

FLÂNEUSE

WITH

AN ALIEN LENS

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OPENING

As I was born and raised in a female body, my everyday life is gendered. During my teens, I had never questioned my gender identity associated with my female body. I started to question:

Am I having these experiences because of my female body or as an individual?

Would I experience this stereotype if I wasn't a woman?

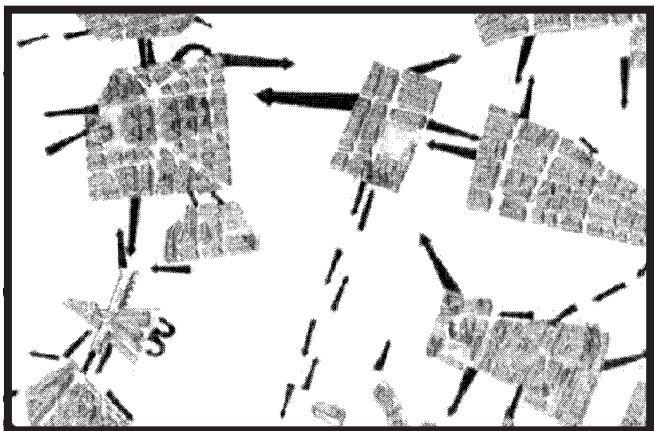
The world around me kept reminding me not to forget my gender. My gender identity was shaped by social norms, so my experience was deeply gendered and binary. When I moved to Amsterdam, it was the time the number of COVID-19-positive people skyrocketed. I had been living part of a majority in Korea and it was such a drastic shift to suddenly belong to a marginalized group. I was more aware of my body when I was alone or in a group of Koreans or Asians outside. That same winter I got myself a balaclava. It was a great tool to avoid the Dutch drizzle and explore the new city. With the new head and face wear, I could perfectly hide myself from the world. I could hide my gender and racial identity to wander around the city while feeling safer. Without it, I tended to stay in front of my monitor to travel through cyberspace on Google Maps. That way I could satisfy my urge to go out.

The term psychogeography⁴ was coined by French Marxist, Guy Debord. It is described as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.”■ This definition and the map image of psychogeography led me to reflect on a series of questions:

What experience do individuals, especially those with female bodies, have in their environments?

What circumstances, especially those concerning women, lead to feelings of alienation?

What particular experiences do women have to go through in an urban setting?



In this essay, I will examine a collection of science fiction narratives that explore women’s experiences in urban contexts. To

unfold the complexity⁵ of these issues, I will draw on concepts such as the **flâneuse** – the female form of the male **flâneur/flânerie** who roams the city – psychogeography, liminal spaces, in-between spaces, alienation, and the rich field of feminist science fiction narratives. These elements will provide the framework for my analysis and interpretation, allowing me to venture into the obscure territories of the experiences of those with female bodies in urban environments.

I am seeking to enhance the richness of my language through this diverse collection of science fiction narratives. I have developed a fascination with video works that depict new fictional environments inspired by the complex interplay between cityscapes, emotions, and the experiences of female protagonists. The imaginative environments I create often feature women traversing within space, either wandering or going through metamorphosis triggered by their surroundings and interactions.

In the broader context of gender roles and societal expectations, women undergo different transitional moments than men. The story I will explore revolves around the coming-of-age journey of a female protagonist – her struggle to overcome adversity and emerge as a self-confident individual. This essay blends coming-of-age and fiction, creating the space for the exploration of and experimentation

with unconventional themes.

Moreover, I aspire to unravel innovative methods of portraying women as they inhabit these new spaces. These spaces exist within the glitch, those liminal realms that are positioned at the intersection of reality and fiction. They act as bridges connecting the external cityscape to the inner space of thought and emotion, delving into the essence of Otherness and the unfolding of unique experiences.

By tracing the outlines of my personal experience and the interplay between urban environments, gender, and the realm of science fiction narrative, this exploration attempts to unravel the diverse aspects of female experience in urban contexts. This essay begins with a look at flâneuse, psychogeography, and feminist sci-fi narratives.

■ Ridgway, Maisie. *The Double Negative: An Introduction to Psychogeography*. The Double Negative. 2014. www.thedoublenegative.co.uk/2014/12/an-introduction-to-psychogeography/

fig. Guy Debord. Psychogeographic Guide of Paris.

Absence of Flâneuse, Invisible Female Figure

The term **flâneur** derived from the French verb **flâner**, was coined in the 19th century in Paris to describe someone who wanders aimlessly.

