Interno // Ep 3: Sara Morawetz

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[Excerpt]

Sara Morawetz *My relationship with Australia is a complex one. It is home and yet no longer home at the same time. And I miss it desperately. I miss the light and the colour and the texture. I miss the landscape and the people and the way in which I guess I automatically understand cultural structures and signifiers in a way that they mystify me here.*

Mariam Arcilla You're listening to Interno, a podcast profiling artists who are recalibrating their internal lives and perspectives of home longing and connection during the global pandemic, as well as the ideas that amplify artistic value and social duty in times of flux. I'm your host, Mariam Arcilla, and I'm privileged to create Interno on the unceded lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation.

My guests for episode 3 is Sara Morawetz, an Australian-born American-based artist, investigator and method maker. Sara explores the emotional and psychogeographical forces behind scientific action and systems. Using her body as an apparatus and an archive, her performance-driven and interdisciplinary work unravels the processes of methodological labour. Sara surveys the exhaustive, the obsessive, the poetic and the absurd inherent within the realm of science.

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Now based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Sara was living in New York for almost seven years, and this was where she contracted coronavirus in April 2020. In this episode, we discuss what it's like to survive this virus while living in a megacity that is constantly rearranging its civic behaviors. We also talk about the importance of university arts degrees and the benefits of collaborating with people from other fields, like NASA scientists.

We zoom in on two of her pivotal works 'How The Stars Stand' which required the artist live and sleep according to time on planet Mars, and 'étalon', a monumental performance that saw Sara recreate her own metre, step by step, starting from Dunkirk and ending at Barcelona — a feat that took almost four months. My conversation with Sara takes place on the 4th of July, while she was still living in New York. So I'll preface this by saying you might hear some street fireworks in the background. Interno is made possible with support from the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane. We hope you enjoy this episode.

Mariam Arcilla Sara, thank you for joining me on Interno.

Sara Morawetz Thank you for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

Mariam Arcilla Today is the fourth of July, which is Independence Day in the United States of America. Before we dive in, I just wanted to check in to see where you're at at this present moment?

Sara Morawetz I am currently in my apartment in Brooklyn, in New York.

Mariam Arcilla And what does the energy feel like over there, with the recent events that have happened! Like does this Independence Day feel different to other years?

Sara Morawetz This Independence Day, I would have to say, is remarkably different to any other that I've had here over the years. There are no real sort of signs of festivities. There are usually street parties — an atmosphere in the city of everybody going outside and really enjoying the summer. Of course, there's people still doing things. But it's definitely a different approach within the city itself and recognizing how much the city's going through, and is still going through, and how cautious we have to be about being in groups together.

Mariam Arcilla And this is something that you were conscientious about from the start, because New York was fast becoming a pandemic hot spot. In early April, you and your husband Darren Engwirda tested positive for COVID-19. What was it like to live with and survive the virus?

Sara Morawetz We were in that first wave that came through New York. It was really serious. I was very ill. I've never been that ill in my life. You know, it was quite frightening to have breathing difficulties and to sort of be lying down gasping for air. The hospitals were absolutely over-run. We didn't want to call an ambulance if we didn't have to. But the doctors had warned us if we got worse, that would be the next call. I guess the reality is, had we been in Australia, we would have absolutely gone

to hospital. The situation of the circumstances here meant we have to try and just do our best and look after ourselves.

Mariam Arcilla Prior to contracting coronavirus, what were the precautions that you were initially taking to avoid contamination?

Sara Morawetz We did all of the things that you were supposed to do, quote unquote. We socially distanced. We were going to the supermarket wearing gloves. We had clothes that we only wore outside. We were washing all of our produce in the bathtub when it came in. We were furiously washing our hands and we still got sick. It's an illness that is highly contagious. Anyone can get it. Seeing the caskets being stored on Heart Island—they dug a mass grave because there were literally thousands of people dying ccr the city every day—they just had no way to store the bodies. They were keeping them in refrigerated vans. No one could have funerals because they were doing them via Zoom. There was that moment of: I was sick and I was watching this, recognizing the line between where I was and those scenes. I don't have a will or a funeral plan. I have to reconcile if something happened to me. How do I process that? I'm far from family and lots of loved ones.

Mariam Arcilla Well, I'm glad to know you're feeling much better now.

Sara Morawetz I am. I'm very glad I'm feeling better as well. It was a huge relief when things started to improve.

Mariam Arcilla In what ways do you think this pandemic has played a role in exposing the underlying inequalities of our current society?

