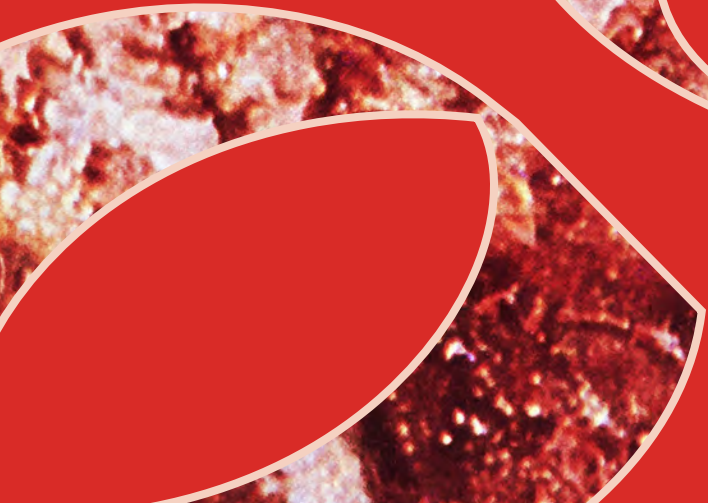
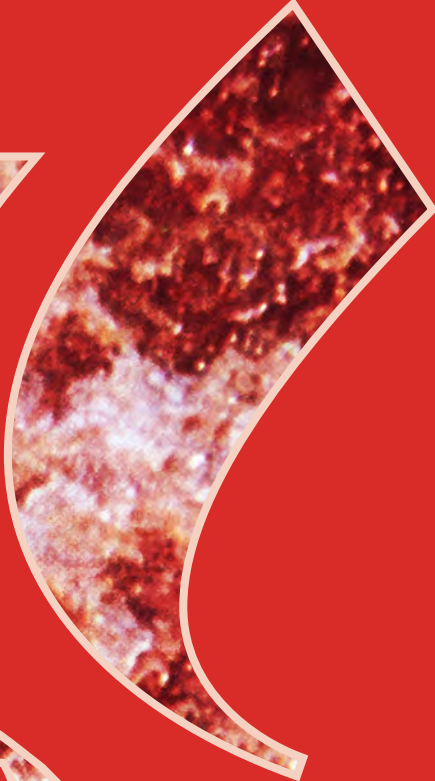
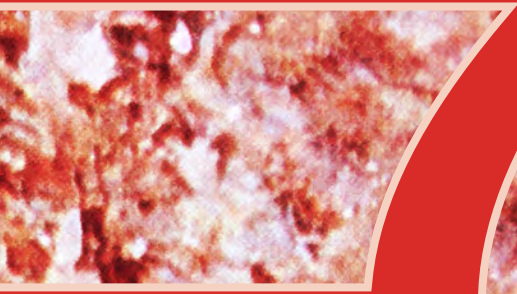
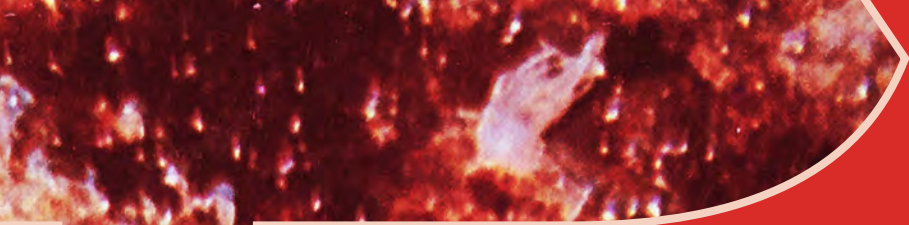


DISRUPT



CHANTELLE MITCHELL • DIEGO RAMÍREZ • IZABELA PLUTA • JOSEPHINE MEAD  
STELLA N'DJOKU & JULIA ANASTASIA PELOSI-THORPE • KARL HALLIDAY  
MOLLY STEPHENSON • NAZLI BAHMANI • ŠEJLA KAMERIC



Heart of Hearts was founded in Naarm and Nipaluna, Australia, on the traditional land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and the palawa people.

We pay our respects to their elders - past, present and emerging - and acknowledge them as the custodians of the land and the rich stories embedded in place.



Find recommendations for Indigenous literature [here](#) and links to support First Nations Australians [here](#).



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# Foreword

RACHEL CIESLA & JAXON WATERHOUSE

**NOTE: Since this text was first started, in April 2020, the Covid-19 situation has shifted and manifested in a multitude of ways, one of the most pertinent and insidious of which has been the way it has altered time; deadlines, due dates, planned events and proceedings. We have tried to keep it current, updating this as we write, but we will never be able to get these words to you as quickly as is necessary. Regardless, we hope that some aspect of this - and the entire issue - resonates with you.**

In April 2020, roughly one month into the Australian lockdown, we exchanged an email thread, through which Rachel posited a series of questions regarding the possibility - catalysed by Covid - of a rupture or break in the contemporary art world, and its endless flow of work. Within a matter of weeks, much of the life would be drained from Melbourne. That which made city living worthwhile - the shows, museums, exhibitions, performances - were closed, cancelled, postponed. For us members of the sequestered masses, the isolation was made worse by the unemployment that we were potentially facing once the lockdowns were lifted. Though this was crushing, there was a sense of camaraderie within our inside time; it was for the good of the country, the good of the community, the good of ourselves.

**NOTE: Whilst we have been under restrictions of varying stages our arts community has come under attack again from the Morrison government. Many of our long-running arts institutions have been passed over**

**for Australia Council funding, which renders their futures and the futures of all who work for, within and across these institutions increasingly precarious.**

While we may mourn and bemoan the arresting of career trajectories, the opportunities snatched away, the programs abandoned and works left unseen, we believed these disruptions were the beginning of a new reality. For a contemporary world predicated on high performance, what possibilities might exist for mobilising this disruption - could the spanner of Covid-19 in the hyper-productive art machine lead to a reconfiguration of the mechanic nature of institutional and 'successful' contemporary art? How might the politics that these institutions are founded upon be altered? In a time predicated upon the necessity of 'being smart'; of being constantly mobile, flexible, dynamic and most importantly, up to date, what will drop away or be shucked off?<sup>1</sup> United in our state of constant becoming, of cultural liquidity as against institutional ossification, we have triggered the disintegration of the social network. Like Zygmunt Bauman says, 'for power to be free to flow it must be free of fences, barriers fortified borders and checkpoints. Any dense and tight network of social bonds ... is an obstacle to be cleared away.'<sup>2</sup> This liquidity comes with a cost - while the institution may be where creativity goes to die, the freedoms we opt for can sometimes leave us exposed to free fall. Bureaucracy can work both ways: to support and to suffocate. Finding ourselves in this position, we look around and see the need for a coming together, and the creation of adaptive safety nets through community. As our connections with each other grow strained through



Katrin Koenning, *such, that*, 2017, archival pigment print, 40 x 32 cm

separation, and we try ever harder to nurture them, so as to weather the Covid tempest, we need to ask ourselves if we can carry this through to the other side.

What privilege can be surrendered to lift up another? Can we re-enter the working environment without falling back into routines of hyper-performance, burn-out and ultimately exploitation? Will we resume work with the Master's tools – or, will we harness interruption, incoherence and surprise as the now – ordinary conditions of life, to create it anew?

The unknowability of the future has become more apparent in the last few months, and it seems impossible to conceive of a post-Covid world. As Hegel reminds us, the owl of Minerva flies only at dusk. There is time to reflect and synthesise new ways of being in the world; of working, of making. We can find a way to mobilise, contextualise and reconfigure this – though not in a traditional sense, due to the potential risks of gathering in groups. Whilst Covid-19 is a community problem, it is also highly personal. We think here not only of the risk of vectors crossing our own bodily boundaries, but also the deeply individual nature of the mitigating measures, such as the solitude of lockdown.

For this issue we turned back to our own archives; the hard drives full of ideas, proposals and texts half written, reviews for long since closed-exhibitions. We spoke about finishing them off, but who wants to print a review of a show from 2019? Mediocre takes already abound – it is far too late even for a hot one. But in looking back at those notes from last year, there were two exhibitions which stood out

for us; Taryn Simon's *Contraband*, Anna Schwartz Gallery and Katrin Koenning's the kids are in trouble, ReadingRoom. Both are illuminating bodies of work, monumental and fascinating in vastly different ways, but amidst the chaos of the pandemic, they have assumed a new resonance.

There is a romanticism in revisiting these exhibitions – though only shown in the last 12 months, it seems an aeon ago. They speak at once to the world that has been lost and to the one that is slowly being formulated at present. This, of course, is a sign of the high quality of the work itself; but also what resonates forward. Through their dealings with the minutiae, they provide us with a framework for coping with the uncertainty of the present. It is drifting amidst Simon's exploration of the legalities and illegalities of the everyday, and Koenning's temporal reflections and refractions, that we find a form of sublimation.

### THE ILLEGALITY OF THE COMMONPLACE.

In his introductory essay to *Contraband*, 'Ever Airport', Hans Ulrich Obrist discusses how the photographs destabilise the dominance of the digital in our current economy:

*If the digital revolution has in many ways dematerialized aspects of everyday life, the paradigm of built-in obsolescence has not been superseded, nor does it seem likely to anytime soon, in the absence of some singular transformative event. Simon's work clearly shows the myriad ways in which we continue to rely on the ceaseless material production of ever more disposable*

*commodities, a maelstrom of overproduction steadily depleting our natural resources. Contraband gives the lie to phrases such as the "dematerialized economy", which only ever ensure that we conveniently forget that we are beholden to mother nature and material production as never before.*<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, *Contraband* renders visible to us the ceaseless flow of material; the endless stream of material (over)production that led us to this precipitous and precarious point that has been caught in the security filter of the state. There is something more to be gleaned from revisiting *Contraband* in our corona-world. In order to maintain this ceaseless flow, digital communications and commerce platforms have flourished, growing dramatically as government mandates have necessitated our working from home.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, while Bezos and Zuckerberg have added billions to their respective net worths during the lockdown period, we're sure we all remember supermarket shelves stripped bare; strangers debasing themselves by squabbling over toilet paper, tinned goods, frozen foodstuffs. Supplies were disrupted as borders were reasserted, both state and national. While Australia is an agricultural exporter, primarily of beef and wheat, our supply chains are dependent upon global exchange networks. Disruptions in these chains ripple outwards – the ongoing abuse of the ecologic by predatory systems has, as we see all too clearly now, catastrophic consequences. They reverberate, resonating in empty bellies and mouths, the hollow shelf space where food used to be.

What has this pandemic shown us but that we are beholden to nature? Its appearance – described by the UN's

environment chief, Inger Andersen, and leading scientists as a 'clear warning shot' from Mother Nature – following decades of industrial and industrialised abuse, demonstrates to us the inextricabilities of the human and the other-than-human.<sup>5</sup> As it stands, we will always be beholden to physical distribution methods – calls for returns to onshore manufacturing, digital academic conferences and working from home cannot replace the affective nature of being in the world, life's inherent physicalities and sensations, the need for connection and the inability of all things to be automated. Perhaps the difficulty is found not in the lie of the 'dematerialized economy', but in the existence of both material and dematerialized ones simultaneously, and the need to adeptly navigate both concurrently. Predicated upon the existence of the physical one, the dematerialized economy is now primed to flourish as the physical takes the backseat.

But whether we are indoors or outdoors, things will continue. And whether digital or physical or both, there is a pressure exerted upon us. We are beholden to forces bigger than us, as capital and its modes of production, its outcomes and outputs, force their way inside us. Like the pandemic that rages outside, they demand entry through the permeable border of the skin. A clumsy metaphor, perhaps, but like Covid, they become embodied. Once inside, they replicate and in turn, deconstruct the human.

What is most arresting about *Contraband* is the scale of the work itself, the immensity of labour that has gone into producing it. Walking into Anna Schwartz Gallery is to be confronted by hundreds



Katrin Koenning, *and so*, 2016, archival pigment print, 40 x 32 cm



Katrin Koenning, *it left*, 2018 Archival pigment print, 40 x 32 cm

of photographs lining the walls, a bizarre assemblage in which shellfish sit alongside bottles of shampoo, antique weapons are paralleled by cartons of off-brand cigarettes. Packages of heroin, packets of Viagra, parts of some unidentifiable animal - or perhaps it is plant matter? All these items grouped together; traditional taxonomies muddled under the broader category of 'illegal' or 'contraband'. We see within *Contraband* the presentation of labour: from that of the producer of the goods, the grower of herbs, the butcher, the drug cook, and so on; to the intersection with the labour of the sender/cARRIER, who attempts to disguise the goods; to the pilot or mailman, security personnel and sniffer dogs, to Simon and her assistants, and then even further on into the future, to those working in the gallery at the time of showing. Around *Contraband*, a constellation forms, labour flows. Simon herself, remarked to Obrist that *Contraband* represents 'nearly 100 per cent' of her activity undertaken at JFK Airport: wherein for a week straight, Simon and her assistants photographed over a thousand items that were caught in the net of border security.<sup>6</sup> A bewildering notion, given the scale of the work.

While we speak here of time, it is pertinent to note the strange muddying of temporalities that occurs in photography. *Contraband* distorts our perception of time, and therefore of labour, because we recognise the amount of time that went into making these photographs - thousands of split-second shutter closes, thousands of minutes. Yet the industrial nature of each photograph masks the human agent held within each item and the photographer. They are rendered stark, impersonal, mechanical.

Though they speak to human activity and agency, and in some cases, deeply ingrained cultural practices, they are devoid of humanity - the shimmer and vibrancy of their matter replaced by institutional fluorescent lighting. The link to Walter Benjamin becomes clear.

Within 'Ever Airport', Obrist refers to Simon being 'yoked to the tyranny of real time', the sleep deprivation this work required.<sup>7</sup> While this bespeaks the nature of the beast of border security, it renders tangible the effects of operating at 'nearly 100 per cent'. The dematerialisation of the economy makes it possible for a greater number of us to operate at this full capacity, within a system that demands 100 per cent. The workplace becomes the home - Zoom meetings enable the intrusion of colleagues, middle management, bosses, into the comfort and security of the living room, dining room or bedroom. The border of the domicile is breached. Following Obrist's thin excavation of Marc Augé's concept of the 'non-place', we need to ask how Covid has altered the home/workplace divide. Does it become each in turn, depending on the time of day? After 5.00 pm, the dining table becomes once more a place to eat, no longer a place for business. Or perhaps it hinges upon the presence of others; what applications are open on the desktop, or whether the webcam continues to stare accusingly at our procrastination. How can we embrace the non? Can we create alternative configurations or assemblages that play the same role, but are different somehow - the non-work, the non-home, the non-family.

We have strayed - not only too far from God, but from our topic at the outset.

Covid has recontextualised labour. Not only with the invasion of the workplace into the home, but also in putting us all to work. Just as rumours circled some months ago referring to Covid as a bioweapon, the body as a bioweapon, you and your loved ones could potentially be bioweapons so act accordingly. We have all become security guards, trying to catch things within the net of the face mask and the antiviral. Being with Covid demands constant vigilance, hyperawareness, an ongoing pledge to not letting anything through, lest it be infectious.

As Patrice Joly writes of *Contraband*:

*The attempt to curb the contraband becomes the Sisyphian symbol of a struggle lost in advance - because no legal barrier can staunch the indisputable impulse of humanity to procure these objects of desire for itself.*<sup>8</sup>

But while Joly classifies all as objects of desire, we seek to expand that, to include items of necessity. While a significant portion of the seized property could be classed as such, it would be remiss not to point out the culturally significant nature of some of them. We think here of powdered medicines, animal products, organic matter - consider this excerpt from a list of seized materials:

*African cane rats infested with maggots, African yams (dioscorea), Andean potatoes, Bangladeshi cucurbit plants, bush meat, cherimoya fruit, curry leaves (murraya), dried orange peels, fresh eggs, giant African snail, impala skull cap, jackfruit seeds, June plum, kola nuts, mango, okra, passion fruit, pig nose, pig mouths, pork, raw poultry (chicken), South American pig head, South American tree tomatoes, South Asian lime infected with*

*citrus canker, sugar cane (poaceae), uncooked meats, unidentified sub tropical plant in soil.*

*Contraband* deals in the question of illegality as it is concerned with the transnational flow of goods. The illegality of some of these items; those infected with maggots or disease, or those with soil, present a biohazard risk, and their confiscation is understandable. But there are a number of items that resonate with a significance and a purpose beyond that of the simple desirability that could be ascribed to other seized property, such as the cigarettes, pirated DVDs, or drugs, in their many and varied forms. This transnational flow extends to the culture and cultural power and/or significance that these objects are imbued with. The border is a containment strategy, keeping the nation 'in' and keeping 'out' what is undesirable. Acknowledging Simon's artistic discretion in presenting the items alphabetically, so as to illuminate the strange constellations and minute typologies that would be missed were they categorised in other ways; the presentation of all of these items here, under the broadest umbrella possible - that emblazoned with **CONTRABAND** - enables the inference to be drawn that it is not just the items themselves that are illegal, or to be kept out, but that which they represent.

