



**EVERYONE  
IS A SCIENTIST**

# Outro

# In the Lab

ROWAN MELLING

I began to notice that everything was calling itself a “lab” when I went to discount physiotherapy at a place called “Physiolab.” It had bubbly test tubes all over the window, oriented diagonally like little rockets blasting off. It was an austere place, with third-wave coffee clinical aesthetics, but I learned some exercises there that helped to solve one, but not all, of my body problems. From the bus I’d also seen a place called “Mudlab”—that’s a ceramics studio whose slogan is “GET MUDDY.” And my department at university has something called the Digital Democracies Lab, where all the kids who are gearing for academic prestige jobs work. They just call it “the lab.” Now, I’m in this thing called Writelab, where we write every week about STS and affect.

Goethe and Schiller had this argument about labs. It goes way back to the ancient Greeks and beyond. Basically Goethe says you can’t do science in a lab (he called it “putting nature on the rack”). If you do, then all you learn about is the lab itself. To do real science, you have to go out into the world. Schiller says labs are fine. Even though a lot of what Goethe said turned out to be “wrong,” I want to go with him. Maybe he’s just saying: don’t pretend your body is absent. Don’t pretend this doesn’t affect you. Don’t pretend the lab itself shouldn’t be studied. In hard science, the lab forms the endpoint of a potentially endless chain of looping studies. Receding in its sterile clinicity, it cuts off studies of the lab itself; and that

cuts off studies of those studies (and studies of studies of studies of labs). In the lab, we can say, “we are studying this object, and nothing else—not us, not the room, not the lab, just the thing.”

When shops call themselves “lab,” though, I think they are trying for something else. Unlike sterile science labs, they *want* to draw attention to their lab-ness. Physiolab, for instance, uses the lab to stick affective connotations of experimental-ity, innovation, and discovery to itself. It is more Romanticist than, for instance, a lab that invents new solvents for processing plastics, or that tests heart medications on monkeys. It’s trying, maybe, to capture a few drops of cultural value, trickling down from TEDx talks and Silicon Valley start-ups. But these fantasies of cool innovation start to melt as you wrap awkward rubber bands around your knees, pinching leg hair, and wonder, “when can I get out of here and why do I still feel so bad?” I want the lab to be different. I’m going to run with Goethe and say: we take the lab with us. It is that place of long and slow stillness where we gradually melt into the surround, each leaf interpenetrates us until we see them all. The science is how these things stick inside us when we walk away.

#### REFERENCES

Heller, Erich. “Goethe and the Idea of Scientific Truth.” *The Disinherited Mind*. New York: Harvest, 1975, pp. 3-36.

# Livabilities

MATHEW ARTHUR

If science was ordinary, anatomical charts wouldn't splay the body out as gruesome viscera like bad 80s horror gore. Arteries and veins wouldn't be blue and red—they'd pulse just below the surface, covered with ingrown hairs or tattoos, botoxed smooth. Touch would be diagnostic, and stories. Being crazy wouldn't be a curse of genetics or bad brain chemicals that lands you in a forever-loop of drab grey-green corridors with plastic cutlery and handleless locks. Instead of the DSM-V, we'd have manuals of care thick like a phonebook: techniques for holding difference gently. Labs and hospitals would be lush, moody, and contaminated—because life is. Machines wouldn't lord their complexity. No working parts would be black-boxed away for expert technicians. Studies, experiments, tools, and treatments would fail, variables skewed by sleepless nights and natural disasters, mistakes made in bad moods or putting things on hold to attend to what's pressing. There would be no cures, just livabilities, pills made instead of things rooted in the landscape. Doctors would be healers: like the rest of us, they'd weep or pray. Everyone would be a scientist.

# Orange

BECCA SOFT

The bartender flames an orange peel before our eyes with one of those fancy torches. For a moment, our pupils become orange too. Then with careful precision, as if performing open heart surgery, he folds his body in half to find the right angle from which to place the peel, curve its shape over the two oversized ice cubes in the glass. The bartender slides the meticulously crafted cocktail toward my folded hands, and like two dancers performing a choreographed duet, I span my palms open like wings, catching it in a gentle grasp. “Thank you.” I sip slowly from the glass, the flavours magnetized to my tongue—as with any fine cocktail, the complexity parades around my mouth: exalting sensations in the before, now, and after.