Yeah, I think just the year as a whole has been kind of remarkable in this regard. It's been really hard to keep your spirits up, when you think of the bushfires in Australia, then there was COVID. There's the video of George Floyd, then the story of Breonna Taylor, and Black Lives Matter. And just...Trump as an ongoing denominator in all U.S. activities. Looking at how those enormous moments of 2020 have illustrated the structural inequities that we've been living with and the sort of illogical undercurrents that underpin everyday life in this moment in time. They've always been there. They've always existed. But I think that COVID in particular has stripped bare some of those sorts of ways in which they've failed. And it's pulled into focus how we were going through all of these things together, but how our experience of those things are different for each of us.

Mariam Arcilla Can you elucidate these differences that you've noticed? For example, how did New York people respond to the outbreak?

Sara Morawetz Big sections of New York actually left the city, so, you know, in Manhattan, in the wealthier neighborhoods, they fled town as soon as the pandemic hit, going to houses in the country and actually spreading the virus across the country as well. At the other end of the spectrum, there was so, so much more suffering. I mean, the people that had to stay, who had to work, had to get the subway...they were more likely to be exposed. They were more likely to lose their

jobs. They were more likely to be evicted. The way in which COVID has sort of lifted that veil...you go okay, not only are they more likely to be affected by the virus due to the nature of their work or the amount that they have to travel to get work, and their interactions, that they have to perform as part of their job, which is also now deemed an essential service—not that they're paid as an essential service, but that they're considered an essential service—they're also more likely to have suffered the long-term effects. And that they're more likely to have repercussions that they can't deal with long-term. Seeing that kind of play out on a mass scale has been really alarming and sort of, you know, aside from the very personal effects of being ill myself and how hard that was to deal with, I think I've been more alarmed at sort of witnessing where that kind of social network isn't available, how people slip through the cracks or aren't taken care of. And it's alarming to then see how the same narrative is being introduced into the way Australia thinks about this.

Mariam Arcilla Exactly. This disparity between privileged and marginalized people in Australia is ever-present. For instance, we've seen what happened with the police rolling out militia-like quarantine rules for the 3000 residents in Melbourne's public housing complex. And I understand there was an urgency to contain the spread, but it just sounded like the initial rollout deprioritized the urgent needs of these residents, which was food, medical counseling and work compensation. That came later in light of community pressure.

Sara Morawetz I saw it on the news. That's crazy. I can't believe that that's the approach that's being taken. I mean, you can't sort of segregate in that way and assume that a sector of the community is more responsible than another. I outright reject that as a concept, particularly as someone who has been in New York through the epicenter of the pandemic.

I think I heard someone say, 'Oh, we're all in this...we're all in the same boat. We're all in this together.' And I was like, no, we're all in the same storm, but we're in very different boats. And sort of really taking this moment to acknowledge that and going, okay we could all be weathering this and we can all relate to the storm around us. But the chaos of being on this little vessel on your own and its particularities, and how you recognise the things that are hard for you, but the privileges that come with that, have defined this moment for me.

Mariam Arcilla Exactly. It's like using these slivers of relatability as learning moments. Here, plenty of Australians are currently stuck in hotel quarantine for 14 days. And reports have shown that confining these people in cramped spaces with disconnection from the outside world leads to psychological strain and trauma, unsurprisingly. But, you know, try spending seven years trapped in Manus Island and see how much your mental and physical state deteriorates by then. So the hope is that, through these comparative analogies, that many of us in privileged positions have placed ourselves in, we can temporarily enter the mindset of what we have done as a society to marginalized people for centuries. And from there, we can hopefully elevate our civic duty by continuing to talk about these dark spots in Australia's history, and making tangible actions that truly fix social injustice.

Sara Morawetz Totally. I'm thinking of the extremes of all these situations, where how people, just through the smallest inconveniences to their lives, have hopefully maybe recognised, alright, we allow these things to continue in much more aggressive and damaging ways for a whole range of people to support that life. We need to actually do the work on all of these other issues. And sort of address how those instances are actually applied to people that we try and forget, or try and ignore because it's inconvenient or we don't want to deal with the reality.

Mariam Arcilla Well, speaking of finding ways to draw attention to these kinds of realities, you've been balancing social distancing with social activism, particularly because you live in Clinton Hill near Barclays Centre, where a majority of the Black Lives Matter protests happened. You're immunocompromised as you're still in recovery, but you also wanted to be involved in protests because of your stance on human rights and even your Facebook profile photo, I see, is a motto that says 'Question Authority.' Why is it important for you to be an ally out on the streets in this climate?

