

# Fabulating Free(dom): Be/coming Non

Vishwaveda Joshi

## Abstract

These notes to self, written and drawn as reflections of/for personal experiences over the last year (2023–2024) imagine and fabulate the notion of “non” as a means to *feeling* free(dom). They convey the non in a way that one can attune with in order to find their own non-s. Through a series of digital artworks inspired by Firelei Baez’s<sup>2</sup> (2022) works created by juxtaposing found images on Canva to make no/one/thing concrete, but any/one/thing fluid. My contribution complicates ideas of negation and/or absence as excess. In contexts of freedom and unfreedom, it provides insights into an articulation of freedom that flows through the gaps of the cages that hold us. Non is no/one/thing and every/one/thing simultaneously, allowing an experience of freedom that is both positively overwhelming and discomforting. This work fabulates freedom by non-following empirical rules of academic writing<sup>3</sup>. **Content Warning:** This piece talks about death.

## Keywords

speculative art, decolonial, queer negativity, insufficient, excess

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<sup>1</sup> I propose non as a counter-concept of sorts that doesn’t fit into the idea of concept because it cannot be defined. It is felt. Therefore, it is multiple and incomplete. It resists completion. Thus, working with it as a fluid, ever flowing event, growing and de-growing conceptually with the strength of speculation, non encourages us to co-explore freedom within ourselves, from years of colonial conditioning, trauma, and capitalist containment, as we explore ways to reclaim freedom for the collective. Non is therefore, deliberately not defined, but rather allowed to be excessive and speculative in its multiple expressions. That deliberate choice is a reclamation of freedom of expression in academic contexts, with hopes to then let it seep through other aspects of human experience—though not limited to it. This contribution attempts to part with established rules of writing, because within those rules, non cannot be articulated.

<sup>2</sup> Baez, F. and Hessel, K. (2024, March 8). Museums Without Men. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*.  
<https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/katy-hessel-audio-tour-firelei-baez-transcript>

This work is disjointed, disconnected, different, unfinished. It is speculative and

hopes to be provocative. At its core, it is an attempt at overcoming a fear of irrelevance and not being enough: especially when it comes to positioning myself, a neurodivergent, queer, South Asian \_\_\_\_\_ in academia, in the world, and in my family. Even deeper, is an attempt to free myself of/from my colonial genesis. Generational conditioning to think and therefore relate in colonial ways, even as colonized beings, generational trauma of being colonized, and of continuing it.

I turn to my journal and to art to think through ways of reclaiming freedom as equitable, just, and inclusive, as I move through feelings of ungroundedness. The entries presented here grapple with my own questions of freedom, unfreedom, freeness, and boundedness and attempt to challenge the images and imagery of cages, being caged and be/coming caged as the goal of colonial

genesis—to keep in cages of violence, injustice, genocide. To contain. To oppress. Amidst all this containment, I look for freedom in academia, freedom in my own body, freedom in the world, in politics, in thoughts. I turn to my body, because over the last year, many experiences have given me a glimpse of freedom that is fleeting but powerfully rooted. Elusive but precise. Tentative but resistant. Events like a concussion, experiencing statelessness, and the death of my father have pushed me to experience what I try to articulate and conceptualize as non. Non,



is therefore a speculative event, continuously imagined pre-cognitively. It is ever expanding, disobedient. Defiant. It can be articulated through speculations and imaginations, but it resists captivation, formation, logic, and definition. **NON** is excess both of presence and of absence. It is an excess of transience. Of impermanence. And, because it is no/one/thing, any/one/thing, and every/one/thing,