*Contraband* shows to us the illegality of some cultural practices, of cultures, of bodies. There is a strange colonial reperformance occurring at the border, an Othering through denial of entry. These items represent life outside, both literally and figuratively. It is worth considering this outsidership as an economic locatedness. These items as gifts or these items as



cultural identity - these items as external to reductive economic models based upon supply and demand. The desirability inherent within these items is the desire for connection; either to create anew or cultivate links to country, culture, family, religion. These links are manifest within the materiality of the items. The border closes these connections off, severing them in the act of confiscation, and by withholding them, destroys the links. But these items were not just confiscated - these organic items were all dissected, before being ground up and incinerated, speaking to the atomization of the Other as a way of maintaining an envisaged integrity, or of enforcing one.

Dorothee Solle writes that 'the net of love proves to be riddled with holes' and indeed, the net is composed equally by the holes as it is the strands of nylon that entangle.<sup>9</sup> Solle writes from a theological context, but redeployed here, we sense the significance of what made it through the net. What is the missing half of Simon's taxonomy of contraband is that which is illegal, but made it through the border, into the hands of those awaiting it. Disastrous in the context of some of these items, but in other cases, the slippage here enables the continuation of connections, their flourishing. There is a need for materiality. Rooted as we are in nature, it will find a way through.

Within this, we return to Covid, and position the struggle against it as being similarly Sisyphian in nature. At the time of writing, Melbourne has returned to lockdown; other states are seeing cases re-emerge. While most of these cases can be traced to community exposure, it is believed the origin points of this

second outbreak are family gatherings, from which Covid spreads to places of employment, and then further into the community. We can recontextualise Joly's statement here, combining it with the connective point outlined above and suggest that no barrier - neither legal, nor the soft and permeable border of the skin - can staunch the indisputable impulse of humanity to procure these connections, to foster and deepen them. These forms of life-in-common are not a thing of the past.

Locations within Melbourne's north and west that have been classed as hotspots are also home to large migrant communities. It has been made clear that the communication of public health orders was insufficient for non-English speakers, and that rapidly changing restrictions exacerbated this issue, compounded by inadequate translations and the non-circulation of materials. An appalling oversight, given the multicultural nature of Melbourne. Places of employment that have experienced these outbreaks include hospitals, schools, aged care facilities, meatworks, and those who work in security. In both of these instances, we see materiality being a major factor in continued transmission. For those within diasporic communities, the same circumstances that lead to their susceptibility to exposure arise from their need for community connection, as State support is inadequate. Worse, when it is proffered, it is heavy-handed in nature. Similarly within occupational transmission, these jobs require materiality. The dematerialised economy does not extend to those who work in care, community support, education, logistics, food production, and so on - those who *must* engage with other people

in a face-to-face manner, or who *must* handle goods or materials.

Covid confronts us, as does *Contraband*, with our rootedness in the natural and in materiality. It demonstrates to us the scaffolding of the digital economy by the physical. For many of us, this became tangible when we lost our jobs in the service industry - though many of us drew some income from the arts, it was not a liveable wage. The sharp reality of Covid penetrated the world, and like a sharp stick into a balloon, it popped - or so it seemed. In reality, this point of penetration became instead an entry wound. As we discussed previously, the holes in the net are how things get through. The holes are where connections are made. To elucidate this notion better, we turn here to the plateau; to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'holey space', an ambulatory, connective tissue that connects to nomadic smooth space and conjugates with the sedentary and striated.<sup>10</sup> The holey space is the transmission and the connection that enables the smooth space of the natural (and therefore, of Covid), to cross over into the striated space of the city.<sup>11</sup> The holey space is the permeable body.

How will we reconsider entry, its granting or refusal, in a world post-Covid? Within the context of Covid, how are the legal and illegal being recontextualised?

Brian Massumi, in his *User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, takes the notion of holey space further, positioning it as 'derelict space'; the 'site of a breach in the World As We Know It'.<sup>12</sup> Or more concisely, that 'we are beholden to both nature and material production as never before'. Massumi's derelict space is a

'zone of indeterminacy that bodies-in-becoming may make their own'.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps now, as we consider the indeterminacy and unknowability of the world both with, and post-Covid, there is an opportunity to make that indeterminacy our own, by refusing to return to the world pre-Covid. As we are confronted with the necessity of the material and physical, there is hope that we can move toward a world that cultivates this, cherishing these connections to nature and each other, mobilising our capabilities to further this project and build frameworks that operate in respectful, reciprocal and harmonious ways - both with each other and the world at large.

**But how might this look, or come about?**

**Let us reconfigure an all-too-oft quoted edict:**

**It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of Covid.**

The simple fact of the matter is that there will be no end to this increasingly labyrinthine and ever-unfolding crisis. There will be a process of adaptation, a series of spikes, a learning to live with it. The ambient threat of the everyday will become more noticeable, but ultimately manageable. The effects of Covid, however, will be felt for decades to come - more than just an extended period of inside time, it will become synonymous with a series of realisations; the ineptitude and in some cases callous and discriminatory nature of governance and elected officials, the unbelievable precarity of the economy and job market, that the arts are consistently the most



Can you imagine Earth without  
the sound of Living?

undervalued sector when it comes to receiving funding, that some people have little regard for the health and welfare for others, that the sharehouse you live in actually isn't designed nor suitable to spend extended periods of time in (and especially not with *those* people) - the list goes on, endlessly, as each day reveals to us the world beneath the World As We Know It.

Although we may have had inklings of these things before, Covid has rewritten them, in letters a thousand feet high, in block capital letters. No longer inklings, but instead a series of truths that are aiding to power the paradigm shift that is the moment we are living through. When we look back, it will be on the World As We Knew It. There is no going back - thank fuck for that.

In Katrin Koenning's exhibition *the kids are in trouble*, a series of 31 photographs metrically line the walls of ReadingRoom:

**A foot sliding into a rubber thong / a dog's hind leg / and an outstretched hand balancing a worn football.**

**Shattered glass / ducks floating in an inky pool / a child grasps a curtain to conceal (or reveal) themselves.**

**A crowd of suited men partially obscuring the profile of Donald Trump.**

Not just photographs on the wall, Koenning has instead composed a series of stanzas - the images all share a rhythm and cadence, something which stretches beyond the purely visual, into the deeply affective. The subjects of these photographs, the minutiae of the

everyday, cease to be merely detail. They become, by synecdoche, the whole.

Taken over a three year period, in a variety of geographical locations, the components of the images - the gardens, waterways, women, children, animals and backyard clothing lines of *the kids* convey a lengthy perambulation through a sensorily rich and culturally heterogeneous neighbourhood. They transmit to us the world, and the things that catch one's eye or attention by happenstance. A place, temporal and spatial, that becomes accessible only through attentiveness and attunement, through openness.

Since seeing *the kids* in late 2019, the images have become further imbued with affect, which is no doubt a consequence of our now-strained relationship with the world outside. Viewing this work now, it becomes symbolic of the 'external' - a place so large that it cannot be seen in one glance, and is only recognisable in these snapshots. The world that comprises *the kids* is far too large, overwhelming so. It cannot be represented in its fullness.

Imagine for a moment the sound of the world - on the steps of Flinders Street Station or alternatively, out in the Dandenongs. The sound of that howling wind down on Wilson's Prom. The screech of the wheels of the 86 tram as it suffers its way down Gertrude Street. The smells of Queen Vic Market, the cigarette haze of Black Cat, a Sunday morning on Sydney Road, or the Monday morning of a public holiday. Strangely difficult, given how familiar these once seemed. The world at present is missing its fullness. Living in Covid doesn't require the full capacity of all of our senses - they are under utilised and dulled, dormant and waiting.

And we too, wait. Covid is a test of endurance and resilience. We wait for everything - Zoom meetings, our state-sanctioned exercise, for the chance to go to the shops, a phone call, until it is time to make food again or shower - but more than anything, we wait for it to be over. In the time between, we find ourselves fixated on things, be it through boredom, ennui or anxiety. Covid has focused our attention, sharpened our attunement to that which immediately surrounds us.<sup>14</sup> Though we may be completely occupied by something, time just seems to slip away without regular routines. At the outset of all this, noted philosopher and goblin Slavoj Žižek published an op-ed in RT, in which he stated that:

*This is not the time to search for some spiritual authenticity, to confront the ultimate abyss of our being. Without any shame - assume all small rituals, formulas, quirks, etc. that stabilize your daily life.*<sup>15</sup>

One wonders whether Žižek's Covid experience has mirrored that of most of us - what his job security is like, how pressing his rent payments are, how many people he lives with. Routine has a way of slipping away when there is little to hold it in place. A routine predicated upon a work/life balance becomes tricky to uphold when work encroaches into the home through the Zoom interface. We digress slightly, but mention Žižek here to say that we disagree. Each of us, in turn, is confronting our own abyss as we are confronted with the limit of life. What it is to live muted. Distant and/or disconnected. With renewed precarity. Indeed, many people experienced this prior to Covid, but this situation has worsened their circumstances and

reinforced their precarity.<sup>16</sup> We would suggest also that the abyss, as Žižek refers to it, may be the place to search for some spiritual authenticity.

We stray too easily, too far from Katrin and *the kids*. The path we left was heading towards a middle ground. Looking at Koenning's work, one is struck by the sense that something has just happened. While adeptly and beautifully composed, the kids, in its focusing on minutiae, seems to be a series of 'in- betweens' or interstitial moments on film. The photographs appear as a record of the seconds just before or just after something has occurred, enigmatic in their interpretive multiplicities.

But upon consideration, what Koenning offers to us in *the kids* is attunement, and a deep intimacy. Her attention to light and dark, shadow and depth draws your attention to our shared experiences of happiness, joy, fear and loss. Where many of her contemporaries all too often contrive themselves, exuding a forced intimacy, Koenning's is eloquent and sincere. The photographs that comprise *the kids* aren't being presented to you, nor exhibited - they're being shared. The viewer becomes the amorphous 'you' addressed in the accompanying text. When she asks,

*Can you imagine Earth without the sound of Living?*<sup>17</sup>

We do. We experience it through her and with her and each other. We accompany Koenning on her walk around that distant and distinct neighbourhood, seeing it anew through her attentive and attuned eye.

But our neighbourhoods too, seem

distant and distinct, now that we spend less time out and about in them. The minutiae that is the subject of Koenning's photographs become objects of fixation as we encounter them now, out in the world - on the walks that are now taken for an hour a day, around the block, or the neighbourhood, or in circles around Royal Park. Doesn't the world seem bigger? I don't remember cars being that loud, or colours being that bright. Everything seems concentrated, somehow. Distilled into its essence. This is it quietened, remember. Now imagine how large it will seem when we all re-emerge back into it.

It is difficult to say how things will be different, and it would be disingenuous of us to say that we knew, or to offer any guidance. As it stands now, we look back at what we have carried with us into this, and partway through this, at how a longing develops for things that once repulsed - crowds, the packed 96, the smell of the Yarra in the height of summer - those things that made the city the city.

**I can't actually understand space without you -and everyone else.**

In this space, however, we have become attuned to the smaller things, as we encounter or fixate on them now. Perhaps here lies the utility of revisiting *the kids*. For Koenning, the possibility of interpretation becomes the subject: it is not the event that is important but either side of it. Similar to the inversion Koenning offers, we perceive one now, through Covid - where life was once constituted by its punctuation by events, Covid has rent apart the spacetime of the everyday. And as we pay attention to the spaces that are left now, we become attuned to

the world around us, acknowledging not only the interconnected nature of things but life as "a subset of a vaster quivering".<sup>18</sup> Recognising this is being in the world, and being of the world; that which we got distracted from, lost sight of, gave up, passed over or was disallowed to us through the ways things were before all this.

However long this goes on for - six months, a year, two years, five, ten, endlessly - the disruption that is Covid has shown us the World As It Is. As we have slowed or ceased, we have grown attuned and attentive - either developing or recovering ways of being in the world. Whatever the world looks like that we enter into post-Covid, this attention seems like a good foundation to rebuild on. Looking forward, we draw once more from Koenning's text:

*Learn from the ancients, the wind, the sea, the animals, and us...*<sup>19</sup>

- R & J.



Katrin Koenning, *that met the sky gathered*, 2017, archival pigment print, 40 x 32 cm

<sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'Nobody has to be vile,' London Review of Books, April 6, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press, 2000), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Ever Airport' in Taryn Simon, *Contraband* (Steidl/Gagosian Gallery: Göttingen/New York, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps ZOOM will emerge victorious when the dust and phlegm settle?

<sup>5</sup> Damian Carrington, 'Coronavirus: Nature is sending us a message,' says UN environment chief, The Guardian, 25 March 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Obrist, 'Ever Airport.'

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Patrice Joly, 'Taryn Simon,' *ZeroDeux*, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Dorothee Solle, *The Strength of the Weak: Towards a Christian Feminist Identity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 34.

<sup>10</sup> Helene Frichot, 'Holey Space and the Smooth and Striated Body of the Refugee' in Anna Hickey-Moody and Peta Malins (eds.) *Deleuzian Encounters: Studies in Contemporary Social Issues* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2007), 170.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that holey space is navigated most often by those bodies most at risk.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations From Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 104 - 105. 13 Ibid., 105.

<sup>14</sup> It would be remiss for us to not mention, even as a footnote, the mental health crisis which is accompanying Covid, which will continue long after the immediate threat has passed.

<sup>15</sup> Slavoj Žižek, 'Slavoj Žižek's Covid-19 lockdown survival guide: Guilty pleasures, Valhalla Murders & pretending it's just a game,' *RT Question More*, 28 March 2020.

<sup>16</sup> This is an intersectional and complex issue, but this article provides a brief overview of how disadvantaged groups are disproportionately affected by the ongoing Covid situation.

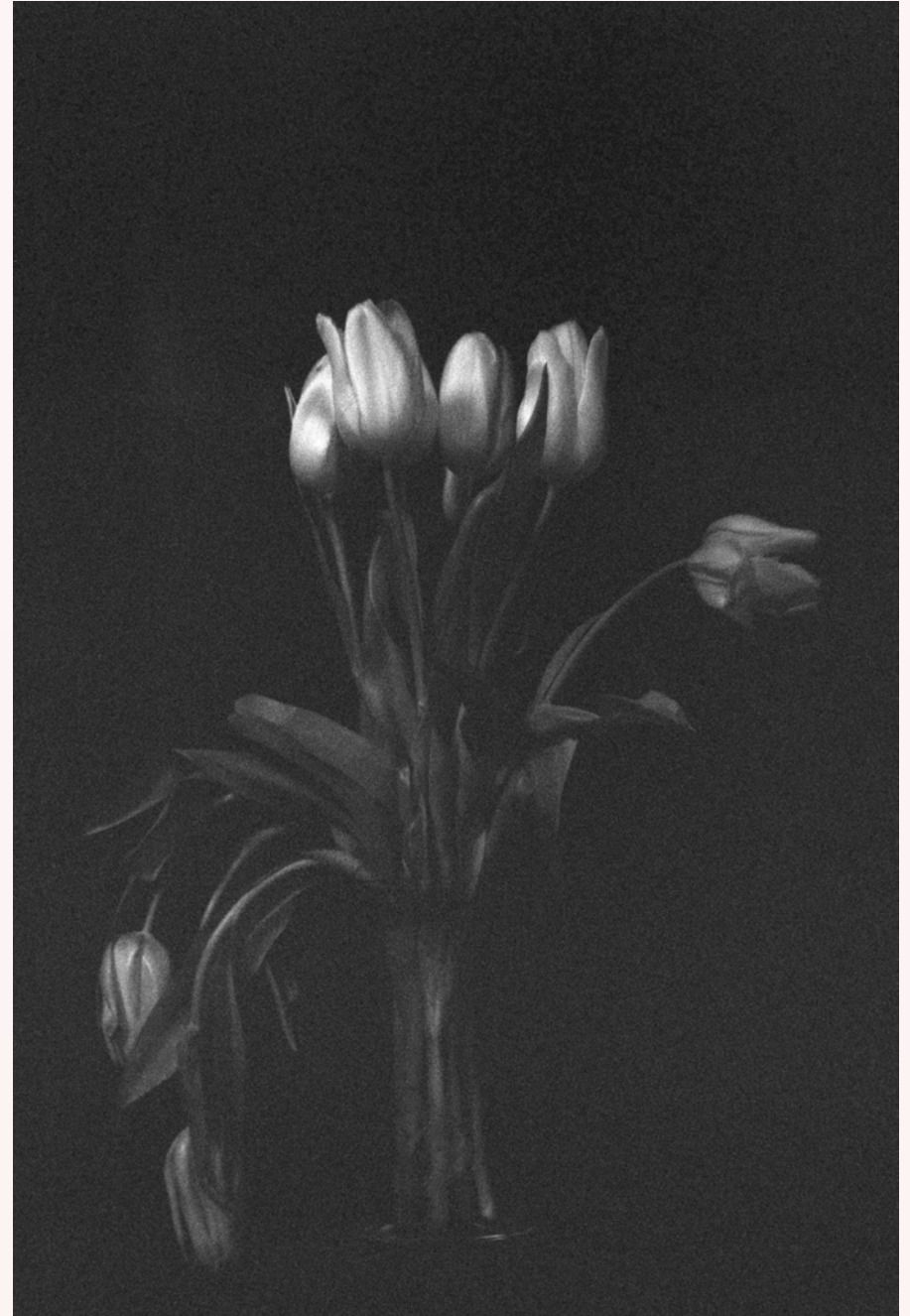
<sup>17</sup> Katrin Koenning, the kids are in trouble, Room Sheet, ReadingRoom: Melbourne, 11 October - 16 November 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, (London: Verso, 2017), 44.