Sara Morawetz Protest became necessary. It became absolutely indispensable way of communicating the feelings, the raw emotion of what had been seen: instances of horrific racism, as there so often are, but I think juxtaposed against COVID, in the silence of COVID, in that sort of...that moment where everyone was at home and everyone had a little bit of distance from their regular lives, these instances were amplified. And you couldn't really sort of be on the sidelines of this. I had to be there and advocate for people who had been treated so poorly by the systems of power that govern this city and govern the state and govern this country — and be a body that stands and says, no, this isn't right and we need to change. When you see what's being done and see how the administration responded, there was just this need to, frankly, stand against racism and that outweighed the risks.

Mariam Arcilla You and your husband, Darren have been living in America for almost 7 years now, having relocated from Australia to New York City so that Darren could work at the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies. What does he do exactly?

Sara Morawetz So Darren is a computational mathematician. He works on their ocean model for climate change research. So, the NASA office in New York is specifically geared towards planetary sciences. And as part of that, they work on delivering predictions about how the climate is going, which is another fun topic of discussion that's kind of being pushed to the side this year.

Mariam Arcilla Yeah, totally [laughs]. Actually, did you see this meme from a short while ago? It was: 'Climate change should really hire the PR rep for coronavirus.'

Sara Morawetz It absolutely should, it could use all the help it could get, honestly.

Mariam Arcilla Because I've actually wondered if the quarantine issues adjacent to coronavirus have benefited any current studies by climate change scientists — or climate *crisis* scientists. Because we're seeing low carbon emissions, because

people aren't traveling the world by air and cruise ships as much anymore. And the virus and economic collapse have kept people inside, which leads to decreased pollution rates in congested cities and cleaner skies and oceans. Does this rare event mean scientists like your husband can analyze their data more concretely?

Sara Morawetz The work he mainly does is predictive, with creating a model and predicting the future. But we have talked about the fact it's like the sky in New York since coronavirus has been clearer. The air has been better. And yes, the large scale impacts of what that will do to the climate — there's a lot of unknowns — but I definitely think there's a lot of interesting research that's being explored. Whether this will have enough of a lasting impact or not, I'm not sure. Depends on if we go back to normal, whatever normal is [laughs].

Mariam Arcilla Every time we talk about a new normal, there seems to be a new normal that comes around the corner to throw everyone off. So I don't even know what a new normal is nowadays.

Sara Morawetz Totally.

Mariam Arcilla I'd like to talk about the synergy's of art and science in terms of your marriage next. We know that art and science have been interlinked for centuries, but in terms of your union, how does Darren's research inform you as an artist? And how have your creative-led methodologies affected the way that he views his work through a phenomenological lens?

Sara Morawetz Art and science are obviously big topics for us. They kind of make up the fabric of day to day life. They are interchangeable. We move from one to the other without really thinking about where those divides are. Maybe more than anything, our partnership or in our lives and through our collaboration and my work have led me to sort of really recognise that the boundaries are much more blurry than we allow ourselves to believe, and that there is a huge creative process that drives both disciplines. And we both approach a problem and sort of try and view it from multiple perspectives and work our way through it to achieve an outcome. I am specifically driven by the sort of philosophical investigations that have shaped science, specifically looking at what science is and how science operates. So what are these methods that make science science, essentially? Darren is integral to that. While he's involved in quite specific technical aspects of my work as well, the most value, I think, is in understanding how experiments work and operate in the field. As an artist, then I'm sort of trying to interpret those and give them physicality and texture and lived experience. How can I make this idea of the scientific experiment visible? And so having him at home...very useful [laughs].

[Interlude music]

Mariam Arcilla Let's look to the skies next and revisit your 2015 performance, How the Stars Stand. In this durational and acclimatizing work, you take up residency at Open Source Gallery in Brooklyn, and you live and perform according to daily time

on the planet Mars. Which is similar to the length of an Earth day, but with an additional 39 minutes and 35 seconds, which equates to...

Sara Morawetz 2.7 % longer day than on Earth.

Mariam Arcilla And I read somewhere that it wasn't noticeable for you at first. But the more you're adding incremental minutes into your day to align with Mars time or Sol time, the more you're drifting away from an Earthling's timeline into a Martian rhythm. And so you were eventually performing days that saw you waking up and having breakfast at 7 or 8pm and starting your day at a time when people were winding down to go to sleep. And you eventually fell out of sync with our planet and fully adapted to Sol time by the 37th day. Humans are, by nature, heliocentric beings. We live according to the rhythms of the sun — Australia being a prime example of this. What is it like to remove yourself from that lived experience of Earth and abide by a living schedule that nobody else around you was following?