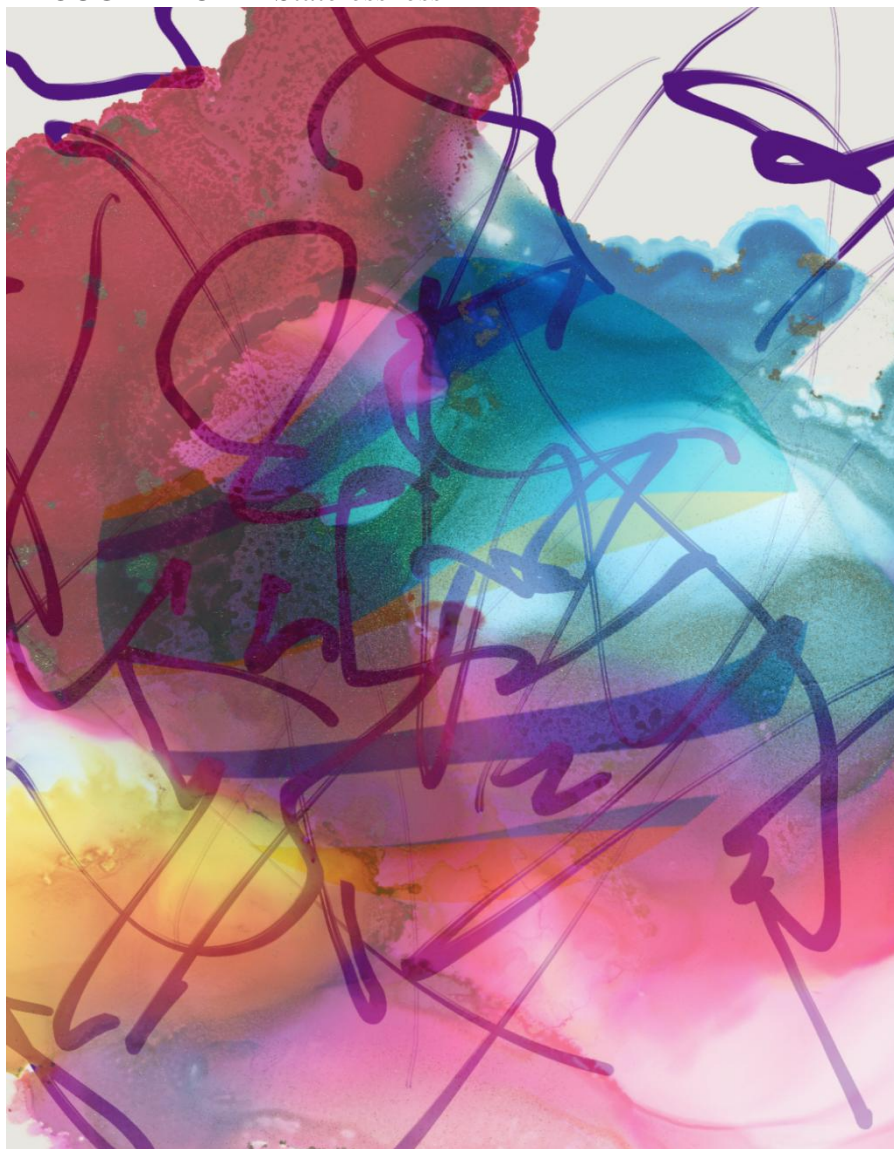
These reflections are personal learnings, that at the first read or upon several reads implicate freedom, ideas of self, and decolonial ontologies with “returning to the self” clichés to demonstrate a reclaiming process, but, once stripped of the initial icks and urges to categorize them as **non-sensical**, they reveal resonances of freedom through a re/connection with non. *Non*, here, is constantly affecting between nothing, something, and anything. It never be/comes, but it is always be/coming. It is excess that resists to be contained. The event of non requires us to resituate freedom, not as a state, but as a continuation, a free/dom/ing through which, in which, for which we are always in motion, never static. Motion, here, does not refer to capitalist, ableist ideas of moving forward or moving through, but the very sparks of speculation and inspiration that are buried by colonial logics and wrath. The sparks that rise when a janky, unexpected thing happens.