Flâneuse [*flanne-euhze*]
noun, from the French. The feminine form of flâneur [*flanne-euhr*], an idler, a dawdling observer, is usually found in cities.■

Deborah Parsons noted that the urban observers have been regarded as exclusively male figures.■ The privilege of urban exploration was predominantly granted to men, particularly to those belonging to the bourgeois male. In Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, she turns away from her *peripatetic philosophers, flâneur, or mountaineers* to ask why women were largely absent from the walking narrative.■ During that era, critics often associated the presence of women on the streets with prostitution. The visual and literary representations of the 19th century predominantly emerged from the male perspective. How, then, can we reconstruct the historical perspective and experiences of women from this vantage point?

A female flâneur/flânerie – a flâneuserie/flâneuse – not only changes the way we move through space but intervenes in the organisation of space itself. We claim our right to disturb the peace, to observe (or not observe), to occupy (or not occupy), and to organize (or disorganize) space on our own terms.■

In contrast to the quote by Lauren Elkin, women were perceived differently from men in urban spaces in the past. By examining some historical and cinematic representations of female figures, we can explore ‘their invisible perspective’.

In Agnès Varda’s short film, *Les Dites Caryatide (The So-Called Caryatids)*■, her camera captures stone representations of women, *the so-called Caryatids*, supporting grand buildings in Paris. Originally, rooted in Greek mythology, caryatids symbolize punishment of the Karyes people in a city located on the Peloponnese. This punishment was inflicted by the Greeks and was the result of the alliance between the Karyes people and the Persians, whom the Greeks had defeated.■ To commemorate their victory and the punishment, public buildings’ columns were replaced with statues of the Karyes women. It is interesting to note that male Caryatids also exist, which are referred to as Atlanteans. They represent the punishment of Atlas, the Titan of Greek mythology,

by bearing the weight of the sky on their shoulders. Atlanteans are far less common than Caryatids, however, their depictions are distinct. Male Caryatids are portrayed as robust figures with muscular physiques, while female caryatids adopt elegant poses despite supporting the heavy structures of buildings, often making them inconspicuous. In Varda’s film, *a three-storied-tall Caryatid* gradually fades into obscurity. When people in the neighborhood were asked if they knew her, none had seen her before. As Varda notes, “No one knows who made her or what she represents.”

It suggests the presence of women figures who were not noticeable in the city from which the word **flâneuse** was derived. They are part of the city but not visible. Building on the historical perception of women, the footage of female figures being invisible in Agnes Varda’s film echoes the historical marginalization of women in the urban



context. The Caryatids¹⁰ parallel obscured by the supportive roles to the unseen roles and experiences of women in this environment.

- Elkin, Lauren. *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Vintage, 2017), 23.
- Parsons, Deborah. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 4.
- Solnit, Rebecca. *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*.
- Elkin, Lauren. *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Vintage, 2017), 423.
- The So-called Caryatids Les Dites Cariatides, directed by Agnes Varda, 1984.
- “Short History of the Caryatids | Un Jour de plus à Paris,” Un Jour de plus à Paris, 16 Apr. 2021, www.unjourdeplusaparis.com/en/paris-reportage/petite-histoire-des-cariatides-en-architecture Accessed 19 Oct. 2023.

fig. Agnes Varda. The so Called Caryatids.

PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY AND FLÂNEUSE¹¹

WALKING IS THE BEST WAY TO EXPLORE AND EXPLOIT THE CITY; THE CHANGES, SHIFTS, BREAKS IN THE CLOUD HELMET, AND MOVEMENT OF LIGHT ON WATER. DRIFTING PURPOSEFULLY IS THE RECOMMENDED MODE, TRAMPING ASPHALTED EARTH IN ALERT REVERIE, ALLOWING THE FICTION OF AN UNDERLYING PATTERN TO REVEAL ITSELF.

IAIN SINCLAIR, LIGHTS OUT FOR THE TERRITORY ■

The term ‘psychogeography’ originated from Paris in the 1950s and the Letterist Group, a precursor of the Situationist International. The Marxist theorist Guy Debord developed it as a tool to transform urban life, inspired by the French writer Charles Baudelaire’s concept of the flâneur.■ In the mid-twentieth century, a group of radical poets and artists known as Situationists pioneered the concept of psychogeography, driven by a critique of post-war urbanism. Guy Debord described psychogeography as ‘the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals’.■■ Debord wanted a revolutionary approach to architecture that was less functional and more open to exploration.■■■ In a broader sense, psychogeography is the intersection of psychology and geography – a means of colliding these two disciplines and exploring the behavioral impact of urban places. According to Debord, however, this term has a ‘pleasing vagueness’.■■■ Its revolutionary idea transformed the notion of wandering and strolling into a more profound state of drifting. Urban

explorers developed ¹⁰ the concept of ‘dérive’ or drift, mapping the emotional landscape of the city, and exploring how architecture and topography combined to shape its ‘psychogeographical contours’.¹¹

When delving into the realm of psychogeography, it is crucial to acknowledge the historical context. The English writer Will Self, one of the heirs to the Situationists movement, declared that the concept of psychogeography had mostly been developed by men. He equated the figure of the urban stalker with masculine privilege, akin to the concept of ‘fraternity’.¹² Additionally, the term **flâneur** coined by Louis Huart in 1841, originally defined a figure with “good legs, good ears, and good eyes”¹³ Sinclair’s quote, to which I was referring earlier, does not seem to apply to women in the city. However, we must consider that women also participated in urban exploration. The modernist 20th-century English writer Virginia Woolf, for instance, frequently roamed the chaotic streets of London. For women, such excursions served as a means to connect with their own thoughts, offering an escape from the societal limitations often imposed on them.