Sara Morawetz It catches you quite slowly. So, you know, at first it's just a little shift, a little moment where you notice that the church bell that was ringing at 6:00 is suddenly ringing at 5:20, then 4:40, then 4:00...and it just moves through the day. And the first week or so didn't feel particularly odd, and then there's a point around day 11 or 12, where suddenly things started to get weird. You recognise that your morning ritual was out of step with everybody else's. Like you were trying to get coffee when everyone else was going out to dinner and you were having breakfast at these sort of old times. Or you were trying to buy a beer and it's 9:00 in the morning and people are looking at you like you have a problem. The more you explain, the more you're like, no no no know it's 7:00pm for me, I'm living on time and Mars time, then they definitely are not going to serve you alcohol [laughs].

Mariam Arcilla So what were the caveats that informed your schedule? And what placeholders did you provide to people that you were talking to who were still running on Earth time?

Sara Morawetz Yes, so the way it worked was that I lived and worked from the gallery. I was allowed to leave, but I could only leave according to — and do things according to — time on Mars. So I could go meet friends, but they had to go have a meal with me based on my time schedules. So now we'd have to go to a 24 hour diner and get breakfast, or they'd have to come have a burger with me at 6:00 am or whatever it was. It took a little...it took a moment for them to sort of understand the process that was happening, that time was shifting for me. And I was experiencing time differently to them. But once they sort of recognised the structure, or that the structure was different, they wanted to kind of come along.

And so there were those mechanisms to do that online through social media. But also [they were] coming into the gallery asking 'What time is it for you now?' 'What are you up to?' 'Like, where are you in your day?' And sort of that dissonance between where they were and where I was, was really lovely. And those kinds of communications links, that sort of interaction was the highlight of the work.

Mariam Arcilla And how did you work with NASA to realize these ideas into a fully-formed project?

Sara Morawetz I worked with my husband on this and a scientist called Michael Allison, who was actually one of the originators of the Mars 24 clock. He essentially made time for Mars. And I used the Mars 24 algorithm to sort of dictate my time. And the idea for the project was that I would live by Mars time for as long as it took for my day to fall out of sync. Which is to completely invert and then to return to synchronicity. So that was 37 Earth days, 36 Martian Sol.

Mariam Arcilla What is it about the Mars timeline that captivates you? How did you stumble upon this timeline in the first place?

Sara Morawetz I guess the way I discovered Mars time was in conversation with Michael Allison. We'd met to just talk about the philosophy of time in general. He's a wonderful man who is not only an incredible scientist, but also interested in science fiction and I guess in that role in which science adapts to the art. So he was very open and capable of sort of describing his research in a way that would briefly intrigued me and sort of explain it with the [Mars] Rover Curiosity opportunity being operated by scientists here on Earth. They have to be awake when [Mars] has sunlight. So that means getting up at 2:00am or 3:00am, whatever time it is on Mars — that's their time. And it sort of is like that moment of awakening, like sort of the mind expansion moment of like, ok, I didn't understand time before now. I thought I understood time because, you know...it's time — we all use it everyday. It's recognizing that this group of scientists use it every time that they're operating the Rover. So every time a new Rover goes up, there's a crew that has to live according to this time. And so I was interacting with a couple of them whilst doing the project via Twitter, sort of having conversations saying 'What solar are you up to?' 'Where are you in your cycle?' 'Because I will know how crazy you are getting right now.' Because they know that all of the NASA scientists actually, when they describe the experience the emotional space for them is not dissimilar. The only difference, I guess, was that they weren't living in a gallery. I was purely experiencing this alternate time.

Mariam Arcilla Sounds like an interstellar jet lag! So how did this emotional space affect you?

Sara Morawetz It...was...emotionally and psychologically traumatic [laughs]. It's a really disorienting thing in some weird way. It did shape my world around these specific parameters that dictated my life regardless of what else was going on around me. My work has, on a whole, always prepared me for concepts of duration and endurance. And I'm continually drawn back to these structural methodologies.

Mariam Arcilla I suppose all your previous methodologies have led you to, and prepared you for, your epic collaborative walking performance in late 2013 called 'étalon'. In this psychogeography project, you walked by foot for 2000 kilometers across 112 days from Dunkirk in France to Barcelona in Spain. During this time, you were accompanied by 11 women who walked different parts of this journey with you

across the landscape. Before we discuss the mechanics of your work, I'd like to play an excerpt from a personal essay written by one of your étalon walking partners, artswriter Sharne Wolff:

Sharne Wolff An excerpt from the essay. 'Walking and Measuring - Sara Morawetz' narrated by the author, Sharne Wolff:

Eleven female colleagues – one of whom walked for three weeks – were organised to accompany the artist each week of a total 14 walking weeks. Mostly artists and writers, the women participants of these weekly walking partnerships acquired varying levels of knowledge about the history of the original journey as a means of measuring the earth's circumference.

