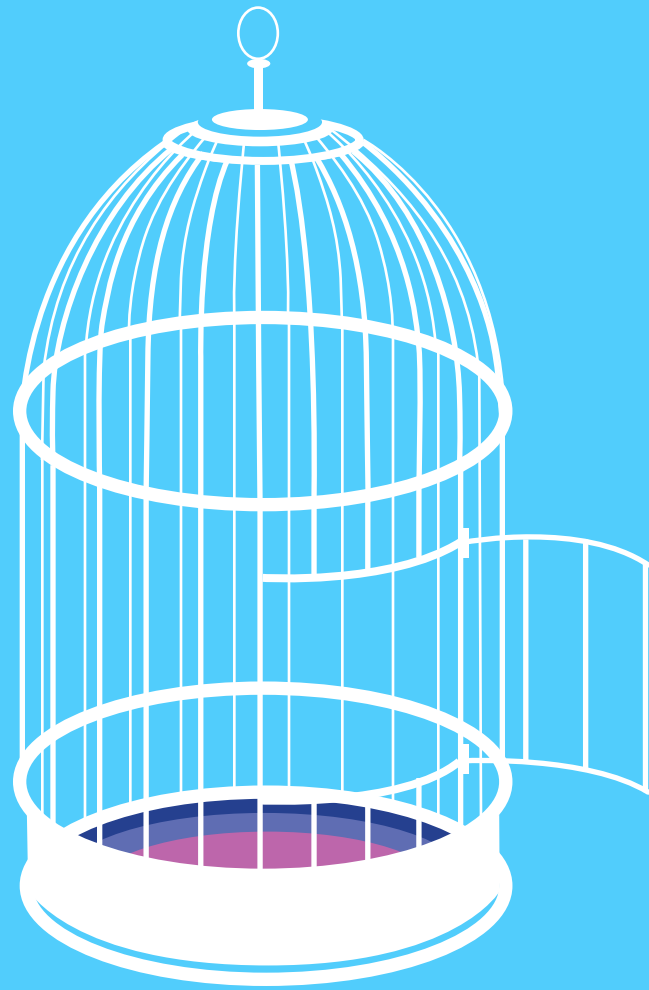


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On the Cover

ERYNE DONAHUE

Untitled, from the series *Saturation, Return*
2006
16 x 20 in/40 x 50 cm

Eryne Donahue (Vancouver, BC) uses photography, printmaking and digital tools to create portraits from her everyday life. Her key interest is how our mistakes, misunderstandings, and the dust trails we leave behind define us as people. These 'flaws' in human behaviour can be found in the process of creation, material and subject matter in her work. Eryne has exhibited across Canada, and teaches in the Fine Arts Department at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

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COMMENTS

PROLOGUE

you'll know it when you feel it

*Do act mysterious.
It always keeps them
coming back for more.*

– Carolyn Keene, *Nancy's Mysterious Letter* (1932)

Its definition is elusive, impossible to articulate without some empathetic grounds. You'll know it when you feel it, but maybe not until after the fact. Sometimes it takes seeing it to feel it—a material reminder of something missing. A stranger jingles and then you remember you forgot your keys. Even the deepest losses will respond to a jingle. These material manifests are of greater mystery than the feeling itself—contrary to popular belief, there's no logic to the index.

Once you have it, it's hard to shake. It holds on with fickle fingers, needy, desperate for attention. I want you I want you I want you and in the same breath, it refuses commitment. That's the hardest part: a mutual wanting and the promise of nothing more. You can't call it a bad feeling. In fact, maybe it escapes judgment altogether. Sometimes it's the worst and sometimes you

just want to get lost in it. Maybe if you're lost for long enough, you'll reach the starting point.

A hole gets filled, but with what? Words are placeholders when it's so easy to lose your place, but then again it's so easy to lose your words. Only materials remain then, and we think the urge to find and relate to these materials is shared. ... There's that noise again, a jingling—even if you know when the feeling is present it's never easy to place. Unreliable in its affects, there is no chance of settling down with a white picket fence. It's all back alleys and cheap motels, smelling of stale desire.