The term **flâneuse** appears broad in its application and ultimately represents an individual who makes a space outside of home – a space where one can experience freedom from the oppression of everyday life.

As Chinese-American ¹³geographer Yi-Fu Tuan suggests, a space truly becomes a place when we fill it with meaning through movement, perception, apprehension, and experience.¹⁴

As I navigate through the historical context of psychogeography and the exploration of emotional landscapes, it becomes apparent that urban exploration, often considered a masculine pursuit, has broader implications. The term **flâneuse** emerges as a strong symbol, representing the female individual who carves out a space beyond the confines of home – a space for movement, perception, and experience. It urges us to reconsider the traditional notion of urban exploration and to broaden the accessibility to all genders.

- Sinclair, Iain. *Lights Out for the Territory*, 4.
- “Psychogeography – Art Term | Tate,” Tate, 2017. www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/psychogeography
- Debord, Guy. *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*, in Ken Knabb (Ed.), *Situationist International Anthology*, 5.
- Tate, *op.cit.*
- Debord, Guy. *op.cit.*
- Debord, Guy. *Theory of the Dérive*, trans. Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 50.
- Self, Will, and Ralph Steadman, *Psychogeography* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), 12.
- Huart, Louis. *Physiologie Du Flaneur* (Paris: Aubert, 1841), 53.
- Elkin, Lauren. *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Vintage, 2017), 43.

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**TRANSITIONAL MOMENTS
AS LIMINAL SPACE**

Being in-between,
liminal spaces,
transition in
“House of Hummingbird”

What does the concept of liminal spaces mean to an individual? Liminal spaces, often referred to as inbetween spaces, are transitional spaces that exist outside of societal norms and boundaries. From an anthropological perspective, women frequently encounter liminal experiences during significant life transitions such as puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, or menopause. In particular, the genre of the ‘coming-of-age’ narrative allows us to explore an individual’s journey from childhood to adulthood, which can vary depending on one’s nature and cultural context.

In the Korean film, “House of Hummingbird” by Bora Kim¹⁴, we follow the story of a girl named Eunhee as she wanders the city in search of the people she loves. Eunhee is a 14-year-old girl from a middle-class family in Seoul in 1994. Her parents often neglect her, and she endures both physical and verbal abuse from her brother. However, amidst these adversities, she finds solace in her new Chinese teacher, who listens to her concerns.

Eunice faces challenges¹⁵ in her relationships with her boyfriend and school friends, and she confides in her teacher about her life. Additionally, she has to undergo surgery to remove a lump in her ear. After her hospital discharge, she receives disappointing news that her Chinese teacher Ms. Kim resigned from her job. Tragedy strikes when the Seongsu Bridge collapses, which leaves everyone anxiously worried about their loved ones. Eunhee receives a package from Ms. Kim and attempts to express her gratitude with a thank-you letter, then tragically learns that Ms. Kim is among the victims. Heartbroken, Eunhee reads her former teacher’s letter on her way to school, ultimately coming to terms with her loss and grief.

Regarding my perspective on liminal spaces within oneself, it is hard to visualize threshold moments. An individual can be easily overlooked, which is why the director Bora Kim decided to incorporate autobiographical elements. In her interview, she mentions that it is a fictional film based on her own personal experiences, allowing her to choose which memories to retell and which to omit. In the 1990s, the country was experiencing rapid growth and was eager to be recognized as a developed country after years of Korean wars. That fast-paced growth often led to safety regulations being overlooked, resulting in accidents like the Seongsu Bridge collapse in 1994 and the Sampoong Department

Store collapse in Seoul¹⁶ in 1995. In just one decade, People had to face two major tragedies. It occurred to me that liminal spaces and pains of personal growth are often neglected, even though young girls universally have to face them. Alongside the societal issues based on these accidents, the film actively invites the audience to relive their significant moments of adolescence. As the director noted, she found a similarity between the main character and a hummingbird. They are both small but seek to find their true love while symbolizing hope. ■■

■■ *House of Hummingbird*, directed by Bora Kim, Atnine Film, CONTENTS PANDA, 2018.