By volunteering to walk with the artist many of these women experienced durational walking, the effects of the physical challenge in walking each distance (generally in excess of 100 kilometres over six days),
and time lived through the pace of walking for the first time.

Individually, their experience heralded a broad range of insights – in one case spanning from 'the border between two countries is invisible'
and 'walking is an art and that there is an art to walking'
to 'the importance of a good pair of socks' as quoted by Stephanie Brotchie to the author.

While on one hand the women were students of the performance, their participatory action as equal and necessary walking partners – which included assisting with the practical matters of accommodation, directions, food preparation and portage, to taking photographic images of the artist in situ and assisting with the two-person task of setting up the target on a daily basis – acknowledges their additional role as co-producers of the work.

Sara Morawetz So nice to hear her voice!

Mariam Arcilla Same, I haven't seen Sharne since before COVID. I asked her to record these words on her iphone so that I could play this for you as a surprise. She emailed this Voice Memo to me.

Sara Morawetz I love Sharne so much...

Mariam Arcilla Yeah I think she's in Sydney this weekend.

Sara Morawetz Give her an elbow bump when you see her.

Mariam Arcilla I will do.

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Mariam Arcilla I'd like to know how this project transformed you. You know, the way that you measure time and space and the way you negotiated this collaboration with people throughout various legs of your walking journey, and the collective labor and companionship and frustration and exhaustion and little triumphs that you've had together along the way. Firstly, can you talk about the impetus for ‘étalon’? And what were the enduring moments that you took away from this experience?

Sara Morawetz So, I should never say never. But I'm not sure I will ever have an experience quite like ‘étalon’again. I was such a remarkable project. It was a dream project and I was just so fortunate to get to share with these incredible people who gave so much for themselves, physically and mentally and emotionally, to making it happen. They are family now and they're really important women who are incredible in their own right and make brilliant work. It was the dream project that I never imagined I would actually get to make.

I was doing my PHD research trying to understand the structures that underpin the way in which we measure up. Why is a day 24 hours long? Why is a meter the length that it is? And I was sitting at this very table in my apartment in Brooklyn reading a book about the history of the metre, when I realized that the metre was a length that was determined by two French astronomers that traveled between Dunkirk and Barcelona to measure the curvature of the Earth and to determine the Earth size basically for the first time to get a really proper understanding. So it was the first sort of large-scale survey of that nature. And by measuring this distance, which is 10 degrees of latitude, they were able to work out what 1 ten millionth of length from the North Pole to the equator would be. So 110 millionth for a quadrant of the earth. And that is basically what the length of the metre remains to be, to this day. There's small tweaks to it, but that's how it was formed.

And similarly with 'How The Stars Stand' and learning about Mars time, realizing that the metre was this object that's relational to my body is relational to the size of the planet...blew my mind. And I literally had my typewriter on my desk, hilariously, and I sat and I just wrote a score for the work. And basically, as it occurred, that I would go from Dunkirk to Barcelona and measure the Earth to create my own metre. I was very fortunate to receive funding from the Vida Lahey Memorial Travelling Scholarship from GoMA [Gallery of Modern Art] in Brisbane and from the Australia Council to make this crazy thing happen.

And realizing that, you know, if you want to measure the curvature of the Earth, it becomes very realistic: How do you make this happen? What are the logistics of bringing this into being? It was a project that would require not only just my physical labor, but assistance. And like, how do you structure that assistance to make the project? What are the conditions or parameters that you want to sort of build into the work in order to do the measurements, the scientific measurements that we were doing to measure the Earth each day? In the project, you had to have a laser range finder and a target that could measure distance, and use that data and with the length of that distance to G.P.S. points. Darren, my husband could do some calculations and work out the size of the Earth. And from that, we could then determine the length of my metre. And we did that every day of the project to then

average all that data out to work out a specific length. Practically, I needed two people to be able to take these measurements, but also the idea that a metre is a length between two points that you're always sort of talking between two points. And it's that space between those two points that makes the object that makes the thing.

Mariam Arcilla Like a third space or heterotopic space?

Sara Morawetz Yeah! I love the idea that it would become a relay, a conversation. The only person that would witness the entirety of the performance would be me. But there would be these vignettes that were sustained by other people that came along with the journey and knowledge and the way that that would pass through.

Mariam Arcilla And why did you call it ‘étalon’?