<sup>19</sup> In Katrin Koenning's accompanying text to her exhibition *the kids are in trouble*, the 'us' refers to the children.

Sappho was known  
for her love poetry.  
Will you remember  
me for mine?

JOSEPHINE MEAD

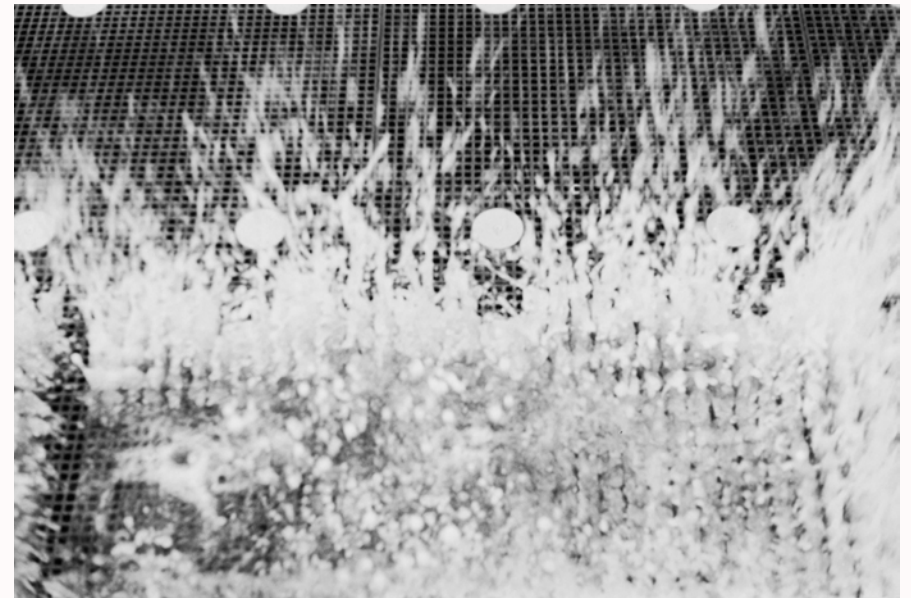


I am disrupted, yet I remain calmer than ever,  
albeit in between moments of quiet concern.

Born 620 BC, Sappho wrote lyrics of love poetry. Did she feel the need to reconfigure herself like me? The tender comfort that occurs when minds meet – the heartache through disjuncture when they miss beat. Miscommunication gives way to acts of future understanding. **TO REMIND ONESELF TO SIT WITHIN DISCOMFORT.**

A performance can be defined as the execution or accomplishment of work. Every single relationship is an experiment – **TO TRY OR TO TEST IT.** Am I capable of further acts of division or rest? To be in delicious turmoil and then thrown adrift through acts of transmission. She likened disruption to displacement—to walk onto uneven ground, to be compelled to leave another; to attempt to turn around. My commitment to learning never falters. Being cradled in arms draws in relief. I am learning and slipping, but believe me, I am choosing to be here.

**TO REMAIN VULNERABLE.** The Greek term pneuma translates literally to breath. The pneuma is a fluid that encompasses speech. Sound turns to substance and silence quickens heartbeat. Use of the voice is one of the first steps towards seeking a bond of intimacy with another. Language carries power. Still, words can go unspoken; phrases - misinterpreted; conversations - internalized. I am working out ways to encourage your speech and to do the same with mine. Our voices must be released. I will aid acts of vocal disruption. Speaking to seek out modes of understanding. We are in the midst of a pandemic and are evermore aware of breathing. (It is often the acts we take for granted that have the most power). I need to build reserves of oxygen in my bunkers. I am attempting to catch one's breath. Breath can be caught within moments of surprise and amidst waves of pleasure. To open the body up to be better. I will soften the world through the power of my lungs. Lean into the sound of the letter. Touch me gently. Change my breathing. **MAKE ME COME.**



To be borrowed, read and dishevelled; to fold an ear to the edge of sound; to spin up content for consumption; to express modes of historic fact; to disquiet the ear to hear the picture; to silence through spiral, polyrhythmia; to continue with corresponding sounds: TO OPEN UP AND TO BE READ BY EACH OTHER.

I found two rosellas in love on a tree branch. They were a sign to keep moving forward. I am reaching the limits of my powers. WHEN A CHANGE OF TEXTURE IS A CHANGE OF COUNTRY. The mouth is a tool for kissing, eating and purging. The eyes are a tool for crying, seeing and feeling (they are drier than before). Wet places mark modes of convalescence and tears will remain ever-present.

Images are endless, as is love-making. To be disrupted from the bounds of the image. To be disrupted from the bounds of the self. To move into a different level of emotional output. You are increasing and I am decreasing. We are on a sliding scale, adding and subtracting. Seeking scenes of balance. To be held all night, my body sweating. This new bone structure is different to what came before and I am in modes of adjustment. There is a fixed stillness that is good for me, yet my heart stutters frequently. I am searching for marks of punctuation to slow things down. I am attempting to ground the image. LOVE WILL NEVER LEAVE THE BODY.

To recalibrate towards acts of openness. I am reconfiguring and I am more closed than I remembered. THE DOORS HOLD ONTO MEMORY. Disrupt me, slow and tenderly. Breathe me in. To remind oneself that the image is worthy. To take disappointment off the table. I am listening - collectively - to the world's possibilities. Many are slipping. Silenced voices are gaining momentum. She told me my dreams are all possible. There are difficulties with listening and articulation from different angles. To have profoundly tender, passionate affection. To enamour the paper with the imprint of sound. To see myself as worthy. Setting challenges that override me. I am blanketed in lethargy. Time is moving at an unfamiliar speed. You are changing things and I am not used to being settled.

I am folded into pocket and then stretched onto wall. I have needed stillness for a while. You are turning my page and laying me down. I fear you are marking me for revision. To be grateful, yet uncertain. To move to the edge of sound. Film processing will fix the image. I am waiting for prints to dry. Sappho is known for her love poetry. Will you remember me for mine?

To experience accompanying sound work follow QR code or listen [here](#):





# A Drift Poethics

CHANTELLE MITCHELL

I lay down on the raft, weighted by my limbs, pebbles as terrestrial talismans in my pockets.

There is a rift between the world and the Earth.

This rift is one which opens up the space between the material realities of that which surrounds us, that which came before us and will exist long after us, and the world in which we make for ourselves. Within this Heideggerian frame there is a presupposition – there is no world without the Earth. As we apprehend this rift, and move through that which is cleaved apart by this reflection on being–in–the–world, we arrive in a thickened space of being–between; the *dichtung*!

But it is hard to drift through thickened space.

As the atmosphere fills with smoke and smog, pathogens contribute to increasing levels of Co2 in the air. Waters grow slick with toxic oil, microplastics, run off and waste – and the body lags. To pull oneself up out of the water and onto the raft is movement in which surface tension breaks. It may be that this is a simple fact of being in the world – material reality is a relationship between the self and other, one of mixing, pulling, pressing down or out, up or in. The space we inhabit is a meeting of forces; a constantly shifting web of interconnected tissue.

This thickening emerges in response to a rejection of the fallacy of simple, elegant, easy being.<sup>2</sup> But what would it mean to move amidst this thickened space of being?

Entering into a thickened relationship, slipping into the rift space, feeling the drag and moving with it, allowing it to pull you under, is recognising the complexity of entering into a relationship with that which is other–than; the world as it is without us, in which the agency of matter operates independently. Acting not as witness, but in *witness*.

The H here acts as a cross bar, connecting space between the two vertical arms of the letter, and intervening into the word. A bridge, a vector, and an application of thickening. The thickening of the word is what carries us from poetics to *poethics*, and it is within the frame of poethics that thickening entangles itself, through praxis, with the currents of the thickened space. Within Joan Retallack's poethics, 'to write means to engage in a probative, speculative projection of the often surprising vectors of words as they graze the circumstances of ongoing life.' This is not only to step into the rift, but to engage in a practice of drift within this thick space.<sup>3</sup> This is an encounter with the vectors of being, in which one moves and is moved in response to the recognition of the agentic nature of the earth as other than world. If we are to follow Michel Serres here, this swerve – Retallack's 'zig–zag' – can be tempered, or transformed 'from the theory of inert bodies in freefall to the theory of the free movements of the living'; it is the clinamen and this deviation of atoms which aligns in part with drift.<sup>4</sup> Poethics is a breaking out of the linear progression of writing towards end, into the rift; allowing for flows to move in, undoing the frames of work, labour, form and structure. In doing so, the self moves with, against and into other forms.

## Rafting

*I am all alone on this island—there are some beasts to look after but otherwise little to do. It is altogether a beautiful place ... the sea calm like a lake. It is exasperating that there is no boat. I am making a raft of driftwood.*

Ian Fairweather

A boat is a vessel, a navigational tool of metal and wood. Histories and technologies of hydrodynamics collide as the boat cuts through the resistance of the swells – carving out a path through currents, reefs, eddies and crags. This boat forms contained space, traversing the endless waters of the ocean. There is a demarcation between this contained space and the other space – to be overboard is to lose one's place within the enclosure of the vessel. To spill out and over is to be cast adrift, uncontained.

However, as artist Ian Fairweather wrote, some twenty-plus years before embarking on his infamous journey between Darwin and Timor, there is a difference between the boat and the raft. A boat is tethered and moored, fit for purpose and awaiting use. A raft however, is something constructed by hand with what is at hand – driftwood, thin sheets of discarded metal – repurposed through necessity of movement in the absence of a boat. A raft enacts its material composition, becoming–driftwood. Less tethered to the compass or the force of the rudder, a raft is an alignment with the surface, a communion with the currents. A raft, too, opens up the possibility of being swept over, or swept into, through its flatness. A surface/depth relationship which respects the power of the sea, as boats instead seek to curve with and cut through the current, an engineered hydrodynamics at work.

A raft operates without the geologic power of oil or coal: no petroleum fuels its trajectories. A raft utilises the power of the currents, harnesses the force of the wind. A raft has no anchor, nor weight to stop its motion and to tether it to the sea bed. A raft drifts.

*a current coming up along the West Australian coast ... might be a help as it would tend to throw me up against the Timor coast. If it went the other way its effect would be the worst possible for it would then carry me into the Indian Ocean which I dreaded.*<sup>5</sup>

The hope within Fairweather's name is perhaps a blessing in giving oneself over to the power of the other–than–human. He recognises drift in his notebooks, acknowledging the agency of the ocean and its currents – then surrenders himself to the potentially annihilating power of the seas.

## Attention

Drift is an observable phenomenon, deeply connected to the movements of the other–than–human world. Attempts are made to measure, harness, study and predict drift – seeking out the how and why of its forces. Why do tectonic plates collide, who decides what gets caught in these collisions? But further, drift is an inherently metaphorical term: we let our minds drift, and we drift apart from others. Perhaps there are patterns in the drift, in the coming apart? Encoded messages from the other–than–human, which, through our attention, might draw us closer to an understanding and appreciation of drift at work?

## Cosmic Origin

Drift is not a solely oceanic pursuit. As we drift, be it through perambulations, associative processes, absent mindedness, we engage with latent geologic memory. As Jean–François Lyotard tells us, 'Drift works in the plural, for the question is not leaving one shore, but several simultaneously; what is at work is not one current, pushing and tugging, but different drives and tractions ...' as we follow the raft, so too must we follow the drifts and flows of the geologic. Our patterns of drift may be seen as a reperformance of earthly forces: that which moves the Earth as well as the ocean, when our minds wander, or when we stray from the paths. Perhaps this semi–conscious act is memory at work.

As geologic drift in action, the Sahara spreads outwards, inching its way over imprecise borders marked on static maps. Red plumes of Saharan dust enter the atmosphere, making their way as cloud over to South America. Filling airways, accumulating on window sills, colouring streams of clear water. But too, landslides smother houses and pour into rivers and oceans, unseating notions of *terra firma* through motion. Like volcanic flows spreading islands outwards or the immediate threat of water overtaking the land. This drift takes place despite us, but often accelerates by our own hand. Even so, in action it draws attention to temporality, agency and force extending beyond our limited frames of comprehension.

Through the 1900s the theory of continental drift moved from a scientifically derided concept to a central tenet of Earthly understandings. This theory presupposes that our continents, originally one land mass, have been breaking apart over millennia, drifting from each other like volcanic plumes, sand creeping outwards, or water enveloping the banks. Our bodies, fleshy and finite, mimic earthly and geologic drift past and future. In the spheres of Robin Mackay, this geologic memory is read as geotrauma:<sup>6</sup>

Trauma is not personal, and the time of the earth is recorded, accreted, knotted up inside us. All human experience is an encrypted message from Cthell to the cosmos, the scream of the earth<sup>7</sup>

Cthell, the molten and terrestrial inner core of the Earth, is at the centre of our geotraumatic understanding. The molten energy remembers the formation of the universe, but at the same time, seeks reunion with the molten energy of the solar space, recalling the catastrophe and horror of its birth and the birth of the universe. This geotrauma recognises the profound horrors of the cosmic abyss. For us, however, as our planet drifts through space, we scale down our vision and temporalities, in an attempt to apprehend other, immanent and traumatic horrors: the waste which piles, or the mercury leeching into earth around mines, the horizon of collapse, ecologic melancholia manifesting as solastalgia and realisation of *apre`s=finitude*.<sup>8</sup>

But it is in our latent geotraumatic memories that we feel the pull to drift: reverberating in sympathy with Cthell's longing for the sun, where we may feel the coming together of our planet, and the pulling apart of the continents – the initial separation of matter in the making of the universe. Here, our drifts operate in a strange alignment with the deep cosmic time of the geologic.

As Fairweather demonstrates, however, the pull to drift is stronger for some than for others.

## Thickening

Within the thickened spatiotemporal frame we are perpetually worlding, through our intra-actions with the other-than-human: be it the movements of currents and waves, blasts of arctic air, glaciers sliding, mountains crumbling or the crunch of the pebble under foot. There is a co-compositional relationship with this thickened time which is unsurprising, given its place within New Materialist frameworks of being. This thickness is an ethical imperative. It brings us, through Bracha Ettinger's notion of *wit(h)nessing*, into co-poesis with the world outside of us – toward what she terms the relational non-I. It is this non-I, to which we are bound by copoesis in transcorporeal frames, that 'brings us to our undoing' – we are both with, and witness.<sup>9</sup> Through the thickening of our witnessing, becoming-with other, the boundaries of the fixed self are undone by the always-already of the non-I. This relational non-I is what brings us to the undoing, and it is in our undoing that we eddy, are eddying. Our boundaries are compromised, as the waves wash over our raft, the raft with its cross bar – the H as thickening agent.

The ethics at the heart of this poetic thickening are ones which allow the agentic nature of matter to flow in. Beyond nature writing, beyond object lessons, beyond the linearity of the 'I', poethics allows space for an agency other than the human to bleed in through poesis. If we recognise strata as not only layered, but thickened by time, its density yields evidence of existence and knowledge beyond our own, manifest through organisms, histories, geologic memories embedded within the Earth.

Atop the raft our weight disturbs the buoyancy of the driftwood, as we feel the pull of the current. We are laden, weighted. The pebbles in our pockets as anchors.

The Sahara spreads outward; grains of sand thicken the landscapes that they cover, whilst the creep of the desert is uplifted by air currents. Dust and sand swept upwards becomes atmospheric markers of drift. A counter, perhaps a companion, to the earthly forces of drift which move land masses – seeking reunion with the sands of the Gobi, mix in with the waters of the Mediterranean, cover and coat the remaining leaves of the Amazon. A thickening, a weighted blanket, a return.

## Dusting

The pebbles fall from the holes in my pockets, over the edge of the raft, and disappear into the sea.

If, as Suzanne Briet states, a pebble rolled by a torrent is a document, it may be a text, one that is written by the movements of geology and hydrology.<sup>10</sup> This lithic material, although it may not be buoyant, drifts; millennia of processes, memory and movement recorded as documentation and contained within it. Once molten and fluid, now arrested through the solidification of lava. Breaking apart, becoming smooth through the temporalities of water and wind. Further, the pebble is enfolded within the Aristotelian structure, one whereby the body returns to its natural place: rolling down the slope of a mountain, or moved by the currents of the sea. It drifts; as document, as text, as thing, as body with memory of natural place. We too, drift and come back to natural place – in alignment with our geotraumatic cores.