■■ Richter, D. Marina. "Interview with Bora Kim: 'House of Hummingbird' Is a Fictional Film Based on Very Personal Experiences," Asian Movie Pulse, 1 July 2019, asianmoviepulse.com/2019/07/interview-with-bora-kim/ Accessed 19 Oct. 2023.

IDENTITY AS AN ALIEN¹⁷

Feeling like an alien in
your own land in
"Borderlands/La Frontera"

To understand the concept of feeling like or being perceived as an alien, Gloria Anzaldúa noted in her semiautobiography work of prose and poetry, "Borderlands/La Frontera" that "living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an alien element."■■ Anzaldúa, a Chicano and Mexican American, often found herself navigating the delicate balance between two cultures, constantly oscillating between predominant and minor sides while intricately managing her cultural identities. Because of her mixed cultural background, she was deeply concerned about how her identity was both being shaped and shifted. In her poem, "To Live in the Borderlands Means to You"■■, she translated her experience into verse, vividly articulating the struggles of living as a female between borders, growing up in two cultures, and feeling like a stranger.

Gloria Anzaldúa's poem deeply resonates with her experiences. The concept of feeling like an alien extends beyond the boundaries

CUANDO VIVES EN LA FRONTERA
PEOPLE WALK THROUGH YOU,
THE WIND STEALS YOUR VOICE,
YOU'RE A BURRA, BUEY, SCAPEGOAT,
FORERUNNER OF A NEW RACE,
HALF AND HALF
—BOTH WOMAN AND MAN, NEITHER—
A NEW GENDER;

LIVING IN THE BORDERLANDS MEANS YOU FIGHT HARD TO
RESIST THE GOLD ELIXIR BECKONING FROM THE BOTTLE,
THE PULL OF THE GUN BARREL,
THE ROPE CRUSHING THE HOLLOW OF YOUR THROAT;

IN THE BORDERLANDS
YOU ARE THE BATTLEGROUND
WHERE ENEMIES ARE KIN TO EACH OTHER;
YOU ARE AT HOME, A STRANGER,
THE BORDER DISPUTES HAVE BEEN SETTLED
THE VOLLEY OF SHOTS HAVE SHATTERED THE TRUCE
YOU ARE WOUNDED, LOST IN ACTION
DEAD, FIGHTING BACK;

TO SURVIVE THE BORDERLANDS
YOU MUST LIVE SIN FRONTERAS
BE A CROSSROADS.

of culture alone. It transcends into other facets of existence, including gender, societal roles, and the urban milieu.

In an essay within the book, *Fear of Going Home: Homophobia*, Anzaldúa discusses the fear of returning home as a lesbian woman. She was afraid to reveal unacceptable aspects of herself, knowing that her mother, culture, and race might utterly reject her. She noted in the chapter that “to avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, and push the unacceptable parts into the shadow.” ■■ Similarly, aliens or people living in between borders often conceal unconventional aspects of themselves. In *Intimate Terrorism: Life in the Borderlands*, Anzaldúa responds to the notion that the world is not a safe place for women. Her own culture, and white culture, are critical of her, and males of all races hunt her as prey.

“Alienated from her mother culture, ‘alien’ in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of herself. Petrified, she can’t respond, her face caught between los intersticios, the space between the different worlds she inhabits.” ■■

■ ■ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), preface.

■ ■ Ibid., 194.

■ ■ Ibid., 20.

■ ■ Ibid.

Transformation, Gender Identity, Body Horror in “Titane”

The French film “Titane” directed by Julia Ducournau deals with the themes of transformation, gender identity, and body horror. The protagonist, Alexia, undergoes an unconventional physical transformation and a shift in her desire. Her journey begins with a car accident, leading to surgery and the implantation of a titanium plate in her head. Initially, she works as a showgirl at a motor show, where she forms a carnal attraction to cars. After a show, a disturbing male fan becomes infatuated with her, and she resorts to brutal murder as a means of self-defense in a hostile world, using a hairpin as her weapon of choice. An attempt to abort with a hairpin results in black oil emerging from her vagina, but the attempt is unsuccessful.

Wanted for multiple murders, Alexia becomes desperate and undergoes a painful transformation, disguising the identity of Adrian, a boy who disappeared at the age of seven. She returns to his father and immerses herself in masculine surroundings by joining a fire station. In this new guise, she conceals her past her colleagues and hides her true gender.

However, her radical²¹ transformation comes with profound suffering, and she finds herself isolated without anyone to turn to. The film conveys a sense of alienation and isolation by frequently situating the protagonist in scenes where she is alone, emphasizing the agony of her transition. The film creates a cinematic universe filled with extreme characters and situations, pushing the boundaries of conventional storytelling.

The film opens with the song “Wayfaring Stranger” which director Julia Ducournau chose as a means to visualize Alexia’s emotions. The lyrics resonate with the character’s experience of feeling disconnected from humanity as she wanders through the world in her unique state of being. For the director, Alexia embodies the essence of a wayfaring stranger — a moment of grace and evolution.