Sara Morawetz The word étalon, in French, means a standard of measure and stallion or male horse and etymological. I was really obsessed with the idea that it was this incredibly masculine trait that, you know, the idea of the scientific expedition that was masculine, that there were two male scientists who undertook this incredible act of discovery. And I wanted to embed that idea of having female artists accompanying these came through that discovery process. So I did a call-out. I was essentially asking people through social media, ‘hey, if I were to do this crazy walk across France, would anyone be interested in joining me’? And I had a couple of people who I was really hoping would be on board, but obviously knew it was a huge undertaking. Can you do it? Getting there, and fitting it into your own schedule, and the actual labor of it? Remarkably, a lot of people said yes. It was incredible and humbling. Each person contributed so much to that experience. And so having now had the time to sort of personally recover and sort of remove myself from the really intense emotional space that I have to get into to do the duration of the work, to kind of return to each of them and have conversations about it and have those sort of moments to work through what it meant to them in the aftermath. Because it was a strange experience.

Sara Morawetz Each week we would transition over and there'd be this moment where I'd been walking with someone for a week...and you developed an incredible bond of understanding of how you walk together, work together. And then this moment with the next person arrives and I have to sort of uncouple my attention from one person and invest it in the new walker. And there'd be this moment where I looked at them and I knew it's coming, like I was trying to prepare them a few days in advanced, like the day before we started, I started talking about endings, letting go, and trying to wind the experience down and sort of like talk through the emotion of it,. But sort of knowing that people weren't really understanding why I was doing that.

Mariam Arcilla Well, I can imagine it would be this hyper sensitized thing to enter or exit a co-dependent lived experience that's like a marathon, where you share your walking life with these women who in turn become subsumed into your performance. And as they measure the metre, you measure your relationship to them. And at the

end of Journey A, you have to say goodbye because you need to continue to B with the next participant. So how do you even reset for this kind of intensity?

Sara Morawetz Yeah, and I tried to put in structures and like some of those were invisible structures and some of them were quite obvious, like handing over equipment to the next participant and giving them time to talk through the process. I still remember the look at each person's eyes, like when I kind of transitioned to starting to plan the next person. And I feel it was palpable for me and it'd be interesting to see how they feel about it in the aftermath.

Mariam Arcilla I'd like to know that dynamic that you had with these participants. I know that Sharne is a big walker who has walked the El Camino, but I'm unfamiliar with how you connected with the other walkers. Did you know them beforehand?

Sara Morawetz Some people I knew very well, some people I didn't I hadn't actually met at all. It was really only online communication. Stephanie [Brotchie] had actually contacted me online, having followed the project and said, 'hey, can I come and do a week?' And it just worked out that she could, and it was incredible. She's amazing to willingly contact someone online and say, 'hey, I'll meet you in rural France and let's go walking for a week'. It was really incredible that she did that.

Mariam Arcilla So what were the defining moments about this journey for you?

Sara Morawetz There are a lot of things that I really loved about this project. One of them was that every week, regardless of people's experience or relationship of walking or performance, there were moments [where] there was an arc of experience where everyone felt a little nervous. Then they felt they really enjoyed it and felt comfortable. Then they found it incredibly hard. The third day was always tough for everybody just because of the intensity of it. And then everybody rallied. Like the fourth, fifth and sixth day, they had remarkable strength of both character and endurance. And it was really wonderful to see people recognise how much they could do, and how capable they were and how resilient they were, regardless of whether they thought they could make the distance. Everybody did. And hearing stories now about people who have gone on to do other hikes and other things, that's amazing to recognise that they recognise this is something they can absolutely do themselves.

Mariam Arcilla Yeah. And incorporating these transformative moments into their own lives.

Sara Morawetz Right. You know, and that's all on them. But it was really wonderful to witness that as a person, as a friend, and as a facilitator of this experience. And that's a very intimate thing that you may not know from seeing the work or the outcomes of it. But that's really special.

Mariam Arcilla I liked that you were still able to relay that intimacy, even though you were physically far away from people who were following your journey online throughout your book. You brought along a jumble of equipment that enabled you to

not only measure data accurately, but to also diarise your progress. And I remember following your journey until the last day, when you finally approached your destination in Spain at the 112th day, and your face was a mixture of fatigue and sorrow and triumph. And it was real and vibrational. Take me back to that last day of ‘étalon’. What did that feel like?

Sara Morawetz It was incredibly bittersweet. I was really, really sad that it was over. Like, I think there was this weird transition of, like trying to get across the border. Finishing France was a real super emotional moment. And then Spain felt like this...I was very, very emotional about it, that I realized that I had achieved the thing that was going to end. And thinking about endings. And thinking about completing something. I realized, at that point, that my body was really starting to hurt in a way that it hadn't. Up till then, it obviously hurt. There were multiple emotional outbursts of pain and suffering, don't worry [laughs], I wasn't a machine. But there was a point where my body adapted and I was feeling quite strong and capable that I think I started recognizing, ohhh my hip is really hurting or my knee is giving me a bit more grief. But at the same time, I also went, huh, that's 2,000 kilometres. Okay, let's do 3,000. There was sort of that recognition. This is what my life looks like now. You get so used to the internal rhythm and the practice of doing it, the ritual of doing it. And walking into Barcelona into a large city, everything fell flat and disconnected. I realized I hadn't been in a large city for months in quite that size and that scale. And it was raining. For a few days in the whole project, it rained.