But I wish to go smaller than the pebble, smaller still than the grain of sand. And here, as my attention drifts, dust begins to settle. The pages of an unread book, table tops, windows and their sills, surfaces unattended all become thickened with dust. In non-attention, dust accumulates; growing, building, becoming present. Dust is thick, but also, it thickens.

In the words of Michael Marder, dust is a boundary crosser – as much as the raft crosses oceanic markers, dust too moves between sites.<sup>11</sup> A raft is an assemblage of things: discard proffered by the ocean; driftwood and jetsam, rope and rusted nails. Dust is made from that which is cast off by human and other-than-human, living and nonliving. Made up of fragments of other matter – dust is identifiable only through its unidentifiable composition. Dust is a trace marker. A ghostly present-absence which becomes a messenger of what it once was: flesh and flint, filament and fibre – fragment – a mosaicked composite of things, assembling anew.

Dust is a drift marker, its motes catch the light in the air. A strange substance, one that thickens as it drifts. Artist Agnes Denes materialises a poethics of dust and drift, which coalesces in work that embraces thickening alongside the resonance of matter. Denes' projects appear as plans and plotted marks, as drawings, sculptures and ecological installations – all fixed within the perceived stability of the page. But, Denes, with trees, maps, data, waste as her medium, too turns to dust, and the medium of her work, like all work, presents as fodder for fossils, for stratification in the face of deep and long time.

In *The Book of Dust*, Denes turns her attention to dust; working from the beginning of being, the origins of the cosmos and human interventions into the Earth, to interrogate the human condition and our place in the universe. Spanning three hundred pages, it is a text comprised of diagrams and digressions, dissections and derivations, each one focussing upon the Earth as being composed of, and in alignment with, dust. A thickened project, directed but destined for incompleteness in the face of time's ceaseless march. This work is poethical work. It is praxis breaking away from fixity toward speculation; diving into the past and toward unknown futures. It untethers strict delineations of being, of inside and outside, of future, present and past, through reflections on the material and existential composition of being.

To feel out the limitations of the self in the world on the macro and micro scale, to leave messages, is akin to writing in and with the dust. Denes' trees may grow wild and shirk their concentric organisation, but within their rings are climate markers, archiving the world as we do within our bodies. The rings are an archive in the present, as the branches and seeds of the tree spread and grow unruly – but growth, and the expansion of the rings outward, is threatened, curtailed by the looming spectres of collapse. This temporal entanglement evidences the present's lacking self-sufficiency. This is drift enframèd and drift entrapped, hauntological in relation to the past and future present.

The openings in Denes' work allow for drift to manifest – to write in and with the world without end. Form and structure are enforced, but eventually come loose, and slip away. And it is within this being between states, of the enacting of form and the drift which organises the world, that we feel a thickening through attention. The way this thickening entangles us, growing over, dusting, gripping and propelling as we move and are moved by the world. The rift is here, in the drift, between word and the world.

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Origin of the Work of Art*, 1950: 71-72

<sup>2</sup> Joan Retallack, *The Poethical Wager*, 2003: 26.

<sup>3</sup> Retallack, 48

<sup>4</sup> Michel Serres, *The Birth of Physics*, 2018:22.

<sup>5</sup> Nourma Abbott-Smith, Ian Fairweather: profile of a painter, 1978: 104.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Driftworks*, 1984:10.

<sup>7</sup> Robin Mackay, *A Brief History of Geotrauma*, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 2006: 69.

<sup>10</sup> Suzanne Briet, *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?*, 1951: 7.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Marder, *Dust (Object Lessons)*, 2016.

We thicken. A layer of dust -  
skin cells shedded.

Our words are thickened  
and my witness  
is now a witness.

My poetics become thick, as words grow  
dense - memory like strata.

The H thickens things. I imagine a Heideggerian thing,  
object without purpose, gathering dust. Thing, as I  
think it, feels thickened by the H. The h, the h-bomb,  
the hydrogen and the how[e] and the horror and the house.

d H u H s H t H

d H r H i H f H t

A current comes up the coast and I map it. I let it whorl.  
From a distance, pen to page, I plot a line on the map.  
Between the currents and the rivers, and the  
depressions in the Earth. To move with the line  
belies the magnetism within the drift.

# Blue Spectrum & Descent Study

*Blue spectrum and descent study* developed into an extensive series of unique cyanotype prints, under the same title, and appear in the artist's exhibition, *Measures of Refraction* at Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert, Sydney.

IZABELA PLUTA

Deep sea diving is something  
I never expected to do.

I think about the ocean and its body of water as a surreal form which has inspired me to consider vastness beyond a mere concept: of how water is experienced and what affect it leaves upon you.

When I look out to the horizon from land, as it encompasses the sky and the sea, it continues into an unthinkable distance. Its span impossible to perceive, as light and colour operate and combine in constant flux.

Under the sea this works in  
a completely different way.

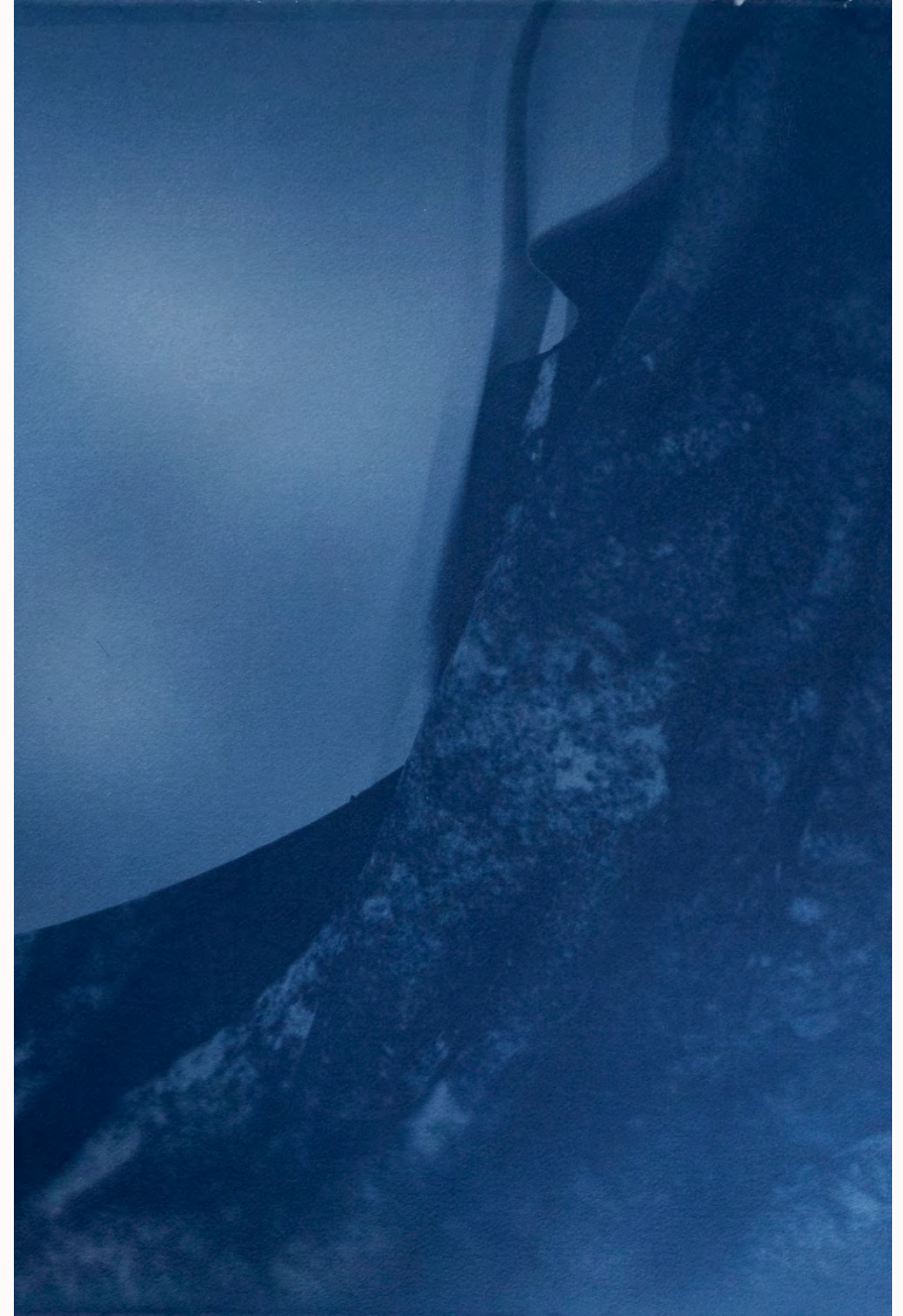


In 2018, curiosity led me to an underwater rock formation off the shores of Yonaguni-Jima in Japan.

Locals refer to it as 'The Monument' – a mythologically disputed site located near a fault line on the cusp of the Pacific Ocean and the East China Sea which lies between 5 and 25 metres beneath the water's surface.

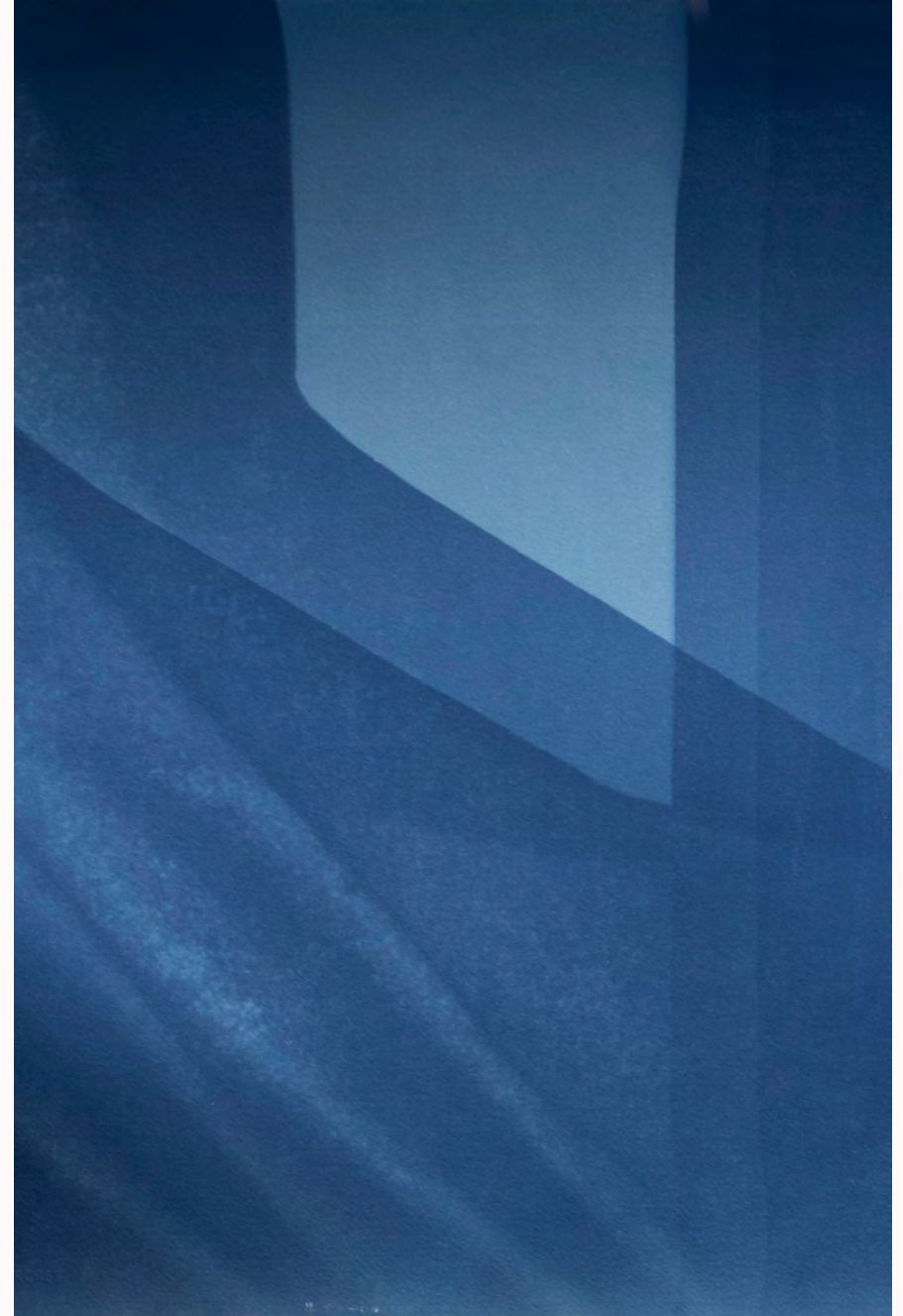
Before the last Ice Age, some 8000 years ago, the area was above sea level, and so contention lies around the question of whether this formation is a man-made artefact or naturally formed by the currents. The site has been studied by marine scientists and archaeologists since it was found in 1986 by a local diver, Kihachiro Aratake.

That same year, coincidentally,  
I left Poland and migrated  
to Australia.



I arrived on the island during a period of perilous currents and wild winds in winter when water temperature keeps to around 18-degrees. The Monument is difficult to reach. Owing to these precarious conditions and its position off Iseki Point, 100km from the eastern shore of Taiwan, access is only possible for a few months a year.

That day the sky was overcast, with choppy water and easterly winds. Twenty minutes out and south-east from the harbour, shale cliffs appear and begin to line the coastline. They seem as though they have slipped into the sea – you can sense their weight – the palpable force with which rock collapsed to form the inversed craters of shattered debris beneath. They're stacked in repeating semi-horizontal layers and bear a certain gravity of unquantifiable scale. They've been created by the hollowing out of (fallen) mass which is echoed in the protrusions left residue in the tidal zone – they remind me of photographic inversions: of negatives and positives.

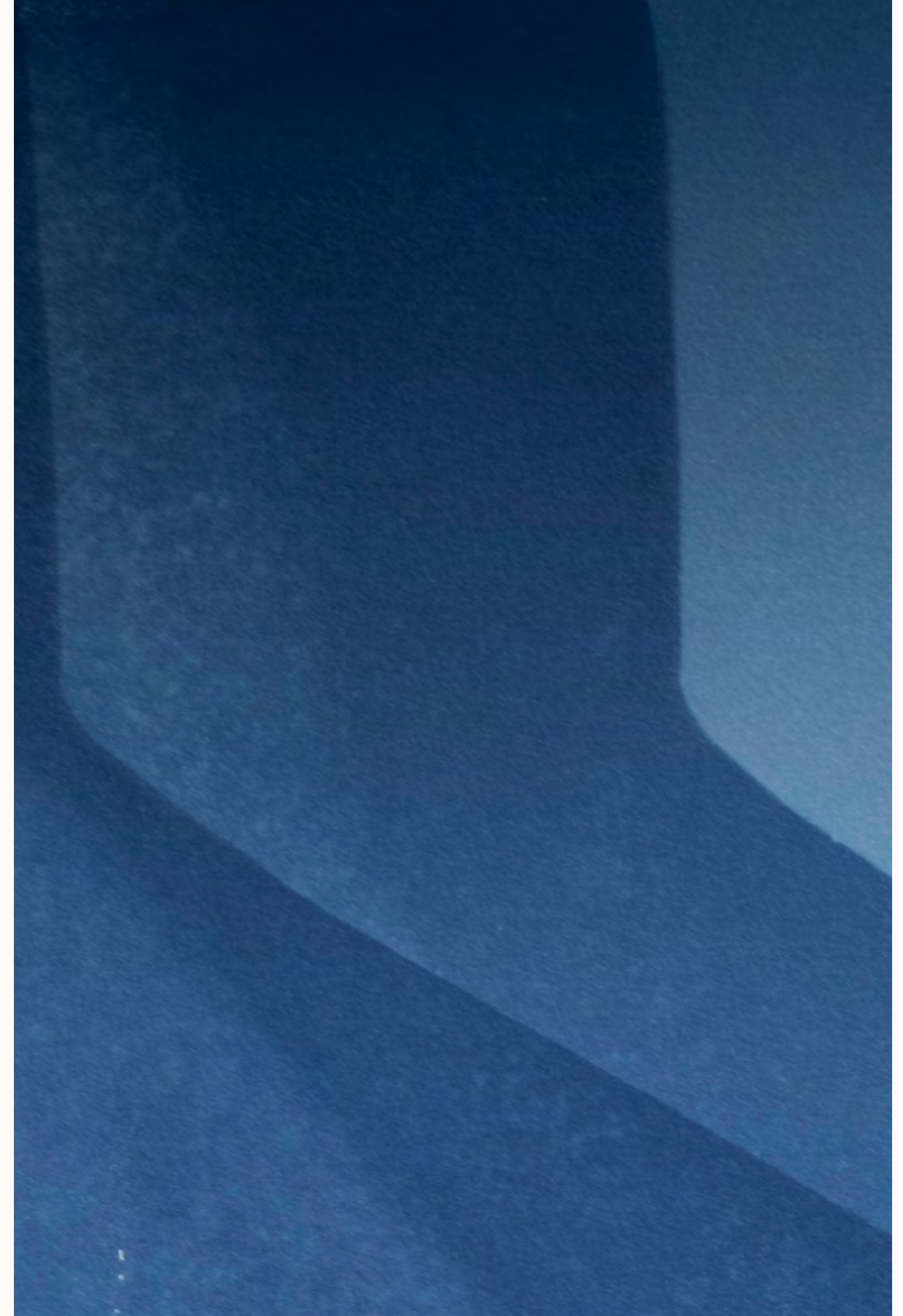




Until our small boat reaches the exact location just to the edge of the sunken rocks, the possibility of diving remains uncertain. The sense of knowing what lies beneath, without the means to witness, is ridden with anxiety and hope (although I anticipate what I'm about to see, it is uncertain what the experience will bring).