# Cycles

HAYDEN OSTROM

How does my grandmother always know when the sour-dough is ready—when it needs more time fermenting? When my uncle takes me ice fishing, he can tell how thick the ice is from the sound his feet make. When we save seeds to replant we become geneticists. How could science not be based in our bodies. Thought is rooted in feeling: it is to flesh as inhalation and exhalation is to lungs. The kidneys control water in our bodies. The tide controls water. Cycles are inherent and fundamental. Why are we so concerned with replicability? Mainstream science lives in the syntactic confines of a question. How would a science of specific sense coalesce? Notice I didn't say "look like." I want deaf and blind science, queer science, decolonial science, particular and universal science.



# Junk Drawer

DEBARAH BULFORD

What if we viewed life as a junk drawer, its contents an array and disarray of past, present and future? Some events are placed in clear view, seen upon opening. Others are set to the back or covered with scraps. You dig and shuffle to find them. The drawer holds discards: things distressing or experienced without yet knowing the “why?” A quick and convenient out-of-sight motion relieves the anxiety of forgetting. Items filed away are later retrieved as something to recycle or refurbish. Time adds character and makes a drawer’s mixed contents valuable. The dictionary defines junk as old or useless articles of little worth: “the cellars are full of junk.” But the adage “one person’s junk is another person’s treasure” approaches junk as a matter of relationship and connection. Like the junk drawer, a definition creates value by holding things together: an inventory of life’s bits and pieces, events and memories. Our drawers and words about junk are full of sizes and shapes, textures and weights. But also tones and emotions that imprint as an atmosphere.



# Love

MORGAINA LEE

The morning bird warbles, filling his whole body with the vibratory buzzing of love stuff, calling out to his soulmate. The scientist awakens enveloped in song, pulled in by the call to love. The biologist said they study birdsong to understand the sensation of song in the bird's body. The biologist traces tones along the soundwaves with their fingers, attuning to the resonances, rhythms, missed notes and off-beats—no mistakes. The biologist's body so deeply attuned that birdsong is felt swaying in the cells of their fingertips as they mark notations along a staff. The scientist does not work alone. The bird sings to the scientist, pulling science into a bellyful of care that joyfully fills in the details of a methodology section. The bird is a scientist, too, with method, rigour, and peer review. Their literature review is a dance, their results alive. Together, the bird and the biologist gently offer an honest account of how mutual care feels. After all, don't we do science because we care about things and think they are beautiful?

# 3D

REBECCA PENG

In the future, I'll be able to 3D print my feelings. There will be scanners, wires, electrodes, beepers. Something will nuzzle inside me like a dog's wet nose, excavate my mind with a persistent delicacy of light. The future will find feeling deep inside me, understand its dimensions, know me better than I know myself. I won't have to generate feels hunched over a screen, tweaking the pixel model, finessing the feeling's grey shape, its golf-ball texture. The feeling comes out stratified, full of tiny teathy ridges. But it's the future, so probably you'll be able to light up your feelings with a soft LED glow: something that asks politely, with pleasant novelty, for your attention. Nothing abrasive. Nothing too fluorescent. Solar-powered batteries, not AAs. My happiness is a bright and pulsing uranium green. It fits perfectly into the palm of my hand. Over time, its strange reptilian shape will be worried smooth, like a stone.

We will collect our printed feelings like particularly iridescent oyster shells. We will arrange them like crystals and speculate on their curative properties. Today, my anger is a ziggurat of pink. Tomorrow, my anger is a snake of pale, pale cornflower blue. When you stare at it, you're reminded of the enormity of sky. Touch it. It's good for focus, maybe libido. In the future, I will bring my feeling to the doctor. It's heavy, and maybe purple. I have to hold it with two hands. My bare legs dangle from the examination table. Best finest surgeon, come print me open. The doctor puts their cold stethoscope right over

my violet feeling (even though there aren't doctors in the future). The stethoscope is a little metal ear. Your hands are the stethoscope, listening. They slide around my feeling's lavender edges, stroke its amethyst core. You hold it, entire, in your cold, attentive hands. In the future, I still want the same things. I hold it out for you, bright and misshapen. You take it. You understand. You believe me.