The moment dissolves into embers, dust and graphite. There will always be debris, which points to a site for destruction and transformation. The new is always marked with the residue of the old as if there's only enough space for the idea of something different. Maybe you don't want anything different. Maybe you want a promise, to have and to hold. But like we said, it's never been good with commitment.

There's a romance to these entirely immaterial things... you think to yourself, as you cuddle with her sweater just to draw in the scent. It might be stale but it's better than forgetting. Loss, a lack and a space to fill presupposes something physical that exists separately. This might be a body, an object, or a thing with a perimeter much less stable. Regardless, the physicality of the feeling is twofold, stimulating the insides while mapping itself onto the outside world.

Longing... To say it aloud is a relief, even though we know it has been here all along. There's nothing like a good mystery, and longing is it. All we can do is offer some clues—examinations of material, documents of the impossible feeling. When the metaphors become tired all you're left with are two syllables, arbitrary sounds with an undying echo.

The language around us begins to crack. Everything becomes fluid, leaking and spilling and unable to hold its shape. So we let it bleed.

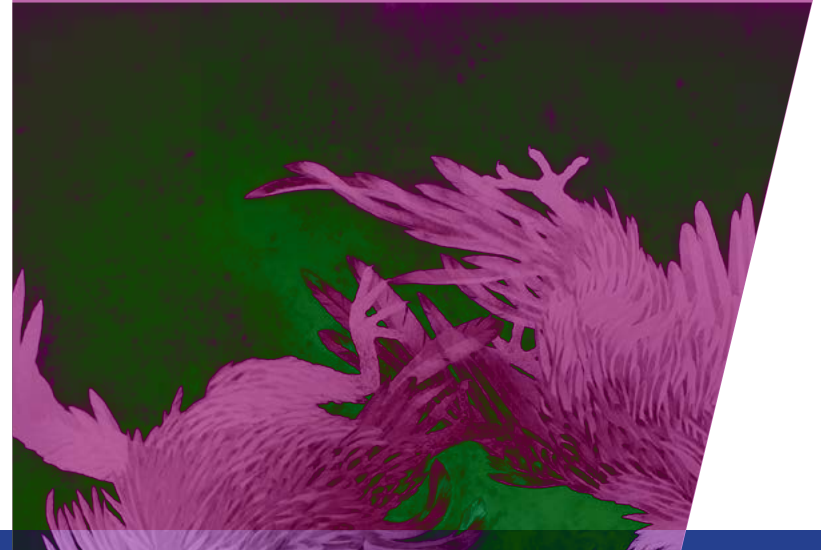
9B and Me (Love, Touch, Destruction)

I want to roll around on Lucienne Rickard's series of graphite drawings on drafting film. Well, it's different than rolling around on them, it's not exactly that. I may want to simply touch them, but really touch them, absorb them perhaps. Or maybe I only desire the works themselves. They are beautiful to be sure—life sized renderings of dark, velvety creatures (a bull, fighting dogs, battling chickens) (figs. A-C) meticulously created with a 9B pencil and time. Their delicately rendered, delicious flesh and fur and feathers shimmer and glow in their blackness, begging me to stay with them, or admire them, or love them, or touch them, or what I really cannot say, or what I can at this moment come closest to surmising: roll on them. I want to. I really want to.

It's more than wanting to, though, and I'm sure I don't actually need to. It isn't a vital necessity that I must secure in order to keep breathing, keep living, like I must feed, water, clothe, shelter myself. But then again, I do *need* to. Synonyms: essential,

want. So I *want* to. Synonyms: *need, lack, desire, crave*. I must. I crave it, but then that isn't right. There is a *desire*. Synonyms: *yearning, craving, longing*. Longing... Really, I long for it. I long for these works of art. And I don't even know what that means, to long, to have longing. Lacking is a part of it. To know exactly what shape my lacking hole is but to have no idea what aim could fill it—to understand the object of my desire, but not how to objectify it.