### The Dilemma:

As I compile these notes to make tangible the idea of non, I find myself in a conundrum to choose. Do I express my new-found insight of free/dom/ing in a way, through words, that others can relate to, resonate with, re-sound through, affect with, or do I release myself from language, free myself from rules of communication, and yet, speak to the free/dom/ing within us. So, then, I ask myself, can I communicate the processuality of free/dom/ing from my colonial genesis in ways that can be non-colonial? Can I re-ontologize my experience of self and therefore the world? I come up with something insufficient and inefficient. But here I am, trying against my colonial will to communicate the non-s. When I sit to edit some of the notes to submit for the call, the fear of writing something that does not fit directly to the call, that isn’t obedient but does contribute takes over. It is writing that is simple, vulnerable, and non-academic. It is lurking around the idea of freedom as a social justice rhetoric by proposing that for me, decolonizing myself, re-ontologizing myself to the world, changing the ways in which I currently, colonially relate through identities and identifications, must happen first before I can truly experience freedom, and create spaces of collective freedom. This does not mean a withdrawal from support, solidarity, or fighting capitalist logics of justifying violence, genocide, discrimination. It means, to be open to the non-s through the work we/I do, to gesture towards a decolonial future, where there is a possibility to experience non – [\_\_\_\_\_]. Of living defiantly. fluidly, be/coming non-containable, non-governable, non-suppressible. Non reclaims freedom because it resists. It defies. It refuses.



## THOUGHT ACT 2- Statelessness



March 23,

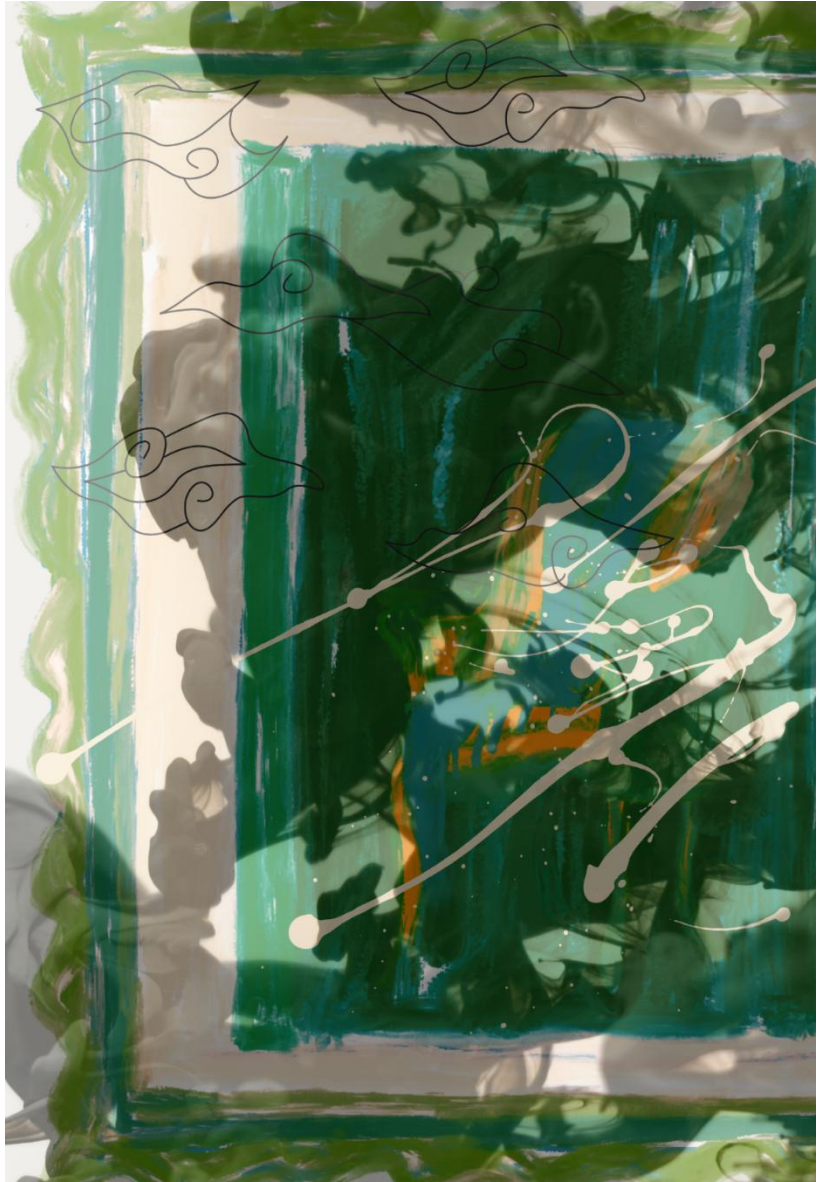
2023. Passport renewal application rejected. I am no longer, in a span of seconds, part of the world. I cannot continue education in Canada. I must withdraw from my studies. Leave the country. Go back. But how? I stay without documents, laying low. For months. Sweats. Nightmares. Fear. Guilt. Shame. Nothing to do. No earning. I withdraw from life. See less people. Sirens freak me out. Rapid, shallow, improper breathing. Fainting. Again. I am no/one/thing. Yet. Yet, I feel free. Sparks of connection and relation to the world, beyond human, in ways I have not felt. I relate to the humanness of people. I am free to be... to do the work that got pushed away due to degree-based commitments.