The white-washed surface of the water: a barrier shielding the monument from sight.

Experience is only made possible in an ether which is not made up of air, but of water.



A local diver jumps into the messy waters, feeling out the strength of invisible currents. He resurfaces minutes later, shouting an affirming “Okay.”

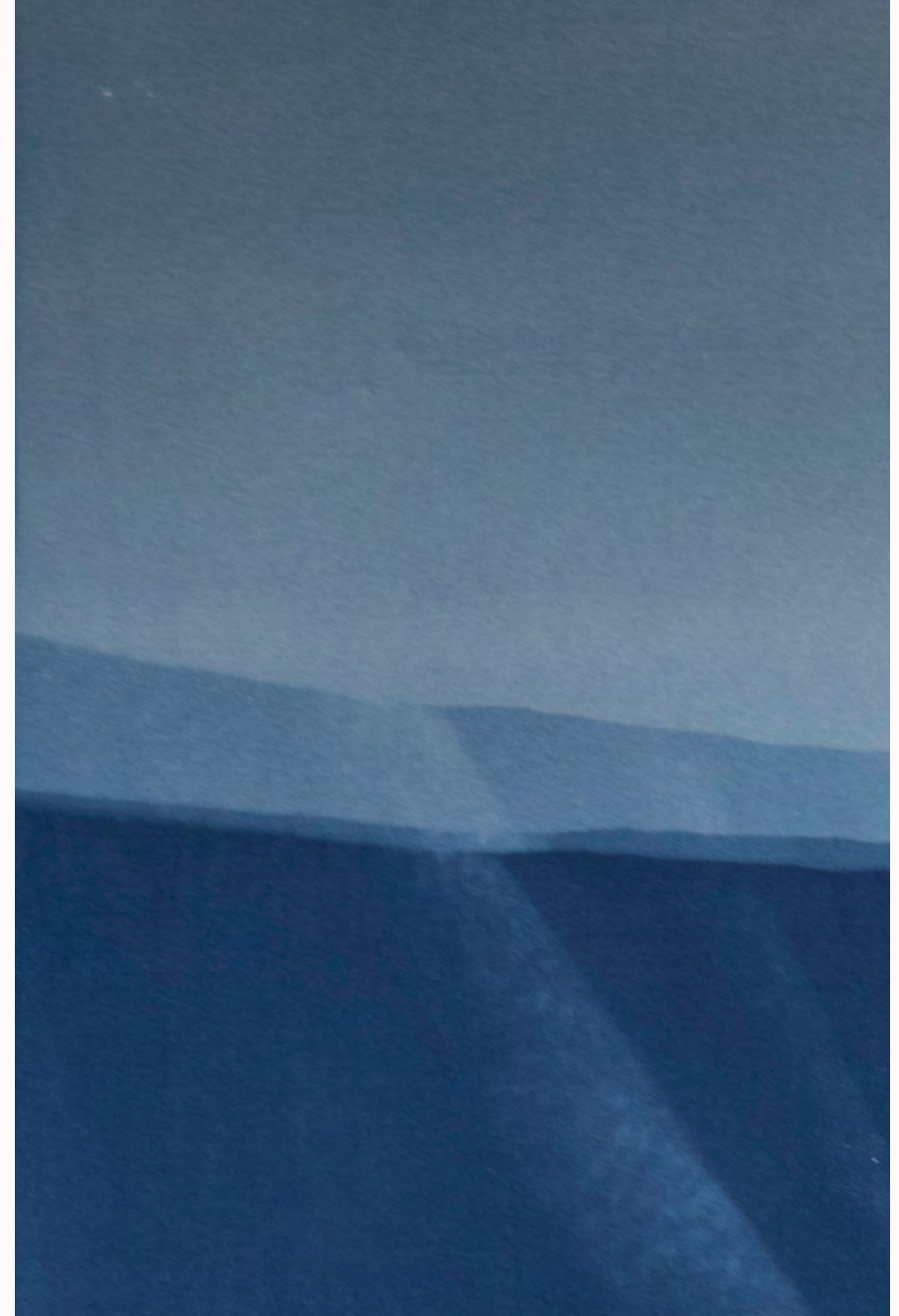
The moment suddenly becomes very real and with it my intuition and unease of going underwater shift into action. I move quickly, securing my gear, putting on my mask. Before I know it, I’m ushered to the boat’s stern and there is nowhere to move except forward – off the edge and into the swell that makes my chest tighten.

The piercing noise of the crashing waves and the boat motor punctuate this heightened instant of what is about to happen and release a rush of adrenalin.

### As I jump, the sound breaks.

My body, encased in dense neoprene, contracts as I’m embraced by the cold water. It fills my ears. The sound of my breath, amplified through the respirator, takes over my awareness of my new surroundings.

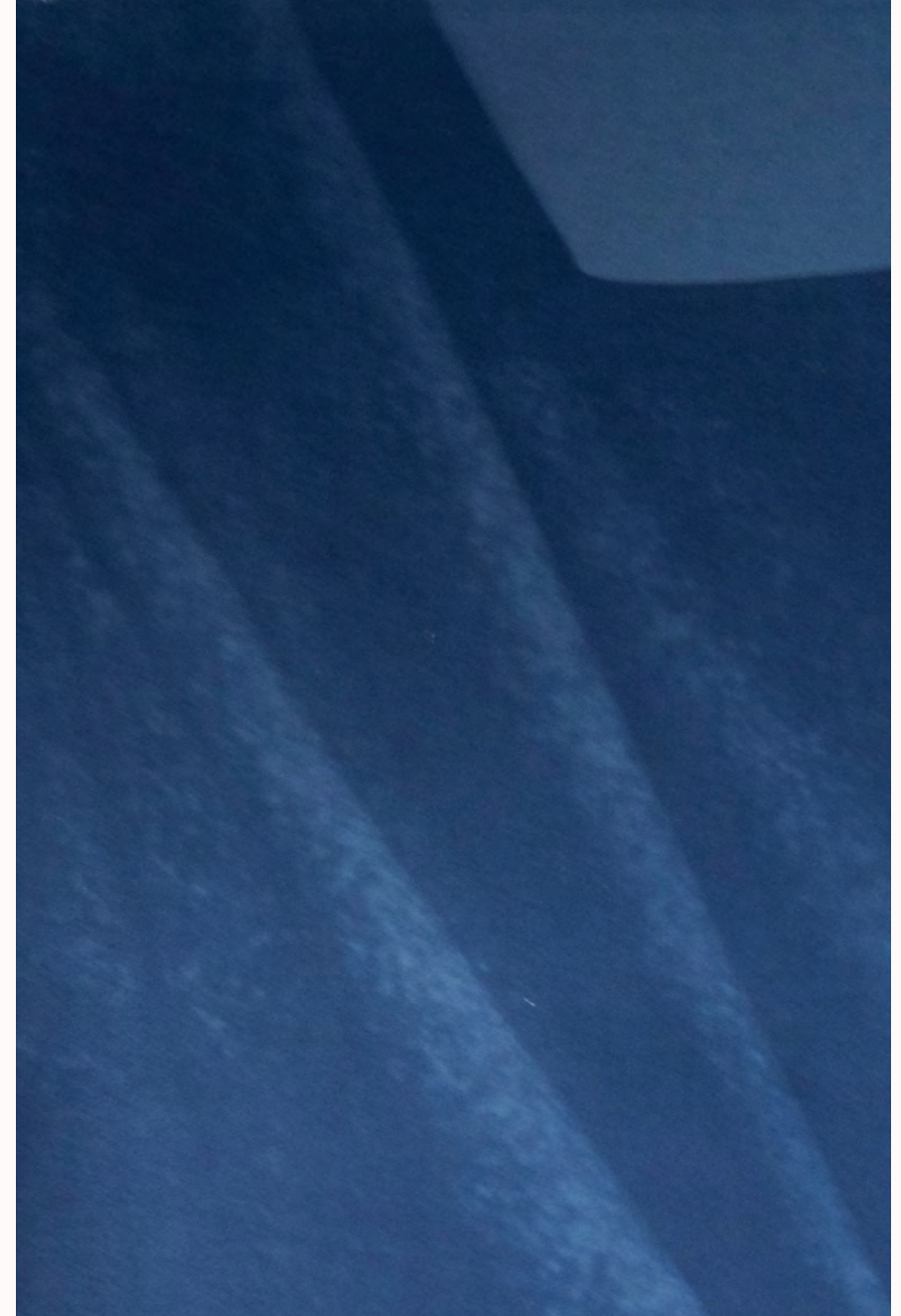
I’m no longer next to anything I understand, but within something whose materiality I can feel constantly on and around me.



The cacophony of the wind's tempestuous chaos, the sonorous diesel-powered engine and the endless collision of surface waves turns instantly to silence. Punctuated only by the steady rhythm of my inhalation and exhalation, calms my body as it adjusts to the conditions, my mind races. The space around me is full, experienced as a heaving volume. A mass that pushes against me while I push back onto it's encompassing force and move through it.

### Water is denser than air.

I breathe and equalise, pinching my nose to expel the pressure in my head as I gradually descend, feet first. My body moves gently, arms and legs bending and stretching through the water, as if in slow motion. My breathing slows. I think of all the things I cannot see through the thickness of the blue. I can't make sense of the distance. My slow-moving body is hurried by the current's quickness, guiding me towards The Monument without thought or direction. I'm aware of the slippage between floating and drifting - sinking. I simultaneously move with the water while pushing against its force with my limbs. The only constant is the familiarity of my breath.

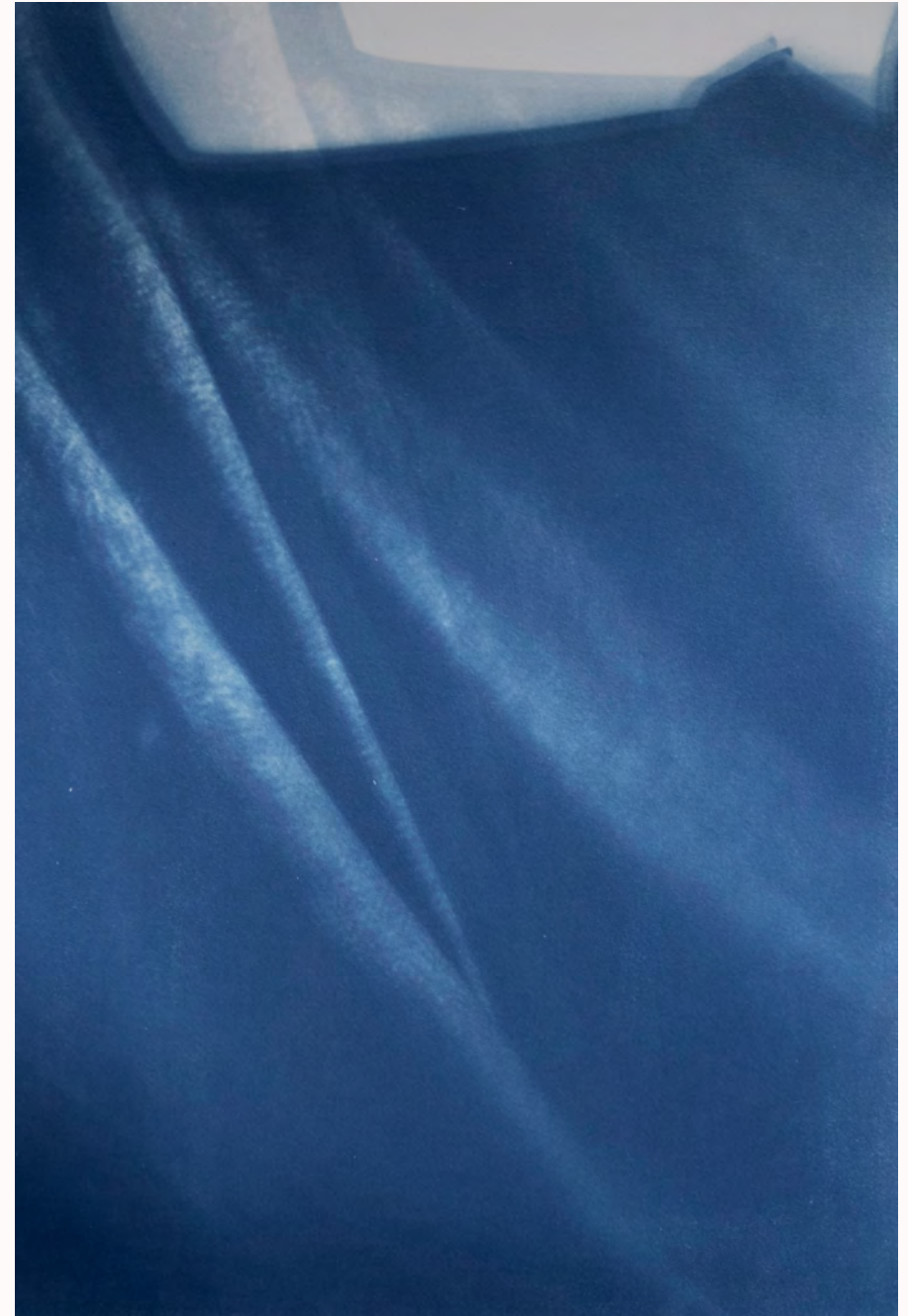


Blue remains blue. Rays of light break the surface of the water, racing themselves to the ocean's depths.

There the blue changes, perceived in vertical troughs that come from above and fall beneath, dissolving into darkness.

As the light travels farther, only blue light remains – eventually being absorbed as well. As the blue is all around me it's all that I can think of.

I try and conceive the measure of it – its endlessness in relation to the scale of my body. A speck. Magnitude. Endless distance that terrifies me.

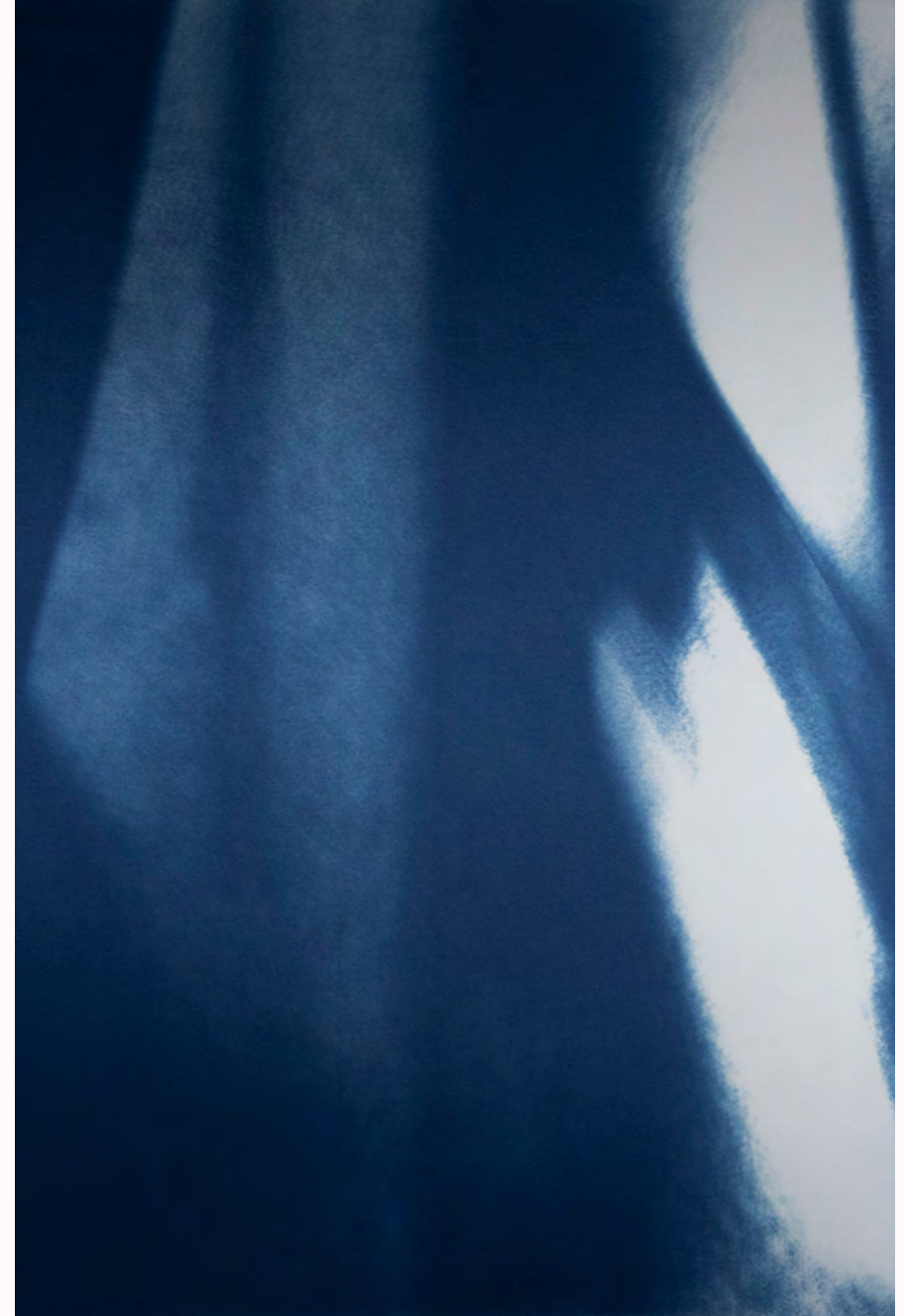




Eventually The Monument appears. Although I've seen it in photographs many times before this affective moment, I am not certain of what I'm seeing. I can't comprehend its totality because the water visibility is too poor, so I see it at constant speed, moving across it. It appears as if in sections, like a film; much too large to see whole unless I were above it, in crystal waters or above the sea. The very surface of the water obstructs its view.