Is what I suffer from called longing? What does that word mean? Synonyms: *craving, eager, languishing, pining, yearning, anxious, ardent, avid, hungry, ravenous, wishful*. It must be hard to be so passive and aggressive all at once. Ravenously languishing, an avid and eager pining. It seems that longing is passive, but defined most often with its aggressive counterpart of desire; although, at times, it is seen as a more aggressive version of desire. John Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, called the pain of longing a "fierce desire" (Milton 2008, 511). Either way, desire



and longing are hard to unknot, where one is used to define the other and vice versa. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) states that longing is “a yearning desire,” and that desire is “a longing” and “to long for (something lost).” (Yearning, for its part, is a “strong desire or longing.”) This stroll through the OED is only the tip of the iceberg. More lexicographical legwork done by Juri Apresjan reveals that:

Webster’s dictionary presents the following two synonym series as different: *desire, wish, want, crave, covet*, with the explication ‘to have a longing for something’, and *long, yearn, hanker, pine, hunger, thirst* with the explication ‘to have a strong and urgent desire for something’. Of *crave* it is separately stated that this verb ‘implies strongly the force of physical or mental appetite’, and of *covet* that it ‘implies a strong, eager desire’. This description generates a great many questions without supplying answers to any of them. First of all, is there a difference between *desire* and *longing* or do they mean exactly the same thing? If we are to believe the second definition, there is a difference: *longing* is a ‘strong and urgent desire’; but then how can *desire* and its close synonyms *wish* and *want* mean simply longing, as suggested by the first definition? If we are to believe the first definition, why does the dictionary supply two synonym series in place of one? If we are to believe the

second, why are *crave* and *covet* placed in the first series rather than the second? Is there a semantic distinction between ‘strong and urgent desire’? (*long, yearn, hanker, etc.*) and ‘strong and eager desire’ (*covet*), or is this distinction purely verbal and what is meant in both cases is the same ‘strong and urgent desire’? Are we supposed to understand differently (and if so, in what ways) the definitions ‘means a strong and urgent desire’ and ‘implies strongly the force of physical or mental appetite’, or is this a stylistic refinement on the part of the compilers, who shun hackneyed phrases? One can go on asking such questions (inevitably occurring to any attentive user of synonym dictionaries) by the dozen. (Apresjan 2000, 23).

How can I know what I feel? Do I long for, desire or merely yearn for these works of art? Or is it an action towards them? Or none of these things? How can longing and desire be untangled from one another?

While desire is always used to define longing (and vice versa) there is one small arena where they are pulled apart: when it comes to homesickness and nostalgia, longing is almost always the term used. Longing for home, the past, longing and home and the past—they are their own matched pairs that separate longing and desire. Homesickness has been known as “the classic form of longing” (Cunningham 2000); the one is always defined by the other. Home, in this case, is a utopian form of place that cannot be returned to, if it can exist at all. Nostalgia is a longing for memories and the past which also, of course, can never be returned. Susan Stewart tells us nostalgia “is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing ... the past it seeks has never existed ... and hence, always absent, continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack.” (Stewart 1993, 23) And so longing can be passive, a lack, a feeling with no object whereas desire is aggressive—there is always an object of desire. “Object of desire” is a commonality that is often heard, often said, often felt and often had. Yet an object of longing doesn’t exist. To long for something seems less directed, it is less knowable. In fact, the OED states that longing was “originally an impersonal verb with an accusative of the person.” (Cunningham 2000) Longing can be severe and it can be powerful, but compared to desire it is agentless. It says so itself: *longing*. There is distance; it dissociates itself from set subjects. Is it even possible to long for a work of art?