Mariam Arcilla It's almost as if your mind and body tremors as it absorbs the vulgarity of urban noise and megacity bustle. You have undergone such an intensely introspective and solitary rhythm of endurance within these outskirts.

Sara Morawetz Yeah yeah yeah. All the emotion all at once. It felt like a really surreal dreamscape. It didn't feel real that it would end. And then I just wanted to get up the next day and walk again.

Mariam Arcilla So what did you do the next day after the project ended?

Sara Morawetz I spent a day or two in Barcelona and then I got on a train back to Paris because I actually wanted to witness the route a little bit. I didn't want to get off of the flight and I felt angry. I felt angry that I wasn't walking. I felt angry that I didn't know what that particular road that I saw along the rail line felt like on the foot. I didn't know the texture of things, and the speed, the noise. Everything felt magnified and unnecessary. And I think it was very it was very beautiful experience to come back to New York, particularly at the beginning of winter and returned to the small apartment and these kind of confined spaces — after being truly outdoors and walking through nature and contemplating that kind of relationship with distance and with time, in a very different way.

Mariam Arcilla Well, time and distance will look very different to you soon! You and Darren are off to a new adventure where you will be leaving New York for a new life at Sante Fe in a couple of weeks. What's in store for you there?

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Sara Morawetz Yes, so we've been in New York nearly seven years now, which has gone really, really quickly. We love the city, we'll always love the city. But we were ready to have a bit of a change. I think I've changed a lot since ‘étalon’. I desperately want to be outside more. I want open space. I want to be able to walk. And my work, I think, as it continues to evolve, requires time outside of space to be outside. New York offers many things, but particularly at this current moment, space outside is not one of them.

Mariam Arcilla And you're going to be living in an actual house now.

Sara Morawetz Yeah, we're changing over from living from a one bedroom apartment to a house, which would be a nice transition. And I will have a studio for the first time in my life.

Mariam Arcilla Oh wow.

Sara Morawetz It's going to be a really amazing new development for my work and my practice moving forward that I have a dedicated space that I come back from and in, and sort of return to again and again. Instead of working under the dining room table, lounge room area.

Mariam Arcilla With everything that has happened to you abroad and all these new adventures ahead of you, what does home longing and connection mean to you as an Australian person?

Sara Morawetz My relationship with Australia is a complex one. It is home and yet no longer home at the same time. And I miss it desperately. I miss the light and the color and the texture. I miss the landscape and the people and the way in which I guess I automatically understand cultural structures and signifiers in a way that they mystify me here. I understand what's happening because it is of me. But being away, I hope, has made me appreciate it more. But also question it. Isn't Australian society doing its best to uphold the values that I believe are core to the country I grew up in? I would argue that at times we're failing ourselves. It's difficult to be a part of that change from abroad, but also recognizing that there will come a time and a place where I will hopefully re-enter that dialogue and sort of have a stronger voice or a stronger opinion.

Mariam Arcilla Well, let's re-enter that dialogue for the moment. You graduated from a fine arts degree at Sydney College of the Arts. Right now, you would have read that the Australian government is doubling the fees for humanities and arts degrees at universities. And there was a recent article in The Guardian that asked Australians to submit their answers to the question: where did your degree take you?

And many people responded. One said that their degree took them into journalism and TV. Another went on to become an archeologist. Some say that even though their arts degree or humanity degrees don't equate to the current job, they have, their time at uni enabled them to question things and to think in a boundless way. I was working with an engineer once, and I remember he told me he was lamenting the

fact that he didn't take the arts courses that were an offer to him at uni. He studied engineering because he wanted to help build structures and elements. And he knew how to instructionally build something, but he didn't know how to inject emotionality into them. You know, buildings have skin. They have a heart and soul. And he regretted not learning how to artistically inhabit a space.