The shale rock appears blue – sometimes revealing brown hues as the lack of light upon it removes its legibility. Its texture is ambiguous, concealed in parts with algae, a materiality camouflaging angular rock into softer forms and shapes.

The current continues to move me. I drift across the massive form as if on auto-pilot, seeing only what the water visibility allows. So many variables are at play and beyond my control – I'm completely unanchored, lingering in the fluctuating distance between my body and the formation. I give way to the invisible movement of water. Unable to see the current that I have relinquished my senses to, I can feel the force of its turbulence as I'm pulled closer to the anchored rock and then as quickly as I find my buoyancy, I'm pulled away and along until I'm past it-having been able to touch the rock for only a few moments because the feeling of it heightened my awareness of letting go to movement. Visceral.



The cold water on my body becomes colder. The skin around my eyes becomes sensitive to the pressure and the glass of my mask as it fogs. As my body moves, without orientation or gravity through the water, droplets trace the surface of the glass and I'm able to see just beyond the visible vapour of my breath manifesting itself on the surface.

I'm too nervous to attempt to flush the mask at depth for fear of not being able to replace it in that same swift movement. A seemingly simple action, which I have been taught, always becomes an overwhelming task when I'm underwater. I'm fearful of not being able to open my eyes again and instead needing to complete the dive with my eyes closed.

For me, the only thing more unnerving than not being able to perceive the distance, is to not be able to see its blue. Underwater, the senses become heightened. Feeling water upon my skin as a relentless contact compacting upon me as I dive deeper is a powerful physical sensation. It also manoeuvres in the space of my imagination as endless space, a contradiction to the feeling of compression.

I am always uncertain  
of location.



IZABELA PLUTA

STELLA N'DJOKU

&

JULIA ANASTASIA PELOSI-THORPE

## Untitled

Stella N'Djoku

Translated by Julia Anastasia Pelosi-Thorpe

I ponder the result,  
at this morning hour,  
of this biology so perfect  
it wakes me even pre-alarm  
and of realising I've a body  
only in rushing.  
Bus-train-bus  
Office-school-office  
Bus-school-bus is  
the only pulse I seem to know.  
But today, the first day where home  
starts regaining its initial meaning,  
I revisit whether the sense of rush  
was in ending and the satisfaction  
in extreme weariness  
of body.

I observe, in this silence,  
the slowness of snail on grass  
moist line on tile-geography.  
Dandelions shift lightly at its passing  
and leaf is eaten with no rage.  
There's beauty  
in this quiet we were not accustomed to.  
A time has come for metamorphosis and seeding,  
for dancing lightly in the air.

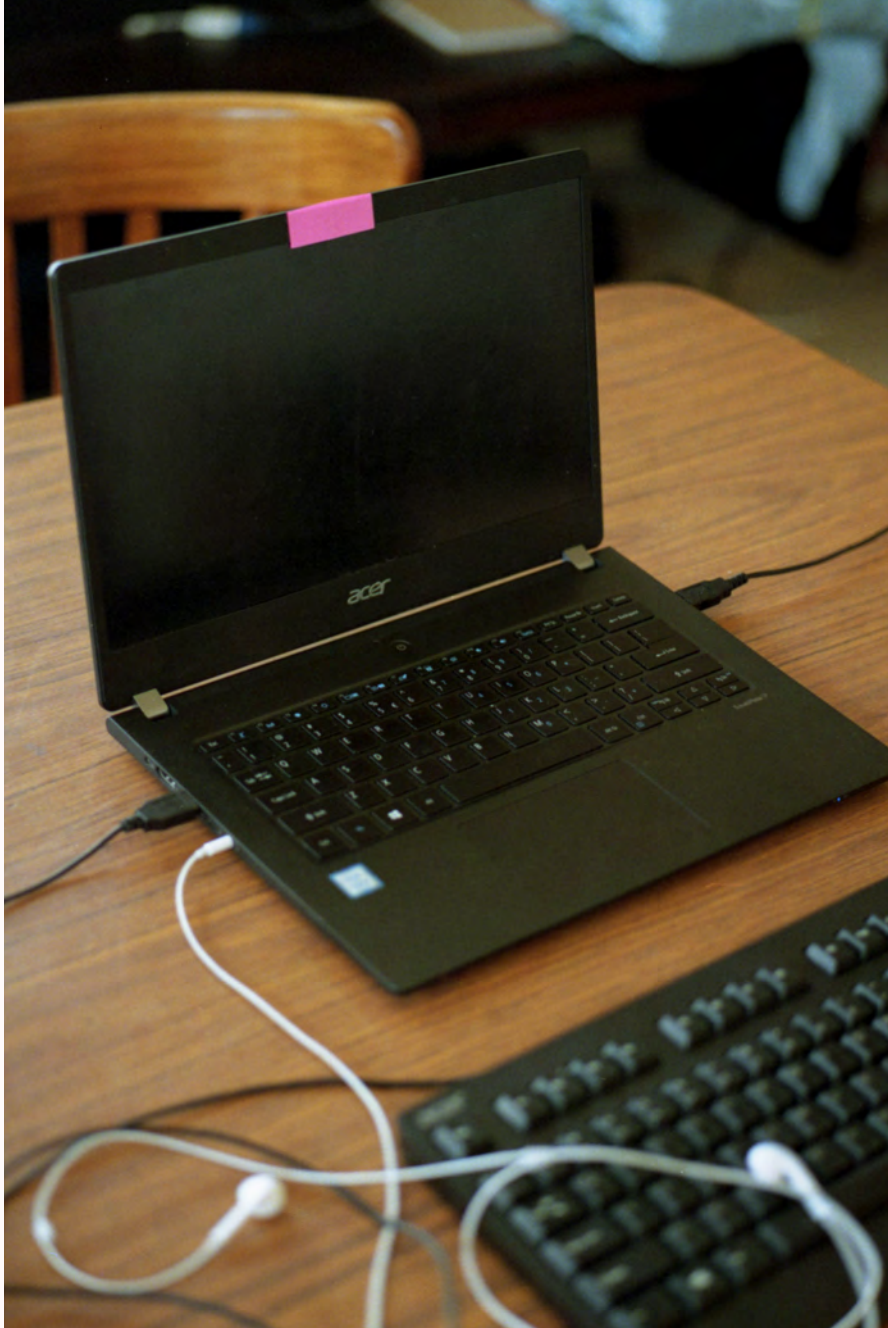
Stella N'Djoku, "Untitled" first appears in the poetry anthology *Dal solloccuoto: poesie asselate d'aria*, edited by Matteo Bianchi and published by Samuele Editore in response to the 2020 pandemic.

Watch a recording of the poem [here](#).













# My gift to you

MOLLY STEPHENSON

Real is Material sensitive,  
the holding of pleasures deeper than ethics,<sup>1</sup>

Real! Is the Revenge of the Junk;

The beautiful diamond,

The agnostic shell!

The Revenge of the Zany;<sup>2</sup>

The glistening Forest!

The fruitful Flower!

The melting Earth!

Help!

It is now Christmas time.

My symbolic gestures:  
 My gift of introspection,  
 My fatberg,  
 My squid,  
 My handbag,  
 My unicorn,  
 My boardgame,  
 My dance;  
 My permanent carnival,<sup>3</sup>  
 The transfusion of blood,

Liquid, lollies, pillows, pearls, coffins, foam and coral,  
 quarrying all in the quietness  
 of an out of control chemistry experiment,  
 a kindergarten wet area.<sup>4</sup>  
 Hoping and keeping and skipping into

My fatberg, fatberg, fatberg. My

Fat,  
 Fat,  
 Fat.

Freeze! in my *Mise-en-scène*,  
 My threshold of repurposing: the illogical fantasies of my  
 kinky kinks,  
 drooping dreams  
 jumping jacks!  
 Oh! These dreams!

They no longer hold meaning  
 We gave it to them,  
 Then I gave it to them,  
 Our arrogance gave it to them,  
 All these anxieties and desires;

*the spooky secondary revision gave it to them*<sup>5</sup>  
 Little chicks inside my dream,<sup>6</sup>  
 inside your dream,  
 inside their dream,  
 Or maybe it's not even,  
 Or inside.  
 Our outside. Or elsewhere,  
*Or somewhere.*

*My gift to you* –  
 The absence and indulgence of mediation,  
 laced with ribbed ribbon and  
 rebirthed in  
 and through  
 fire.

<sup>1</sup>Lauren Berland, Sianne Ngai. "Comedy Has Issues," University of Chicago Press.

<sup>2</sup>Sianne Ngai, interviewed by Adam Jasper, Cabinet Magazine, 2011.

<sup>3</sup>Berland, Ngai. "Comedy Has Issues," pg.236.

<sup>4</sup>Clare Milledge, *The Artist-Shaman and The Gift of Sight* (Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, Sydney College of the Arts, 2012-2013), pg.95.

<sup>5</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts*, (UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), ProQuest Ebook Central, pg.25.

<sup>6</sup>Anne Carson, "The Glass Essay" from *Glass, Irony, and God*, Copyright © 1994 by Anne Carson. Used by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation.

# The Monstrous Kiss and its Perversions

DIEGO RAMÍREZ

**SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES BROUGHT ABOUT BY COVID-19 ARE REFRAMING THE ACT OF KISSING: SHIFTING THE GAPING MOUTH FROM AN IMAGE OF UNQUENCHABLE DESIRE TO RESPIRATORY COLLAPSE. AS THIS ORAL ORIFICE BECOMES A PORTAL FOR THE PATHOGEN.**

The mental picture of a wet tongue slowly emerging from a foreign body—like Satan transfiguring into a serpent to pervert Eden—is an eerie trespass of safe distance. This erotic scene of bodily caress becomes momentarily forbidden as the government regulates closeness and assigns a police force to patrol human interaction. Within this restrictive environment, seduction assumes repulsion, the sluggish tongue locked in a slimy hole of narcissism. The lips stand like guards involved in pathetic masturbation, moving grotesquely with earthworm locomotion. Meanwhile, teeth gain the appearance of stale bricks collecting moss, completing a depressing scene for the end of the world. In the framework of COVID-19, the kiss is lethally corrupted, as the connotations of love, familiarity and kinship it carries begin to decompose hideously.

This transformation is monstrous, an aberration that threatens normalcy by turning an instrument of affection into a mode of transmission; an entry point and a vulnerability. Since saliva spreads COVID-19, the kiss becomes an engagement malformed with terror, impure and unsafe. What makes it truly monstrous is the speed of contamination – rather than the fear of a single transmission – numbers explode with a warlike intensity. Like zombies who multiply through wounding, the virus duplicates swiftly by contaminating

others and endlessly replicating itself. In the discourse of monster theory, Noel Carroll understands this process of reduplication as fission, explaining that monsters owe their ontology to a state of division, doubling and multiplication.<sup>1</sup> Jeekyll and Hyde is a double split into good and evil, while Dracula is a subject caught in eternal self-replication. Carroll also notes how a being becomes monstrous when it proliferates to form a mass, such as the titular menace of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963): one aggressive bird may pose no threat but a flock of them certainly do. The pandemic is the massification of an epidemic, where a widespread disease is affecting an extraordinarily large territory. It is unpredictable and voracious, like a flock of birds waving with rage.

Within this setting, the kiss is also creepy, becoming a shadow or an inversion of itself, an instrument of care turned into ideological negligence. While a renewed consciousness of bodily fluids accounts for discomforting feelings during this pandemic—our awareness of the virus brings attention to the reality of the mouth as an unclean orifice—there is also a semantic collapse taking place, as the idealised notions of love, friendship and kinship that are conveyed by the uninus act of kissing are violently devalued. Indeed, social distancing measures and contamination flip the kiss into a semiotic shadow, like the kiss of Judas, actively signifying and reinforcing its antithesis: separation. To kiss during social isolation is an anti-community gesture that defeats collective efforts to stop the spread of the virus, exposing kissers to risk of infection and thus, quarantine. The kiss as an act of humanity (an affirmative gesture of shared existence) becomes an abrupt assertion of anti-humanity (negation of our collective wellbeing). The kiss no longer unites, it divides.



The maligned kiss of Judas Iscariot in the Gospels exemplifies this nihilistic engine, as Judas betrays Jesus Christ with a kiss that reveals him to the Romans, a phantasmal event that dawns the crucifixion. This episode monsterises Judas by exiling him from Christ's circle of apostles, violently pushing him outside the boundaries of social acceptability and community. The creepiness of Judas, however, is in the desecration of the kiss. The word creep originally refers to the crawl of snakes and animals with short legs, such as spiders. The term evolved to denote a form of fear; the unsettling nature of this movement becoming a physiological reaction. Eventually it becomes a cypher for an uncomfortable subject, as the human creep manifests with the uneasiness of a slimy creature.

**JUDAS IS CREEPY BECAUSE HE REPELS, AND HE REPELS BECAUSE HE DEFILES. JUDAS EMBODIES THE SEMIOTIC SHADOW OF THE KISS, TURNING HIS LIPS INTO THE PENUMBRA AT THE EDGE OF THE UMBRA, WHERE UNITY IS ENGULFED BY TOTAL DARKNESS; VOIDING WHOLENESS INTO HOLLOWNESS.**

The kiss of Judas, like COVID-19, is also sick with the devil, as "Satan entered Judas" to make him betray Christ.<sup>2</sup> The notion that the devil can penetrate the body and hijack human consciousness resonates with the functions of a virus. The limitation to this morbid comparison is that demonic possession is not commonly understood as a transmittable state - one does not catch the devil from a possessed. However, there is a societal predisposition - an atmosphere

of decadence - that welcomes Satan, a state of collective corruption that makes humanity more susceptible to possession. When reading the gospels and the myriad of demons that Jesus cast out, it appears that an epidemic of satanic possession is taking place in the New Testament. The masses are inscribed with a state of spiritual vulnerability, in desperate need of religious inoculation. While there is no community transmission, there is a high rate of infection. Behavioural changes are a common motif in pathogenic narratives, such as *Blade II* (2002), where vampirism is conceived as a virus that radically transforms its host. Like demoniacs, the vampires in *Blade* are humans endowed with supernatural abilities. Returning to Judas Iscariot, the kiss is a manifestation of his disease or uncleanness because of its central role within the Church, where it bonds, includes and excludes.

As Michael Philip Penn posits in *Kissing Christians*, early Christians used the kiss to distinguish themselves from others throughout the first five centuries of Judeo-Christianity.<sup>3</sup> While the author makes it clear that kissing is common in Greco-Roman societies, he isolates the Christian kiss as a ritual, and therefore an action distinct from everyday gestures.<sup>4</sup> The threshold that divides early Christians and other communities, such as Jews, is incredibly porous indeed. For Christ and his apostles were Jewish themselves. The threshold that divides early Christians and other communities is incredibly porous indeed, thus increasing the necessity for rituals that reinforce the separation and delineations between groups, an endless reminder of the limits of 'us', 'them', 'ours' and 'theirs'.

**THUS, THE KISS IS INSTRUMENTALISED AS A UNIFYING GESTURE THAT BINDS CHRISTIANS ACROSS COUNTRIES AND SEPARATES THEM FROM OTHER DENOMINATIONS. THE SHADOW CAST BY THIS PRACTICE, HOWEVER, IS THE CREATION OF MONSTROUS OTHERS, WHO ROAM IN THE UMBRA, PENUMBRA AND ANTUMBRA OF THE KISS.**

The spectres of anti-semitism are exemplary in this regard, as they are often distorted hallucinations created by viscous Christians. Judas is in fact a victim of racial phantasmagoria, as he is misconstrued to represent anti-semitic caricatures of greed and betrayal. This is how Othering creates semiotic shadows, whose anatomies are a menace to normalcy, and their behaviour an assault on social order. Due to its role in the Church, the kiss is both the subject and object of this inversion.