I've had so many relationships with so many artworks. As an art historian, I really get around. I have, of course, admired works (great works that I am expected to memorize and understand as canon, and ones that strike individual chords with me that I include in the personal canon of my own research and writing). I have wanted works—to own, to view, to place on my wall, above my bed, on the desktop of my computer screen to stare at as I think and write about other works. I have studied, obsessed over, analysed, adored, loved, loathed, become angry at, and even needed (for publications, research, image rights, etc.) works of art. But never, ever have I longed for a work until now. The closest I've come before was when I was an awkward pre-pubescent let loose at the Philadelphia Museum of Art for the very first time. Allowed to wander, thoroughly alone, I stumbled upon the violent red slashes and swirls and unprecedented textual lines lines lines of Cy Twombly's *Fifty Days At Iliam* (1978). I was overwhelmed, left breathless and then dizzily elated. I was a pilgrim visiting an icon, or having a fit of my first Stendhal Syndrome. My emotional transportation at the hands of Twombly was not entirely unique. In 2007 a woman named Rindy Sam was so moved by his *Phaedrus* (1977) that she kissed it, smearing it with bright red lipstick. When charged and put on trial, she said to the court, "It was just a kiss, a loving gesture. I kissed it without thinking; I thought the artist would understand ... It was an artistic act provoked by the power of Art." (Associated Press 2007) Rindy begged the court for the artist's understanding; I begged my father for a replica poster of the work from the gift shop. With a manic greed I needed it and yes, conceivably, longed for it. (The poster was ultimately denied me as being unnecessary, and the painting "not even really very good.")

But it was not the work itself I desired and craved in this way, it was the souvenir, the experiential memory made manifest on archival paper with archival ink. What I longed for was



the moment of enlightenment and discovery, or the easily consumed, commercialized embodiment of that moment, so that I could repeat it again and again. As Stewart relays, the souvenir exemplifies these urges—they are the “traces of authentic experience” which distinguish non-repeatable experiences (Stewart 1993, 135). The souvenir, imaginably, could be as close as one comes to an object of longing. She continues that, “the souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia.” (Stewart 1993, 135) A concrete object that points to something missing, a moment passed that will never return. A meditative icon of lack, lack, lack. Perhaps this (the souvenir) could be an object of longing. That I found mine as a youth is far from uncommon; “The souvenir is used most often to evoke a voluntary memory of childhood ... This childhood is not a childhood as lived; it is a childhood voluntarily remembered, a childhood manufactured from its material survivals.” (Stewart 1993, 145) Though what does it mean that my memory is not pulled forth from a physical thing (the poster) but from the memory of never getting it? The lack cemented the memory more than it hanging on my wall as a “partial double,” a “representation in another medi-

um” ever could (Stewart 1993, 145). So perhaps I have longed for a souvenir, a memory of a memory of an experience, an awakening, a newfound appreciation and knowledge. But no, never have I longed for a work in and of itself.

If longing is the indefinable feeling of (not exactly) desire with lack and pain and no discernible object, do I long for the drawings of Lucienne Rickard? Of course not. If I longed for the work, which is an easy and identifiable object, then I would merely desire it. But I don’t want or desire or need or *long* for the work itself. It is not really my type, and while I can appreciate the skill and beauty of it, it is not one I would be normally drawn to. So perhaps I long not for the work but something to do with it, and then yes, I do long for it, but what of it? Was there some experience in seeing it I missed?