Ducournau emphasizes:

“I always try to bring these moments back to our form of reality, even though my film is not at all realistic. It has to be referential to us. We have to decide ourselves to identify with these bodies, gruesome and filled with body violence.” ■■

■■ *Titane* Director Julia Ducournau on Making a Film Where a Woman F***s a Car, The Independent, 2021.

Exploring human experience through an Alien Lens in “Under the Skin”

The British film “Under the Skin”, directed by Jonathan Glazer, a narrative about identity that centers on a female alien inhabiting the skin of a human woman. The film is based on the idea that one’s skin often reflects back on how one internally perceives. It begins with abstract images reminiscent of cosmic space, accompanied by eerie string sounds and overlapping mumbles of a woman. The initial acoustic landscape is somewhat elusive, making it challenging to discern sounds. However, it later becomes apparent that it is a learning phase for a human practicing broken syllables of human speech.

In a scene set on a dark highway, a motorcyclist transports the body of a woman. Against a backdrop of white light and counter light, two figures – one lying down and the other undressing – suggest a metamorphosis, symbolizing transformation into a human form. The protagonist, Laura now residing in human skin, proceeds to drive to a Scottish town in a van. This detachment from the external world hints at her distinct existence from

other people, creating²³ a personal sphere for observation and contemplation. In this world, she encounters and seduces various men. The film’s deliberate choice of the camera perspective serves to isolate the protagonist from the others. Instead of capturing individual people, the director chose to obsessively target passersby putting Laura in a position of a predator hunting its prey. Since most men were not aware of the filming process, the film captures genuine interactions between men and a foreign woman. These interactions are organic and esoteric accents that immerse viewers in Laura’s world. The film’s sound design draws the audience closer to Laura, immersing them in a world filled with strong Scottish accents, mumbles, and ambient sounds. It guides viewers through the surroundings with crisp and pronounced sound. In contrast to that, the external world outside the van is portrayed as muted and spacious, sounds are muffled.

The enigmatic place to which Laura leads the men is abstract, as they are lured into darkness. The only thing which remains visible in the frames is their floating skin. At first, she does not grasp human emotions, but her transformation begins as she encounters a man who genuinely cares for her and releases her from her hunt. Gradually, this alien entity comes to understand human emotions through her experiences. The film concludes with her human skin being torn from her

alien body and a man²⁴ burns her remains.

In “Under the Skin”, Laura’s perspective can be seen as that of a foreigner, an immigrant, and a woman, which allows for multiple layers of narratives to add up. The film’s score, composed by English composer and singer Mica Levy, invites the audience to experience the world through the lens of a female human, incorporating elements such as heartbeat, breathing, and eerie string sounds. It explores obscure spaces while investigating the blurriness of reality and questioning the perception of the audience.

Both “Titane” and “Under the Skin” offer a unique lens through which to explore the idea of an alien perspective. They feature female protagonists who undergo transformative experiences, straying from their regular lives.

In “Titane”, the protagonist Alexia’s transformation, triggered by a titanium implantation in her head, represents not only a physical alteration but a fundamental shift in her connection to humanity. Despite her utterly human appearance, she shows ruthlessness and emotional distance, alienating herself from the society around her. Her journey leads her to become a grotesque hybrid figure, blurring the lines between identity, gender, and maternity. The film’s exploration of her experiences challenges the conventional notion of what it means to be human.

Alexia’s alien perspective²⁵ is not about being extraterrestrial, but about embodying a profound sense of otherness.

In “Under the Skin”, Laura’s perspective is fundamentally alien, even though she initially assumes the guise of a human woman. Her existence is marked by a detachment from the world, positioning her as an outsider and foreigner in human society. The deliberate choice of camera perspective serves as a tool to isolate her from society and emphasizes her as a predator. The unscripted interactions made possible by the filming process, of which not all participants were aware, heighten the sense of her foreignness. The film’s depiction of Laura’s existence offers an alien perspective on human existence, highlighting the stark contrast between her experiences and those of the people she encounters. Their alienated perspective on society reveals how differently the world appears to them, leaving them disoriented and perpetually wandering.

The question that arises is:

How can a character embody an alien perspective without altering their physical appearance to make them be perceived as alien?

The answer lies in exploring the emotional and psychological aspects of alienation.

