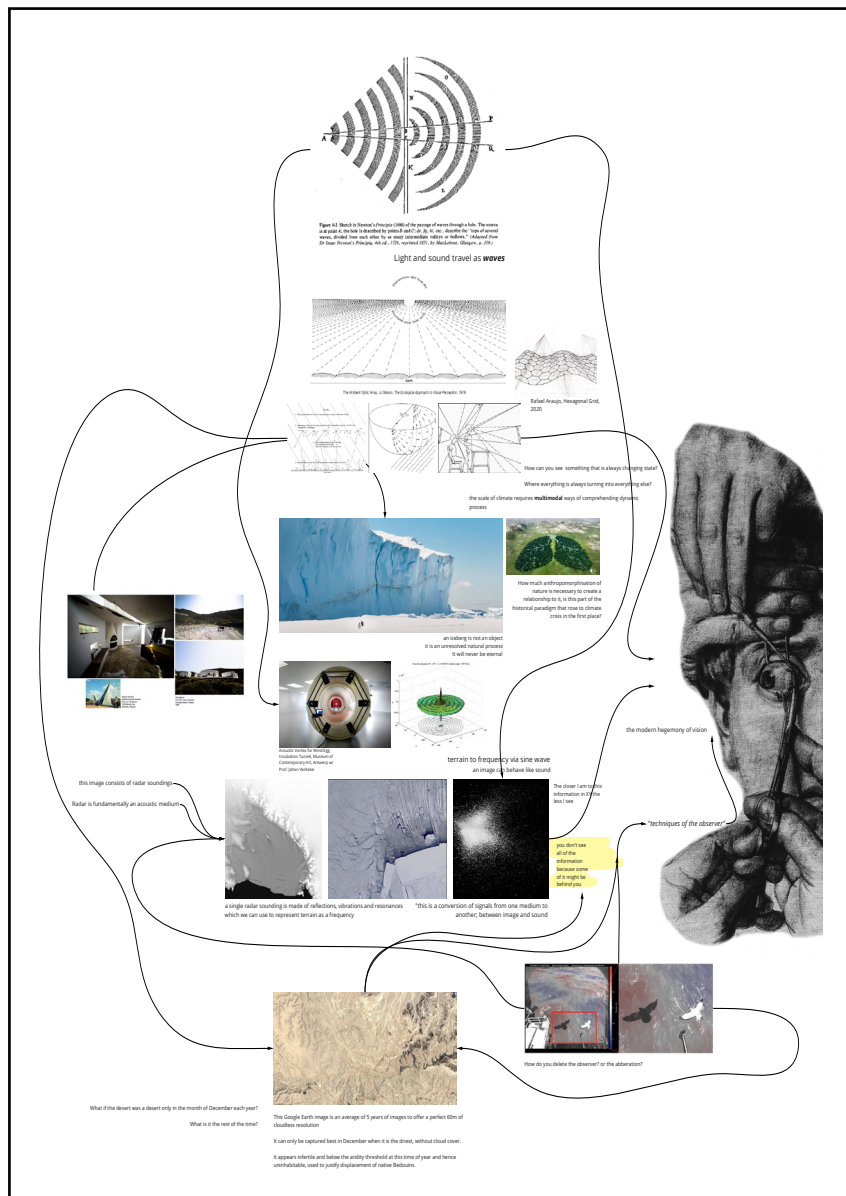


Images from Saadia Mirza's ongoing artwork with data sets related to massive geological shifts in glaciers and ice shelves through the scientific method of acoustic sensing. The image above is a representation of the sound data expressed in 50 channels through dissonance, loudness, and ambient noise. The image below is a 50-channel sound visualization based on the first image. Courtesy of the artist.

compositions like those of the composers Francisco López or Chris Watson, which are based precisely on sound "photographs" of landscapes, returning to the assonance in the creation of the word "phonology," as anything but the offspring of a fresh attention to the environment activated by

reflections on soundscapes.

Max Eastley, a visual artist and composer allied to Brian Eno and the British radical improvisation scene since the 1970s, in addition to having used environmental recordings on various occasions, is a key member of the Cape Farewell



gestures, seem long gone. One area of contemporary music production unusually close to ecological issues is black metal: an extreme genre born in the 1990s in the Scandinavian countries, which manifested fetishism for nature to symbolically reinstall the pagan roots of the North. Black metal's belief in the annihilation of ideas of progress and positivistic and post-Enlightenment mastery of nature are eerily resonant with more progressive streams of thought. For those who wish to pursue the subject, Scott Wilson's witty *Melancology: Black Metal Theory and Ecology* (2014) is highly recommended.

The collaborative digital table top drawing by Haseeb Ahmed and Saadia Mirza, April 2021. The diagram introduces different questions regarding the visualization of planetary phenomena such as the climate. It includes references and past works by both artists.

association of artists. This group, now part of the University of the Arts London, promotes awareness regarding climate change and organizes multidisciplinary think tanks as well as direct actions in collaboration with intellectuals from different disciplines interested in sustainable

technologies. They have coordinated initiatives with such public figures as Jarvis Cocker, Laurie Anderson, Robyn Hitchcock and Ryuichi Sakamoto.