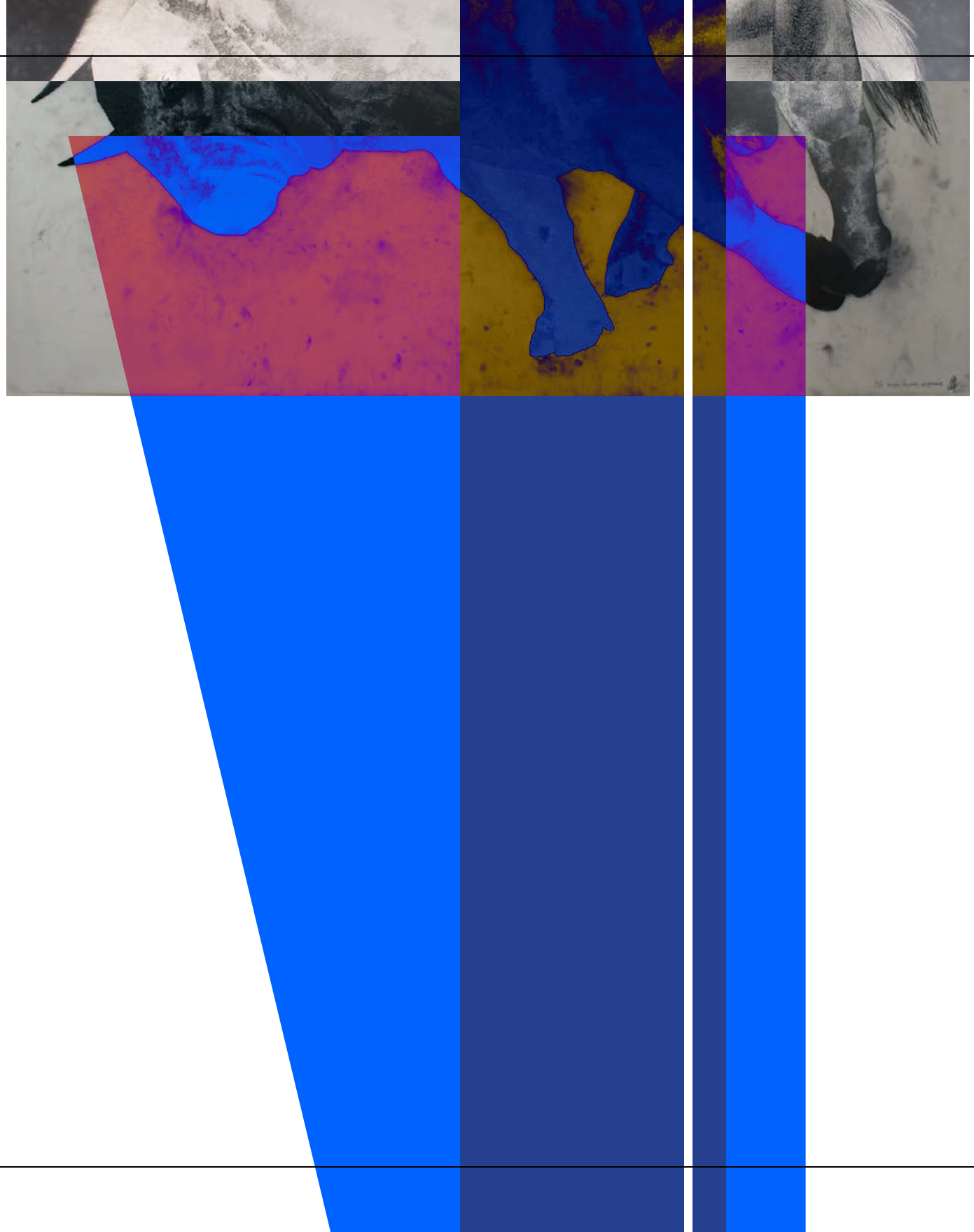
After first seeing the work as part of a large group show at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia this year (one full of loud video art and interactive sculptures and giant phallic neon quilts) it wasn’t an immediate stand out. If I was telling this story again (which is exactly what I’m doing) would it or would it not be love at first sight? No. I didn’t go over to the quiet work, the one in the story that I’m destined to be with by the end. Instead I spent the night laughing with the boisterous life of the party, or in this case (to pile on to my already overly wrought and confused metaphor) a video work with dancing, singing and coolly detached homemade costumes with nipple flaps doing lacklustre yoga. Instead I go home, and while in my daily routine find myself lost in thought about the work. I am lost in these thoughts, day after day, hour after hour... No, not really lost thoughts, but as if the daily routine was the maze and the work itself the end point, I return to it again and again. It is the true point of my efforts, the focus of my physical motions.