Sara Morawetz Yeah. Well, I think, interestingly, all of the work that I've done collaborating with scientists over the years and meeting scientists at the top of the field, the ones that are truly generating new knowledge are the ones that are incredibly creative. And, you know, they enjoy speaking to artists. And they enjoy working with artists and talking to others because it's about that creation of new knowledge. And it's about a method of thinking. Devaluing the contribution that artists make in that field of thinking more broadly is a total disservice to Australia and Australian culture, not just in the art that's produced or the theater or the films. It's actually how we think and talk collectively, and you know, how those conversations go outside the creative industries to other disciplines. Because to be an incredible engineer, you have to be creative. To be an incredible scientist, you have to be creative. That's a common denominator to be the best in almost any field. So the idea that if you're teaching creative thinkers, they may go on to run businesses or become teachers or do other things. So to sort of sit outside the surface level of what we think artists offer is short-sighted and doesn't really understand how all of these things integrate society better.

Mariam Arcilla Yeah, I agree. And through my own arts degree, I hope I've been able to contribute to society as a writer, producer, gallerist and collaborator. But this path also led me to work in the design and tech sector for five years on human-centric projects that improved cities and transportation. And my arts degree taught me how to connect artists as scientists and architects so that they can invent things that defy genres. I would not have come to these conclusions if I did not do an arts degree. So I have witnessed and benefited from the transformative and immeasurable experience an arts degree has provided to me. And I wanted to reflect on this moment, especially since the creative sector in Australia continues to take these blows... I'd like to know, Sara, where did your degree take you?

Sara Morawetz It took me on this very long walk across France. It took me to Mars and back. It's taken me on this lifelong journey to document leap seconds. [At] Sydney College of the Arts — I'm doing my PHD there slowly but surely at the moment — but as an undergrad, I still remember my first sitting in the meeting room when they introduced us to the structure and the formality of the school. And they said, ‘If you want to learn technical skills, you should probably exit out the door. Now we're here to teach you how to think.’ And at that moment, I knew I was in the right place. Technical skills might be handy as things get tougher, but I can definitely confirm that the skill that I went through, studying visual art, is that I went on to critically think and sort of break down structures that seem too commonplace to normally warrant a lot of attention. My obsession with time and measurement and distance, the fundamental structures of science, the philosophy of science are maybe the first things that people think of when someone thinks of someone doing a fine arts degree.

Sara Morawetz But the space that the degree offers to follow your own research passions, your own endeavors, is really important and incredibly valuable. And the way in which I've been able to critically take the way I think, and the things that I want to think about, and communicate those with audiences both outside the arts, in the sciences or just to the general public — I think these are conversations worth having. And I'm just one. There are literally thousands of students who go through that program who do that in very different ways and offer texture and vitality to a whole range of disciplines, whether they continue to make art or not. They think in a different way and they approach problems differently. They try and come to different kinds of solutions and different kinds of avenues for how we measure success, how we measure outcomes, or the ways in which things run into the future. You can't necessarily put a KPI against that, and mark it off and say, oh, that's a tick here earlier that raised X number of dollars. We think differently, and that thinking...that is generative and that contributes. And that's the labour that art does. It's about how we think and what we think about and how that kind of folds into all kinds of activities in varied ways.

Mariam Arcilla Sara Morawetz, thank you so much for joining me on Interno. I really enjoyed our conversation.

Sara Morawetz Such a pleasure. You're such a delight to talk to. Take care of yourself and have a really lovely day.

Mariam Arcilla I'd like to leave you with some words by Aja Monet, a New York based lyricist and activist of Cuban-Jamaican descent. And you can find this post on Instagram via @AjaMonet:

I look forward to a day or doesn't take death for us to come together.
Where our disagreements are based on ideologies, not personalities.
Where we love each other enough to listen to truth telling and speak with purpose, not just to be heard. A collective healing is a seed of every fight and every struggle.

I look forward to less cliques and more community, new values and ancient gratitude, a movement for the loving and all that it endures as well as challenges. Hyper empathy is anarchy.

I look forward to anarchy in society so enriched by difference and empathy. To hurt you is to hurt me. Therefore, we cease to need to be governed. It's not impossible. It takes us imagining and working towards that courage at risk. I look forward to a new life studies and the children born of our commitments to one another.

Be not discouraged. Be not dismayed. Be defiant. Always be.

Mariam Arcilla Interno is produced by myself, Mariam Arcilla. Each podcast episode is accompanied by a transcript and reading notes covering the topics I discuss with guests. You can find this on the website MakingArt.Work. Thank you for listening.

[Outro music]

// END OF TRANSCRIPT //

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The Guardian: What is the value of an arts or humanities degree?

TEDx Sydney: Sara Morawetz: Walking in search of the metre

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CABIN FEVER: Coping with COVID-19 playlist of experimental films & videos

ABC: Why George Floyd's death tells the story of many black lives - Stan Grant

Anti-Racism resources for Australian Allies

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The Art Life: The path from Dunkirk to Barcelona - Sharne Wolff

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