Penn offers several theories to explain the adoption of kissing by Christians as a tool to define themselves, one of the most convincing being that kissing symbolises family in late antiquity.<sup>5</sup> Since Judeo-Christianity adopts the visage of a family—wherein Christians refer to each other in familial terms: 'brother', 'sister', with God as the 'Father'—it is plausible for kissing to be an extension of this tendency to invoke the familial.<sup>6</sup> This notion makes Judas' kiss more cursing, as he profanates the foundations of the Church; violating a ritual that belongs to the "closing of prayers, the Eucharist, baptism, ordination, martyrdom, the cult of martyrs, greetings, monastic vows, home devotions, saluting

the altar, epistolary conventions and death rituals."<sup>7</sup> It is an assault on the totality of belief; an attack on its leading figure and family structure, as well as the ritualistic apparatus underpinning it. In sum, Judas' betrayal is a radical decimation of the kiss's highest symbolism, a nightmarish perversion of its capacity to greet, recognise, unify, and honour kin.

The vampire embodies this nightly inversion of the kiss, where the kisser befools and assassinates, instead of birthing and honouring. Andy Warhol recognises this phantasmagoria in his painting *The Kiss* (Bela Lugosi) (1963), wherein he reproduces a still from *Dracula* (1931) in which Bela Lugosi's Count Dracula ravenously bites into a victim's neck. The implication of Warhol's title is that Dracula's bite is a romantic kiss turned foul, the rupture of consent this implies rendering the kiss horrible. The vampire as lover invokes the warped image of a malignant narcissist, employing manipulation to deceive others. Dracula's sinister hunger for blood can easily become a metaphor for 'narcissistic supplies',<sup>8</sup> where the perpetrator devours their victim's adoration to fill their pathological void. Elsewhere I have discussed how the design of Lugosi's vampire borrows from the Latin Lover<sup>9</sup> figure, common in the early 20th century, to stylise a cinematic rendition of *Dracula*; sharing a distinct semblance with the Latin Lover types (thick accent and slicked back hair) portrayed by Rudolph Valentino and Ramon Novarro in film.<sup>10</sup> This codependency between undead and Latin Lover further emphasise the signage of the vampire bite as a gothified kiss, an abusive romance unfolding in the darkest night.

Dracula's phantasmagorical kiss also holds a similitude with Judas, as their cunning lips sinisterly betray those they touch. Within pop culture, *Dracula 2000* (2000) exploits this comparison, with Dracula revealing himself as Judas Iscariot, rendered undead after a failed suicide. The more contemporary 'Chapter Twenty-Seven: The Judas Kiss' of *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-) further mobilises this correlation by portraying Vlad The Impaler as the son of Judas, and the guardian of the original thirty pieces of silver. This conflation shows how both figures trade closely in the popular imagination, signifying a deadly kiss of betrayal. The kiss of Judas swallows the life of Christ with the same voracity that a vampire drains its victim. More broadly, this creature's aversion to silver is also reminiscent of the silver coins of Judas, which circulate as haunted tokens of heresy. There's an internet legend that exploits this connotative echo by claiming the vampire descends from Judas, who passed on a pathological fear for silver.<sup>11</sup>

The vampire's abhorrence of the cross is another haunting of the crucifixion, strengthening the lineage between Dracula's bite and Judas' kiss. In this way, the undead functions as a travesty of the gospels, becoming a warping zone for its teachings and beliefs. The vampire is Christ and Judas split into an uncanny double - holy becomes unholy, hope becomes despair, redeemer becomes tempter. Even the vampiric lore of immortality, which curses the vampire to eternally rise and slumber in their coffin, stands as mockery to the doctrine of resurrection. Once again, we are seeing a devaluation and nightmarisation of high ideals, as the undead rises like Jesus, to

roam in torment rather than bliss. This doubling of Christ is furthered through the motif of sanguineous consumption, as red wine is ingested by believers in symbolic recognition of Christ's shedding. The vampire performs the same ritual albeit animalistically, in a purgatorial compulsion. *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1897) strengthens this nexus paraphrasing Leviticus 17:11, "for the life of the flesh is in the blood", in Dracula's exclamation of, "The blood is the life!"<sup>12</sup> This is a common thread amongst works that derive from Dracula's imaginarium, like *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) where Spike says, "Blood is life, lack-brain."<sup>13</sup> In the cinematic adaptation of *Interview With The Vampire* (1994), this is rendered visible by Lestat drinking rat's blood in a cup of wine, parodying the Eucharist.

Let us return to Judas and position him within this gory semantic, tracing the linguistic connection to blood that manifests in his utterance of "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood,"<sup>14</sup> following his deliverance of Jesus to the Romans. This is also true of Akeldama (Field of Blood), a burial ground for foreigners that is said to have been acquired with the thirty pieces of silver that Judas forsook after betraying Christ.

#### THE FIELD OF BLOOD IS A GRAVEYARD FOR ALIENS, IMPRINTED WITH GOTHIC POETICS OF DIFFERENCE AS A NETWORK OF SUBTERRANEAN TOMBS FOR OTHERS TO LIE.

Like the theatre of shadows in racial relations, these cadavers are testament to the compulsive need to cast out difference by manufacturing linguistic distinctions - the fear that without separation, these

(dead) bodies might penetrate the sameness of community and disrupt its harmony. This shows how difference is pathologised, hallucinated as a condition that can spread like a monstrous fissure if it's not regulated, isolated and controlled. In racist parlance, one could describe the increased movement of peoples as an epidemic to discursively construct minorities as a disease.

The vampire's kiss also brings forth familial disintegration, just as the kiss of Judas ruptured the 12 Apostles, the earliest kinsfolk of the church. This is true in Stoker's *Dracula*, where the Count intervenes in the union of Jonathan and Mina Harker by kidnapping Jonathan and momentarily converting Mina into a vampire—while in Stoker's novel they consummate their marriage, after curing Mina. Later adaptations show a different fate, such as *Nosferatu* (1922), where Mina dies by sacrificing herself for the death of the Draculean Count Orlok. In Mario Bava's *Black Sabbath* (1963), the disintegration of the family is more prominent, as we find a vampire that returns to infect his household. In this short film, a patriarch leaves on a mission to murder a Wurdulak, an undead creature from Slavic mythology. He returns late at night, five days later, to his home; suffering an injury to the heart and carrying the head of the Wurdulak to prove his inexplicable success, but also displaying uncanny symptoms, such as a hunger insatiable by food. The newly converted vampire soon begins to turn his family into Wurdulaks with a bite, a dynamic that resembles a greeting kiss - an affectionate gesture for kin now corrupted.

Philip Brophy notes how the horror film routinely liquidates the nuclear family in *Horrality: The textuality of contemporary horror films*. In this essay, Brophy finds a unique sensibility he terms 'horrality': a neologism for the humour, morality, and textuality of horror in the early 80s.<sup>15</sup> *Horrality* discusses the destruction of the family by noting a shift in spectatorship with the release of *Amityville 2: The Possession* (1983) from "individual identification (the victim, the possessed, the pursued, etc)" to a spectacle of annihilation that destroys the family for optic pleasure.<sup>16</sup> While this reading is specific to films produced in the late 70s to late 80s, such as *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), the annihilation of the family is still a common motif in contemporary horror cinema. *Hereditary* (2018), for instance, tortures the family with spectacular devices that include decapitation, self-immolation, bone fracture, possession, and burning. A lengthier aspect of *Horrality* is body horror, which Brophy discusses in relation to *Scanners* (1981), *The Fury* (1978), *American Werewolf in London* (1981), *The Thing* (1982), and *Alien* (1979). This focus on abjection extends to Brophy's practice as an artist and film director, a large focus of which has been the destruction of images of bodies, rather than families.

A perennial example of Brophy's application of body horror is his 2-screen animation *Vox* (2007), in which he foregrounds, exaggerates and ultra-sexualises the corporeality of intimacy. This work consists of two vector headshots - facing each other in profile - set against an empty backdrop that resembles the void of a red stage. The icon on the left is a male while the one on the right is a female, both Caucasian-presenting. This framing evokes

Jan Svankmajer's 'Passionate Discourse' and his surreal stop motion animation *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982), where a couple merge during a sexual frenzy until they turn into a violent blob. However, unlike Svankmajer's tactile aesthetic, the style of *Vox* is a digital tutti frutti of pop art, superflat, anime and Adobe graphics. These sensibilities become more complicated as elements of body horror set in with a post-humanist audio-visualisation of romantic osculation, where flesh becomes mutant and plastic.

In a public segment of the work made available online, we can see the female protruding abominable genital tentacles from her head, which she expands and contracts in a struggle to touch the male. Extended animation stills and installation photography show that the male corresponds to this ritual with a similarly abject transformation. Some elements of these mutations resemble the vampire bite in Guillermo del Toro's *The Strain* (2014-17), where the strigois<sup>17</sup> cheeks split open to release a growth that blossoms like a penis worm. While it is unclear whether Brophy's figures are courting, mating, or simply dialoguing, their non-penetrative touch conveys a kiss. *Vox*'s scene of morphological fantasy is intrinsically sonic; the shapes interact with a synthesiser, becoming sound organs as well as expressions of desire. In doing so, the sci-fi aesthetic points to the evolution of a new biology in which noise is central to bodily functions, like a mating call for Terminator. The title of the work, *Vox*, speaks to this speculative evolution by conveying an alien, hypersexual audio-visualisation of the vocal apparatus and its role as a linguistic instrument.

While the family is absent from this unearthly theatre, the reproductive logic of *Vox* codes its non-presence with trouble. For having seen this procreative ritual, one wonders what spawn emerges forth from this union. On the other hand, these creatures may also be sterile, capable of self-replication or simply unwilling to breed. It is worth considering the artist's use of doubling during the pre-production of *Vox*. A monstrous fissure that first entailed recording a test video of a male performing facial expressions, which later became key frames for the animation. This same footage is also the basis for the female, as the artist simply adapted the masculine features to conform with the female form instead of shooting a new subject.<sup>18</sup> By accessing the inner logic of the video, we can deduce these figures can duplicate. *The Strain* springs to mind again – where vampirism is imagined as a virus culpable of heinous mutations – to consider the role of sickness and its uncontrollable dissemination causal to extreme bodily transformations.

A proposition for *Vox* as a sickness fits well within a chain of Cronenberg-esque associations, where this bodily extravaganza could be a disease. This is not to force a zeitgeisty interpretation onto the work, rather it is a recognition of how the piece becomes recontextualised during the radical and rampant germophobia of COVID-19. It speaks to the heightened state of paranoia that colours sexual encounters with psychotronic anxieties during the peak of infection: *Vox*'s horrible tongal anatomy renders visible the romantic terror that presupposes closeness. The subtext of familial obliteration is also an insightful tomb in the abysmal passageways of

connotative catacombs that is the horror genre. Showing the disruption of intimacy to be more than a postergated kiss, as it apprehensively holds the primal drive to procreate and the West's obsession with family formation. It threatens the institution of the family and the political ballast this unit brings to societal structures at large. Beneath the horniness and frustration, there is a tingle of panic regarding the preservation of the species. Indeed, when a kiss turns into a vector of disease, it triggers grand and neurotic preoccupations with the future.

Judas is sick with the devil, Dracula is infected with vampirism and Brophy's osculation offers a morbid audiovisual glyph to further articulate oral aberrations of this kind. These kisses are corrupted, relegated to the shadows cast by dominant systems of meaning making, such as Christianity and the film industry. They separate wholesome from loathsome, clean from unclean and normal from abnormal. The mouth as a site of difference does not escape the implication that Otherness is constructed in speech, that parlance makes monsters. Judas, as the oft-target of anti-semitic sentiments, exemplifies how discourse constructs the enemy through villification.<sup>19</sup> He also demonstrates how the kiss becomes creepy during a semiological inversion, where it flips into a shadow of itself: it repels, divides and terrifies. However, the true moment of monstrosity occurs during fission, when it doubles, multiplies or spreads. While a grotesque mirage, like that of Brophy's *Vox*, is a true marker of monstrosity, the kiss becomes more threatening when it challenges normalcy by multiplication. It is the Draculean takeover, the potential for reduplication

that renders the supernaturalised kiss monstrous: wherein difference becomes pathologised and the lips transfigured into vectors of hallucinogenic diseases. Returning to COVID-19, it is the rate of infection rather than the intensity of the disease that makes the kiss monstrous, for its mega capacity for rupture threatens 'reality' – and the structures that enable it – as we know it.

<sup>1</sup> Noel Carroll, "Fantastic Biologies and the Structures of Horrific Imagery," in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 139.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 22:3

<sup>3</sup> Michael Philip Penn, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in Late Ancient Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 24

<sup>8</sup> Narcissists have a pathological need for attention that drains their victims from emotional energy.

<sup>9</sup> The Latin Lover is a male stereotype characterised by seduction that appeared in the 1920s.

<sup>10</sup> Diego Ramirez, "Unnatural Hunger: the copy, the vampire and postcolonial anxieties," *Island Island*, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Toothpickings, "Jesus and the Vampire Apostle," 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, (1897), 134.

<sup>13</sup> Season 5, Episode 22 *The Gift*

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 27:4

<sup>15</sup> Philip Brophy, "Horrority: The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films," in *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder (London: Routledge, 2000), 277.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

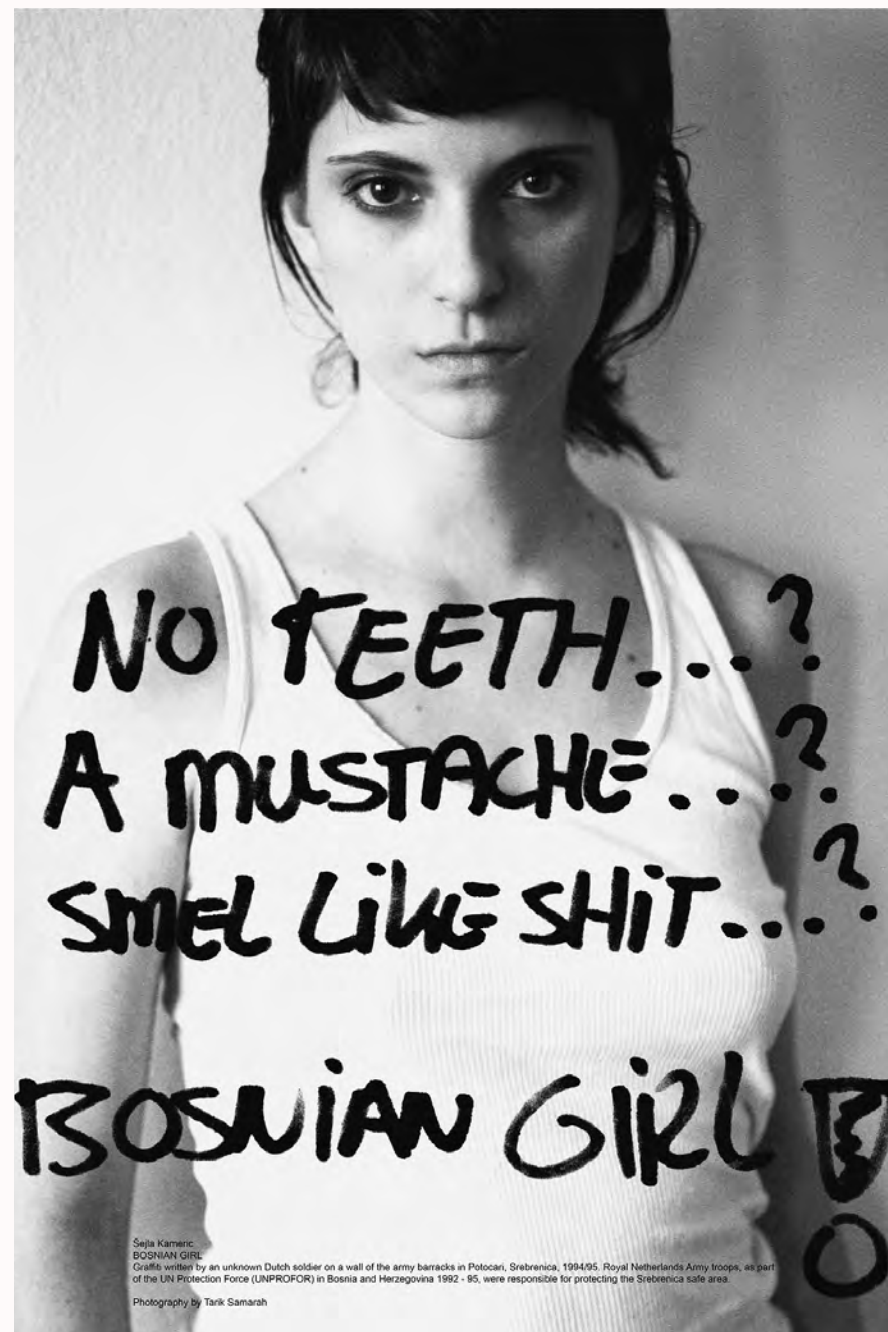
<sup>17</sup> Another term for vampire drawn from Romanian mythology.