I am grading architectural sketches, and groan when once again my hand comes away covered in charcoal (“please take care in the finish of your work, spray adhesive/fixatives are



easily purchased on campus or online!” is now a fixture in my clipboard software, so I can cut and paste and cut and paste the dozens of ignored pleas each week). This dirt on my hand is unwanted, it is abject, a hair in my food—but my thoughts race past it, to Rickard and the draft film and the velvet fur and I think of her graphite, covering the thin paper, all over it, layers of it, excess, wonderful. That dark smudge is the robust hair on my lover’s head, desirable. I want to cover myself in it. I crave it. Long for it. Once this longing is fixed (unlike those student sketches) it cannot be unfixed, my longing has taken form and it is powerful. It is in my mind while and during and long after the offending charcoal has been washed away. And now my longing is fully realized and it really is longing. It is longing because I yearn and desire and crave and it is longing because I still have no idea why or what for. It is not the work but some utopic haze of activity around the work, an idea of myself with and of the work.

The museum is dangerous now. For me a place of leisure, of work, of mindless relaxation and pleasure, this place is now full of peril, illicit. I cannot let myself lose control; I cannot let my mind wander. If I make this mistake I stray and find myself in front of the drawings. Of the three, it is the one of the bull. The bull is alone and on his side. He too is yearning, but I cannot know for what (I cannot even figure out my own desires, his are for himself). What I do know is that he must be touched. He needs touch. I must touch. I will touch. I long to touch. Wallace Stegner knows the peril I am in. He yells out to me, writing: “Touch. It is touch that is the deadliest enemy of chastity, loyalty, monogamy, gentility with its codes and conventions and restraints. By touch we are betrayed and betray others ...in a gesture of comfort that lies like a thief, that takes, not gives, that wants, not offers, that awakes, not pacifies.





When one flesh is waiting, there is electricity in the merest contact.” (Stegner 1992, 506) I know that if I touch the work I will not stop. That one small poke or smear will only awaken, not pacify, and I will begin to rub and demolish the work and try to claim it as my own, with my touch and my body.

Touch not only awakens my urges and longing towards the painting, but also envy. I look at the work before me and see, on the translucent draft film, Rickard’s fingerprints in pencil lead all over the whiteness of it. I am truly shocked to find that my primary emotion is jealousy. Rationally I am impressed at the trace of the artist, of her great skill and this different take on the “brush” stroke, but truly, honestly and irrationally I am jealous. Even though this is her work and of her, it seems unfair that she can touch while I cannot. Of course, her touch created what mine would destroy. She created the amazing detail I long for—the layers and layers and layers and layers and layers of graphite of black of velvet of dark of smooth of depth of silk of fur of need of line of skill of time of want of memory. Over a long, long (longing) time she created this and even more, it changed her body. The effort of the work and the time it took created muscles and uneven limbs, honed tools. In an interview with the MCA Rickard says that her drawing arm is much bigger than her non-dominant limb. Her muscles physically grew, lengthened (got *longer*) from the process of creation. In German, the word for longing is *Sehnsucht*, which comes from the same etymology as the word *die Sehne*, tendon or sinew. These works, with their incredible detail rendered by a small tool (the 9B pencil) took a long time to create, and I have longed for them for a long time now. Perhaps here is the second way we can distinguish the meaning of longing from desire. It is long. Desire can be quick, desire can flame up, but longing is “a prolonged unfulfilled desire or need.” To long and not desire you must do so for a length of time, and you must remain unfulfilled for even longer. Rickard’s work echoes this again, as she says she isn’t able to complete a work unless it is “hard, arduous, physically difficult ... I’m not able to make quick, easy things.” (Museum of Contemporary Art Australia 2014)

Speaking of length, I’ve been standing in the museum for a long, long time. In front of the graphite bull, I am standing on a cliff. I must jump, absolutely. There is a boundless physicality to this need to jump. Poet and novelist Luke Davies writes about addiction, saying: “Desire can occur in the brain, the mind, as well as elsewhere, whereas longing, true yearning, tends to bypass the rational centres and take place in the limbs. It’s even beyond the heart, quite possibly.” *Sehnsucht* comes from *sehnen* (yearning) and *die Sucht* (addiction). I am addicted to my longing. The need to jump is so strong. I will.