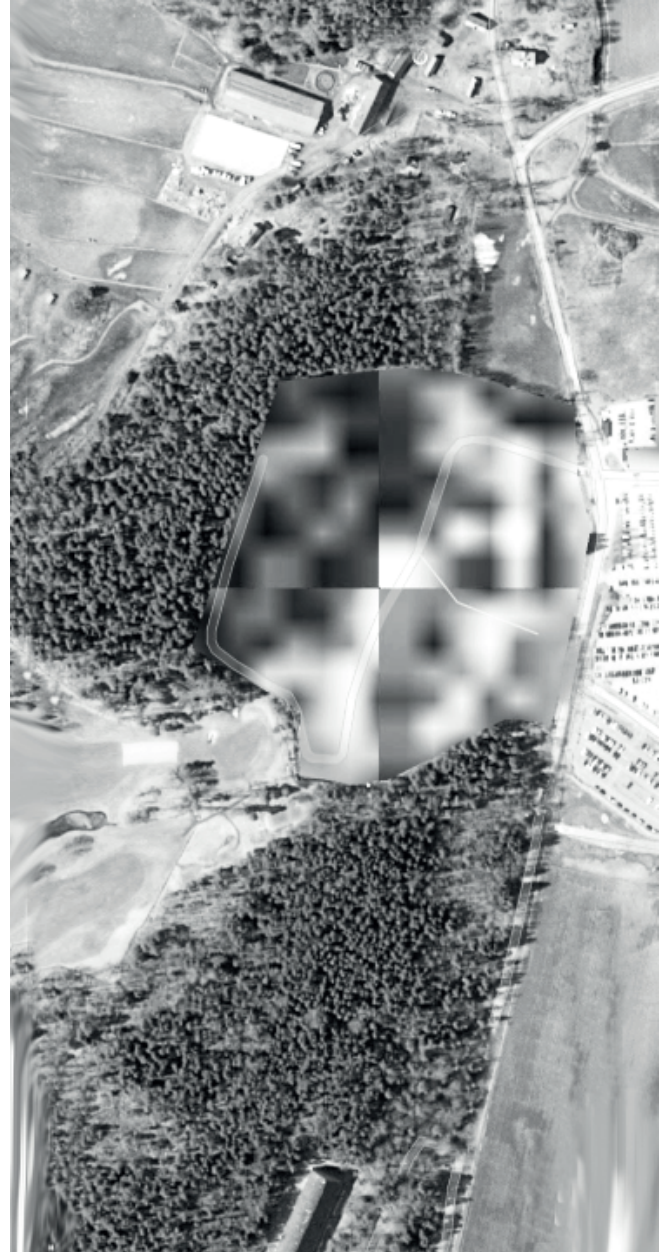
26 THE SPACE BETWEEN NOSE AND BEAK

SHE IS GOING SOMEWHERE OR COMING FROM SOMEWHERE;
SHE IS SATURATED WITH IN-BETWEENNESS.

...
I FOUND HER USING CITIES AS PERFORMANCE SPACES OR
AS HIDING PLACES; AS PLACES TO SEEK FAME AND FORTUNE
OR ANONYMITY; AS PLACES TO LIBERATE HERSELF FROM
OPPRESSION OR TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED; AS
PLACES TO DECLARE HER INDEPENDENCE; AS PLACES TO
CHANGE THE WORLD OR BE CHANGED BY IT.

...
SHE VOYAGES OUT AND GOES WHERE SHE'S NOT SUPPOSED TO;
SHE FORCES US TO CONFRONT THE WAYS IN WHICH WORDS LIKE
HOME AND BELONGING ARE USED AGAINST WOMEN. SHE IS A
DETERMINED, RESOURCEFUL INDIVIDUAL KEENLY ATTUNED TO
THE CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF THE CITY AND THE LIBERATING
POSSIBILITIES OF A GOOD WALK.

LAUREN ELKIN, FLÂNEUSE: WOMEN WALK THE CITY IN
PARIS, NEW YORK, TOKYO, VENICE, AND LONDON ■■



This chapter begins with a quote by Lauren Elkin, which immerses me in a space where I can experiment with my crafted character, the half bird half human. This chapter will outline a narrative about this mythological female figure. The fiction traces a figure from three different perspectives.

Rumors

circulate about the protagonist and her surroundings, creating a sense of intrigue within the town.

The third person's eye

change offers an impartial, factual perspective.

The protagonist's point of view

provides a more personal account through letters, journeys, and monologues.

These various forms of storytelling serve as guides through the tale of an alien woman navigating society.

■ ■ Elkin, Lauren. *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Vintage, 2017), 43.

fig. Google Maps and edited by author

A tale has thrived in a world where whispers carry more weight than the truth. This enigmatic alien, cast aside by society, has become the central figure of countless rumors. Her otherworldly appearance spreads — a being half-human, half-bird — fear and mistrust took hold. The human imagination easily conjures up images of sphinxes and medusas, weaving her into a monstrous figure.

“At the heart of the town lies a hill known as XXX. Here, a woman resides within the hill, a body that is part human, part bird, and part something unknown. The place is called the ‘throat of the village’, hidden in perpetual darkness.”