thought act 3 - My Father dies.

November 12, 2023. Leukemia. Dialysis. Ventilator. Blood bottles. A dance between consciousness and unconsciousness. A decision made to take him off life support. Made in 30 seconds. Unbelievable. He is gone. But my love for him is here, overflowing.

In excess. How to contain it? He visits my dreams. I am in deep shock. Who am I? How can I make the decision to take away someone's life? Panic attack. Tears running down, uncontrollably.

Life as I have known to be is gone. He didn't know some of my truths. I will never have a chance to tell them. As I sign papers for his release, he is lying there, dead. But it feels like he is looking at me. Calling me. His body jerks. I call the nurse. He tells me that it was a muscle spasm. Last of life that was left in him is gone. He gives me



a nod. Overwhelmed, sad, not knowing who I will be now, I experience non again. This time, I understand the “yet” of things. The yet to be. There is freedom in it. From hate, anger, rage, from how we relate to ourselves and others. My need to blame myself and the doctors for his death is gone, just like he is, in 30 seconds. I am yet to be \_\_\_\_\_, and that is free/dom/ing. I cry freely. For he is gone.



Thought Act  
1 —

Concussant.  
January 29,  
2023.

Tumbling  
down through  
15 stairs.  
Injury. Ears  
ringing. Guts  
nauseating.

Not  
remembering  
words. Heat  
flashes. Head  
throbs. Non-  
linear, rapid  
breathing.

Shivering.  
Unable to  
stand up.  
Don't know  
who I am. I  
am nothing.

OR  
ANYthing.  
Pupils  
dilated.

Cannot stop  
crying. Panic  
attack.

Emergence of  
non for the  
first time. Just  
a glimpse.  
Feeling calm.

Liberated.  
Free I  
understand,  
later that day  
in a dream

that to be/come free from anything, we must first experience this state of fluidity, nothingness.



## **Acknowledgments**

Papa, I hope my musings bring a smile to you, wherever you are, I hope we can always keep talking.

## **Author Biography**

Vishwaveda, an anthropologist in the making, is currently a practitioner of unfinished, the not-yet, dancing in-between disciplines, titles, and roles. Having recently finished licensing as an expressive arts therapy practitioner, she is currently contemplating pedagogical experiments using collage-making as a mode of thinking and feeling otherwise. Drawing on theories of affect, decolonial thought, and relational aesthetics, she seeks to reimagine ethnographic writing as a space for tenderness, opacity, and transformation. She aims to move towards practice that refuses containment, unfolding across care work, critical inquiry, and poetic experimentation within the disciplines of anthropology and art therapy.