<sup>18</sup> "Technical: Animation," *Vox* (2007), Philip Brophy.

ŠEJLA KAMERIĆ



We live in a constant war where  
female bodies are used as territory.



ŠEJLA KAMERIĆ



1. Losing control and gaining confidence.
2. Maintain yourself as a work in progress.
3. Allowing a private figure to emerge.

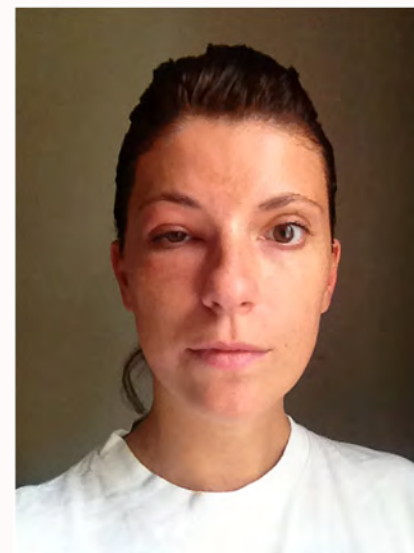


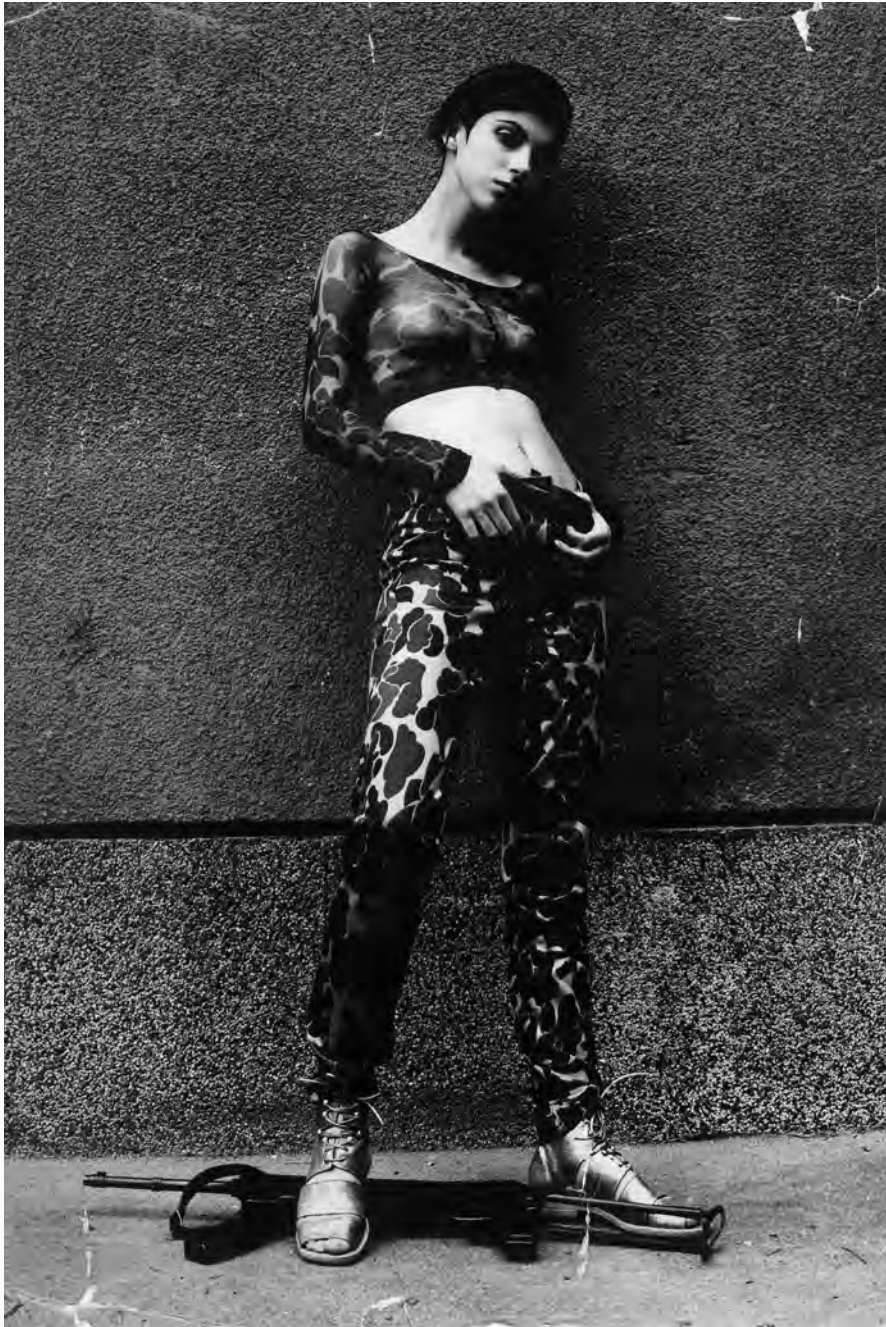
**Evidence. A brutal proof of emotions that self-form into a physical shape.**

**It shows an unknown overlapping of physical and mental territory.**

...

**Beauty is stressful because it is unknown...**





The culture we live in gives us the guidelines -  
points of understanding or total misunderstanding.

What exactly do we see and what do we want to see  
from the vastness of images that are being imposed  
on us on an everyday basis?



**SUMMERISNOTOVER, 2014-2020**

Site-specific public intervention as shared images, posters and stickers, various dimensions

Installation view, Sarjevo 2014 (p. 3)

Installation view, Fondazione Adolfo Pini Milano 2014 (p. 13)

**BOSNIAN GIRL, 2003**

Public project: posters, billboards, magazine ads, postcards

Black and white photograph, dimensions variable

Graffiti written by an unknown Dutch soldier on a wall of the army barracks in Potocari, Srebrenica, 1994/95. Royal Netherlands Army troops, as part of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992 -95, were responsible for protecting the Srebrenica safe area.

Photography by Tarik Samarah (p. 5)

**PRIVATE FIGURE, 2020**

Artistic collaboration between Šejla Kamerić and Elodie Grethen (p. 6, 7)

**UNKNOWN, 2019**

Colour Photograph, 10 × 7,5 cm, 32 × 25 cm (framed) (p. 9)

**BEHIND THE SCENES I, 2019**

Wallpaper photo 250 x 183 cm (p. 10)



# Fragments of Home

NAZLI BAHMANI



He lost his mother suddenly. My father lost his mother across the ocean in an instant. Grief is complex; it is clarifying and disorientating at once.

She wasn't of the world we live in, him and I. She was from a life left behind but not forgotten. He lost his mother and she took with her a fragment of his identity. Something dislodged and placed in her while he tried to make the unfamiliar familiar. He lost his mother and he lost his link to his place.

It's believed that you begin to develop a sense of self when you recognise yourself in the mirror.

Once you can register the shape reflected as your being, you begin to look around you. Placing yourself within your context; piecing yourself together one touch, one smell, one sound at a time.

A child born in Iran sees the dusty streets where children play football in Tabriz, the orange farms in Shomal where families picnic and the expanse of the Albroz mountain ranges, looking down on Tehran. They feel the full embrace of having a village for a family, a respect for hierarchy and the obligations to others that define collectivist societies. That was the world in which he built himself.

By his own account, he was 16 when he first began to feel his identity take shape: when he felt ownership of his responsibilities and a view of what was to come. To guide him he had his pillars. He looked up to his father and was guided by his mother.

She had orange henna dyed hair and a dislike of traditional styles. She never conformed to the rules imposed on Iranian women. The energy that ran through her wasn't soft and delicate. She lacked the politics of femininity that dominated her realm. She demanded to be heard. She could be brash because she was and because of that she was often misunderstood. She was never accepted -she had to carve a place in the world for herself and she did.

I knew all of this. I loved her and I respected her as a woman of will. But it took her death for me to place her in him, to see her clearly as his mother. To see what bound them together. It seems obvious in hindsight but we so seldom look outside the confines of our relationships unless forced to do so.

He remembers her kindness to a Baha'i family across the road and her determination. The way his parents were partners in their goals, she was never second. They built roads and provided water to villages. They themselves were two villagers determined to lift themselves and all those around them. This is not to colour it as an entirely pleasant experience; there was conflict and turmoil. Strong wills meeting created electric currents around them. There is no politics more complex than that of a family. But this was the energy he saw, the imprint he gained and amongst it all was joy.

At Iranian funerals they cry in song. They cry for the people left behind and speak their names. They cry for the son who no longer has a mother. They sit and sing of the pain of no longer being attached. These aren't soft songs, but there is a harmony in it; a catharsis in speaking and moving to others' pain. When we cried for him, we cried that he no longer had anyone to guide him, that he was alone now, detached from the reality she had tethered him to.

The migration was spurred by the revolution that dislodged any perceived pre-ordained path. A defining recalibration of everything that was. The revolution was fragmented, families disagreed, nothing was clear. My aunt had to flee, my granddad narrowly avoided execution, my uncle went to war at 14 to gain protection for his family. Like many others, family was fragmented and life grew unrecognisable.

My dad was the last to leave, waiting until the 1990s. He waited hoping for change, wanting to hold a place for everyone to come back. He waited until he could not justify staying. He left for us.

Migration does not erase the relics of your past, it brings them along. They float about you, never finding grounding.

I have respected his ability to oscillate between the individualist he needed to be and the collectivist within him, have watched him battle his traditions in order to function in a liberal society. Watched him learn and grow, letting go of control, letting things lay were they fell.

His mobility became part of his identity, piecing together a new reality with the memories of the past still in sharp focus. Writing poetry like a Persian at the Innaloo KFC after a nightshift in his taxi. The ease he found in the familiarity of returning to university was shadowed by his memories of the first time around in Tehran. His fight to be allowed to learn the things he was now re-learning in comfort. Even now he works as an engineer by day and he listens to Persian resistance radio at night.

As life took shape a slow suppression of hope began to creep. Things faded, and the pain of longing was suppressed. He formed a reluctance to go back home as a visitor. Denying desires to feel, smell and see it.

In our family we are taught that we should be a tree. That you place roots so you may grow to provide shade for everything else. In a collectivist society you try to spread the branches as far as possible, providing what's needed for all those you can. That is always the goal.

But as migrants, the roots are unstable in the first generation. It's hard to be a tree when your connections are severed, and the struggle of adaptation is all consuming. When catching a bus is a complex social interaction, it becomes hard to provide shade across an ocean.

For my grandparents, their roots proved impossible to extract.

When you had plans to help a village, it's hard to find fulfilment in tending to a backyard. Migration incapacitated them. Left them in a foreign land unable to express desires or action plans. Comfort is uncomfortable when struggle represents progress. Sanity can't be maintained when you lack purpose. So they went back, went to provide shade. To grow the tree.

They took with them a hope that there would be a place for him on the land he dreams about. They were a spark readying to become flame. Acting as an in-between of what is and what was. Retaining a place for us in the places he built himself, on the streets he imagined he would walk down, on the farm he wanted to help his father grow, with the people around him who raised him. The cousins who were brothers, the aunts who were mothers, and the friends who were family. Where language is comfortable even in hostility.

A place to go back to when life would let him. Where he could provide shade, feeling the cool reprieve from constant exposure.

He lost part of that when we lost his Baba.

But she remained, refusing to come back and take her place in one of her children's homes in Australia. Instead she worked, driven to provide help to the furthest reaches of family. She threw her life force onto their farm. Willed it into blooming. Creating the sanctuary. She wedged a place in the earth of Iran so that one day he could go back. She maintained family and community, holding the place of any man. Because she knew, as I know, that he had left his heart behind and brought his mind along.

She was missed but she was determined. Then suddenly she was gone.

In her passing there was the acceptance of finality, a goodbye prolonged by hope. There had been comfort in her presence: a connection to the places, to the imprints of the past. When she died, I cried and through the fog of grief I found clarity. She was his mother the way my mother is my mother.

*But she was also home.*

# Contributors

**CHANTELLE MITCHELL** is a writer and researcher. Her practice leverages fragmentary and archival approaches, addressing structure and place in ecological frames. She works with experimental non-fiction as coordinator for the SEVENTH Gallery Emerging Writers Program and as editor for Free Association. Chantelle has written for The Lifted Brow, Plumwood Mountain Journal for Ecopoetry, and Marrickville Pause, as well as presenting at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Bus Projects, Sawtooth ARI, ANU and the University of Canberra.

**DIEGO RAMÍREZ** is an artist, writer and arts worker. Originally from the city of Guadalajara, Mexico, he currently resides in Naarm/Melbourne. His practice employs a variety of mediums to unpack representations of otherness from the perspective of a Mexican subject. Ramirez belongs to a generation of young artists, writers and curators that came to the fore by questioning the language of diaspora and identity art, concurrent with the art world's increased and often performative awareness of 'representation'. He contributes to this trite dialogue with a historical interest on the gaze, stereotypes and monsters in a racialised discourse. He sets himself apart from his peers by engaging with supernatural semantics, such as vampirism, magical colonialism, post-Catholicism, and eschatology. While he works with different mediums, his exhibitions tend to combine found material with new content to re-evaluate popular media.

**IZABELA PLUTA** is a Polish-born, Australian artist who works with photography as a way of interpreting and re-conceptualising the function that images have in the present. In 2019, Pluta was commissioned by the Art Gallery of New South Wales to create a significant new work, *Apparent Distance*, for *The National 2019: new Australian art*. In 2018 she presented new work at The Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney and was a finalist in the MAMA Foundation National Photography Award. Her first European solo exhibition, *Variable depth, shallow water*, is planned to take place in 2021 at Spazju Kreattiv, Malta's National Centre for Creativity. Pluta has undertaken residencies at Durrmu Arts Aboriginal Corporation, Peppimenarti and International Art Space (IASKA) Kellerberrin, as well as International residencies in Tokyo, Barcelona, Paris, Belfast and Beijing. Izabela is represented by Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert, Sydney.

**JAXON WATERHOUSE** is an early-career researcher and writer in WA. He dropped out of a PhD to spend his days looking for lizards in the desert.

**JOSEPHINE MEAD** is a visual artist and writer based in Naarm. She works through photography, sculpture, installation and writing to explore personal notions of support. Her recent work has positioned female family members as support-structures, considered the body as a site of discursive practice, explored notions of deep listening, and examined the temporal and sonic nature of writing and photography. Josephine has exhibited widely in solo and group exhibitions in Australia and abroad.

**JULIA ANASTASIA PELOSI-THORPE** translates into English and into XML (TEI). Her translations of Italian and Latin poetry are published/forthcoming in the Journal of Italian Translation, the Griffith Review, Asymptote, the Los Angeles Review, Oberon Poetry, the Australian Multilingual Writing Project, and more. She can be found at @jpelosithorpe.

**KARL HALLIDAY** is a Belfast-born photographer, curator and writer living and working in Naarm/Melbourne. Karl's work has been exhibited nationally, and he has independently curated exhibitions and publications in Naarm and Boorloo. Karl is currently a research assistant at PHOTO International Festival of Photography and an executive member of the board at BLINDSIDE.

**MOLLY STEPHENSON** is an artist, writer and curator living and working on Wurundjeri country. Molly has exhibited with SEVENTH Gallery, BlackCat Gallery and Buxton Contemporary, with upcoming shows at Alternating Current Art Space and Intermission Gallery. In 2019, Molly completed a BFA at the Victorian College of the Arts and is currently undertaking her BFA (Honours) at Monash University in 2020. She is the Creator and Co-Curator of the online exhibition *Quivering in Quarantine*, and was a recipient of the National Gallery Victoria Women's Associate Award, as well as the John Vickery Scholarship with the Victorian College of the Arts to further aid the development of her practise.

**NAZLI BAHMANI** is sometimes a journalist and writer looking to slowly understand a mystifying world. Having moved to Melbourne after a brief interlude in the pits of the legal profession, all she knows is that she does not enjoy baking.

**RACHEL CIEŚLA** is a curator whose practice leverages site-orientated and socially engaged approaches, to address questions of memory, place and identity within contemporary art. Rachel is currently the Associate Curator, at the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

**ŠEJLA KAMERIĆ** was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. She has received widespread acclaim for her poignant intimacy and social commentary. Based on her own experiences, memories and dreams, her work takes us to global spaces of displacement and discrimination. The sadness and beauty, the hope and pain that emerge are part of the stories we share. The weight of her themes stands in powerful contrast to her particular aesthetic and choice of delicate materials.

**STELLA N'DJOKU** is a Swiss poet, journalist, and educator of Italian and Congolese heritage. Poems from her first collection, *Il tempo di una cometa* (Ensemble, 2019), have been published in online journals and in the anthology *Abitare la parola: Poeti nati negli anni Novanta* (Ladolfi, 2019). Currently completing a Master's in Religious Philosophy, she has worked for the Italian-language public broadcasting organisation RSI, organised cultural events in Switzerland, and directs the Swiss-Italian project *Dialogue en Route*.

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