“Only her face resembles that of a normal woman, but her body takes on the form of an ostrich-sized, pheasant-like creature. Her features are both familiar and foreign — her face soft and rounded like a woman’s, yet her body adorns with male pheasant-like features such as a long tail, saturated feathers in vivid orange with tiger-like patterns, and turquoise accents on her nape.”

“On every 15th day of the lunar calendar, under the full moon’s glow, she emerges from the throat to hunt. Days later, footprints larger than any human’s serve as witness to her presence!”

“The throat of the animated hill conceals secrets, and those who venture within are never seen again. This enigmatic place is known as the ‘throat of the world’. Once people enter, they are never found again. That is why it is called the throat of

the
world.”

R U M O R

People say it is the throat of the hill where everything sinks into the dark. It is impossible to see what is beyond the throat of the world. It remains camouflaged, a glitch in the world, a space omitted from maps, a secret kept hidden. Some believe it is a deliberate omission and that she is a monstrous secret or a guardian of mysteries, a protector of unspoken truths. Everything around her is obscured.

R U M O R

“She is an alien among mortals,
a flâneuse of the night, wandering in
the dark street like a whisper, hunting.

Or she is simply
a secret keeper that
they dare
not

to

utter.”

THE PROTAGONIST'S POINT OF VIEW

In the dark of night, a journal provides solace.
XX.XX.202X

I awake, my thoughts plagued by a persistent influence of the previous night, a haze of memories that refuses to take shape. My solitary walks through the city, a maze of flat buildings and shops stir discomfort within me. The city's oppressive atmosphere chokes my sense of belonging, and the isolation weighs heavily on me. This is an unusual place. I heard people were looking for this woman who had this peculiar figure — big wings, big mouth, long neck, and furry body. Hardly anyone talks to me. Now that I have grown accustomed to my surroundings, I feel the weight of uncertainty creeping back in. I feel the backlash from my comfort from the past.

THE THIRD PERSON'S EYE

In this town, only binary sexes, only male and female, exist.

가나/Gana* is different. She can change the gender given to her at birth. Possessing the unique ability to toggle specific genes, she can activate either a female hormone (estrogen) or a male hormone (androgen). She was born with female genitalia, but as her pubic hair grew, around the age of ten, she started to realize the coexistence of her male identity. She is also a boy.

Her physical appearance sets her apart from the locals of the town. A strikingly long neck adorns her feature, a characteristic inherited from her original society where the tradition was to elongate one's neck from a young age. Her torso is shorter than the norm, while her legs are slender with sloped and small feet, giving her a distinct silhouette. Adding to her uniqueness, she has a furry body, a feature that further emphasizes her divergence from the traditional gender binary that confines the town.

THE PROTAGONIST'S POINT OF VIEW

An email to my brother/sister/sibling.

Dear 마하/Maha **

Hey, how have you been? Never before have I felt like such an alien. I've never questioned my own existence as I do now. It's bewildering. It seems that I alone hold the power to control my own gender. It is bizarre. The city rejects me, yet I yearn to understand it better. I wander its streets, favoring the night over the day, as the air during the day feels heavy and oppressive.

The people in my vicinity have started to spread a rumor about my ability to switch between male and female, urging me to demonstrate it in front of them. Two weeks ago, I met someone who shared this unique trait. He was kind, but as I spoke about you and our family, he learned about our ability.

He asked me to demonstrate it, which I did. Unlike a simple switch, my transformation took time. I fell asleep during the process. When I awoke, it was neither dark nor light, and he was gone. I was overwhelmed by frustration. I didn't know what to do. Since that night, rumors began circulating about a mysterious woman with an attractive face and an incredibly long neck. I miss you terribly, but I have no desire to return home. At home is where I feel most empowered, most free. I've found a way to navigate my own path, but here, I am the outcast. I am a mutant. I'll keep it brief. Eager to see you soon.

XX
Gana

* In Korean 가 and 나 are equivalents to the [g] and [n] sound. The way they look can explain her transformable traits.
가 is 나's 180 degree flipped shape.

** 마 and 하 each represent [m] and [h] sound. The letters are the same when they are mirrored horizontally.

THE THIRD PERSON'S EYE

Gana begins to notice her identity disappearing from official records. She needs to become a digital ghost, invisible to them, to the city. Her digital social security card has been inexplicably altered, switching her gender from female to male. Her picture, once clear, now glitched, reflected the growing rumors that surrounded her. She is, undeniably, the subject of their stories, in a town dominated by its residents.

THE PROTAGONIST'S POINT OF VIEW

It is nice to go out when everything is in between dark and light. The in-between times, neither fully night nor day, appeal to me. These moments of blurred reality where distinctions dissolve into something beautiful.

l'heure entre chien et loup

.

The time between dog and wolf

.