The times when awareness of the state of the planet, or activism via fund-raisers and symbolic PR

The nymph is a marker for the aesthetics of the period, the *maniera antica* [Ancient style. Ed.]. Classic authors were admired in the Quattrocento for making visible the pathos of the nymphs. But the definition of nymph goes further than that. It is the motif of intensity, which makes life itself visible in all its mobility and changeability. *Ninfa* is a dialectic form that in a single movement, the dense immobility of a princess, modulates the essence of the body with its inner and outer life. Desire comes from the incorruptible beauty of floating creases and descending air. Desirability appears on the surface of the mirror by means of the wind. The nymph is the last gust of wind and final responsible party for a much deeper, perhaps the deepest neurosis in painting: desire as a pictorial affect.

The nymph waltzes into the scene like an aesthetic disruptive symbol, breaking through a framework of narrative times. Its spontaneous presence is on the one hand a sign of the past and on the other, the trace of the present. Nymphs flutter like *supra temporal* phantoms that use their choreography to weave present and past together, on the threshold of motifs and pathos. The interruption of the nymph also concerns the breaking of time, a strange interruption in the whirlpool of history, which the nymph causes to implode in a stormy energy that channels desire pictorially.



A details of Domenico Ghirlandaio's *The Birth of John the Baptist* (1486-90), a painting in the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, Italy. The details depicts a nymph abruptly entering the room where John is coming to life. Her garments are depicted flowing in the air and shaken by her body movements, a traditional style of painting air and wind in the same art historical period.

The text above is an extract from art historian Barbara Baert's lecture for *Taming the Horror Vacui* titled *Wind - On the Origin of Emotion*. In it, Baert deals with the of the representation of Ancient mythologies such as airy nymphs in the Renaissance as a figure between cosmology and humanity.



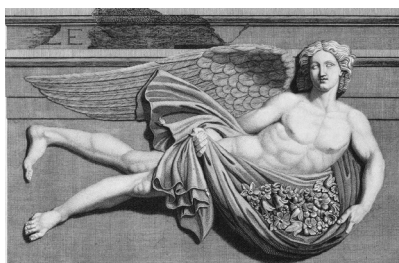
Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Birth of St John the Baptist*, (1486-90)



The representation of the four winds in Christianity is part of its cosmology. The Genesis embroidery of Girona for example (ca. 1050) shows the four winds in four corners, blowing concentrically in the arranged story of creation. The winds not only accompany creation, they also make creation possible and enable it to perpetuate itself. The four winds are the bearers of the divina quaternitas, the evangelists. As the regenerative archetype for the cosmos, the four winds also pass through humanity. The breathing individual is impregnated by wind, made by wind, thereby making the wind the mediator between macrocosm and microcosm.

In this second extract from Barbara Baert's lecture for Taming the Horror Vacui, she deals with wind on a cosmological scale. From at least ancient Greece, the wind was not considered a natural phenomenon but it was instead integrated in a pre-scientific explanation of the universe.

Circular chart correlating directions, winds, elements, seasons, temperaments, qualities, and ages. The page is from an illuminated manuscript dated 1250 of unknown origin (France? England? Germany?). The four main branches of the chart list the Four Temperaments together with their associated characteristics. Each one has a prevailing wind.



Zephyrus and Boreas, two of the gods of wind in Ancient Greece.

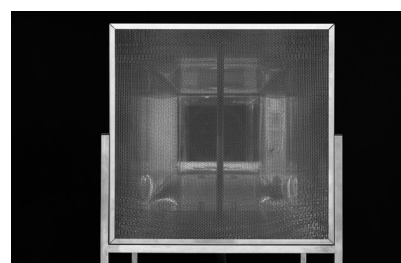
In the photo, the back of the wind tunnel at Rib is seen underneath a the 3D printed inscription "ruach not rauch." Ruach is the ancient Hebrew word for the breath of God. In Genesis the universe is inaugurated through this divine breath, linking breath and wind with creation as in many cultures. Rauch is the modern German word for smoke created through burning something.

This artwork by Ahmed well summarizes the opposite scales we've been dealing in the present publication. The object talks about the bodily act of breathing, it metaphorically zooms out to the technology that allowed its fabrication (3D printing), ultimately to arrive to the creation of the universe in the myth of the breathing god expressed in the words.



Three images of the wind tunnel at Rib, the centre piece of Ahmed's ongoing installation at Rib in Rotterdam. The tunnel will once again put to use during the last event of the program, when artworks and objects from the library of the wind will be tested with the machines and later documented in the next issue of this publication.

A detail in the ongoing installation of Haseeb Ahmed at Rib. Photo by Sander van Wettum, 2021.



COLOPHON

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