개와 늑대의 시간

At the time one cannot tell if it is a wolf or a dog. Things get blurred. Things reside in the dark — hiding themselves, breathing, and waiting for more darkness to come. There is a beauty of being in-between.

THE PROTAGONIST'S POINT OF VIEW

Every rumor was aimed at me these days. I became like a mutant in the eyes of the town. I felt frustrated with my body. Particularly when it comes to controlling hormone switches. The other day, my testosterone level surged up uncontrollably, and I found myself fully transformed into a man. It was hard to believe that others were buying my explanation that my brother had visited me. In a small town, stories are twisted and warped, and the line between truth and lie is blurred. I cannot help but question the nature of reality.

Am I the alien?

.

Or are others the true outsiders?

.

Was I born an alien,
or had I been made one by circumstances?

THE THIRD PERSON'S EYE

At dawn, Gana sets out to explore the city.

THE PROTAGONIST'S POINT OF VIEW

'It is the time to reconnect with the earth,
engage with the very fabric of time and space.

crisp air.'

RUMOR

“ A man, discovering her true form, killed her, severed her manhood, and hung it in front of the throat of the hill. The hill, the place where society abandons the unwanted - rejected baby,

the

disabled,

eccentrics.”

THE THIRD PERSON'S EYE

It is widely believed that the abandoned were prey for the half-human, half-bird creature who resided within the hill. Those who enter the cave are never seen again. They vanish like smoke from a candle. She was their predator.

THE PROTAGONIST'S POINT OF VIEW

I kept it in a journey.
XX.XX.202X

I took solace in wandering the quiet streets when the world was at rest, when shops were shuttered, and the city was cloaked in a sense of stillness. These streets were like incubators for the soul, offering nutrition for the restless spirit.

THE THIRD PERSON'S EYE

The blurs on the maps conceal her presence, a deliberate act of concealment to protect the town's fragile peace. She fights to be visible on the map, to be visible in the lives of people. She struggles so hard. She is a being to be hidden for the sake of others. Still, she remains invisible in a system, but she is saturated by the invisible. She is a ghost in the world while allowing herself to have space to journey over. She pays little heed to the ever-swirling rumors; stories give birth to more stories, creating a complex web of tales. She is, after all, a creature unlike any other in this binary town.

CLOSURE

As I conclude this exploration, I am reminded of the tapestry of narratives and perspectives that shape our understanding of the world around us. Especially, marginalized people, so-called outcasts that are not part of a majority, may be equipped with an alien lens. The essay traverses through the lens of psychology and exploration of the female alien narrative which delves into complexities of identity and belonging by using different voices, myths, and rumors. In the first chapter, the term **flâneuse** is introduced, while focussing on the omission of the female form. The next chapter follows the meaning of 'dérive', and unfolds the backdrop of psychogeography. In the following chapters, I analyzed applications of female alien narratives that incorporate women's transition physically and mentally. When I researched the origins and applications of psychogeography and its variations, there were barely any materials concerning other cultures and diverse bodies. The term was mainly explored in the Western context and connected to white bodies. I created for myself a free space to explore the growth of fiction in the urban landscape. I allowed myself to wander in a morphing environment. In my inner eye, the world is fluid and shifts.

Alone and together, 'female', 'queer', and 'Black' as a survival strategy demand the creation of their individual machinery, that

innovates, builds, ³⁹resists. With physical movement often restricted, female identifying people, queer people, Black people invent ways to create space through rupture. Here, in that disruption, with our collective congregation at that trippy and trip-wired crossroad of gender, race, and sexuality, one finds the power of the glitch. ■■

A GLITCH IS AN ERROR, A MISTAKE, A FAILURE TO FUNCTION. WITHIN TECHNOCULTURE, A GLITCH IS PART OF MACHINIC ANXIETY, AN INDICATOR OF SOMETHING HAVING GONE WRONG. ■■

...
THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF THE GLITCH, WE GHOST ON THE GENDERED BODY AND ACCELERATE TOWARD ITS END. THE INFINITE POSSIBILITIES PRESENTED AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THIS ALLOW FOR OUR EXPLORATION: WE CAN DISIDENTIFY AND BY DIS-IDENTIFYING, WE CAN MAKE UP OUR OWN RULES IN WRESTLING WITH THE PROBLEM OF THE BODY. ■■

These quotes from Legacy Russell resonate with me profoundly. Glitch feminism suggests breaking down a contemporary hegemony that strives for a rigid environment and creates safer spaces. We are ghosts that we can surpass the rigidity of societal norms. The concept of the glitch body allowed me to create various female characters. Female wanderers in an urban environment, that revive or create a new corporeality.

■■ Russell, Legacy. *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (S.L.: Verso, 2020), 7.

■■ Ibid.,

■■ Ibid., 10.

Wish me luck in striving⁴⁰ with a ghost body
and alien lens.

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