Psychologists and neurologists that study high places phenomenon (HPP) say that people most vulnerable to the feeling of needing to jump off cliffs without suicidal ideations are anxious, more prone to being overwhelmed by outside influences. They see danger in potential falls and so their mind tells them they want to jump, so that they back away from the edge more quickly. (“An urge to jump affirms the urge to live.”) (Hames 2012) They want to live and so they are told by themselves that they want to die. I want to jump at this work. I want to fling myself at it and roll on it, perhaps tear it to the ground to better aid full contact, rubbing, clawing, enveloping. I will cover it and be covered in it. Would the attendants catch me? I was an attendant once; would I have caught me? Do I want to jump because I am art-anxious? Am I telling myself I must destroy it because I want it to thrive, survive, endure and become a masterwork, destined to hang on museum walls forever? Or do I really seek destruction? The Florida State University researchers say HPP is completely unrelated to the Freudian death drive, but this sounds like evolutionary psychology fighting with psychoanalysis. Is longing linked to destruction, to the death drive? If I succeed, if when I emerge from my longing fulfilled, will I be covered in graphite and shame? Will it be a desire fulfilled, and thus not fulfilled at all—a disgust at coupling with a lover that wasn’t truly wanted or needed? The moment of regret after orgasm? Longing is inseparable from a feeling of lack. One can only truly long for the

unattainable, so how could longing ever be satisfied by action? Will my destruction destroy the longing? Not satisfy, but decimate, and me along with it?

...Or will I emerge victorious? Will I destroy the work, truly erase it and absorb it onto myself and in having done so realize that yes, yes, yes, this is what I longed for and needed and I have done it and I have become, I am. I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds and works of art. Will the abject horror of my transgression and physical filth (for I will be filthy, covered in black smudges) overwhelm me or will it, as Julia Kristeva portends, transcend to pure excess, the *jouissance* of unrestrained passion? Who is to say? Probably not the latter. (I hope not the latter). Maybe a mixture of both, for “to crave and to have are as like as a thing and its shadow ... the world will be made whole ... whatever we may lose, very craving gives it back to us again.” (Robinson 2004) Perhaps I do not want to destroy but return. After all, Freud’s death drive began as a way to seek explanation for problematic and neurotic repetitions. It was “an urge in organic life to restore an earlier state of things.” (Freud 2003, 308) An earlier state, the inorganic state from which life emerged—the graphite from which resting, dying bulls emerged. Or, perhaps even more simply, my pure astonishment at seeing such craftsmanship in a work of art, done by the artist over such a long time, not by others, not by machines, makes me rebel against it and need to undo it quickly with my talentless flailing fingers and limbs. I will “assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death.” (Freud 2003, 311)

I’ve written page after page trying to pour out feelings that are so big to me, overwhelming and real. I haven’t felt this way about a work of art in decades. Is longing for a work of art so special? Am I embodying a once-in-a-blue-moon *hyperkulturemia*? It’s silly. Ultimately what I am describing is walking up to a pencil drawing, running my hands along it, pushing myself against it, tearing it off the wall and rolling around on top of it. A completely absurdist and juvenile and silly act. At best, a melancholically beautiful Barthesian “deranged interval.”

Roland Barthes explains (with lovers, not drawings—yet another ridiculous conceit of my writing, I have taken a drawing as a lover) “the gesture of the amorous embrace seems to fulfill, for a time, the subject’s dream of total union with the loved being: The longing for consummation with the other ... In this moment, everything is suspended: time, law, prohibition: nothing is exhausted, nothing is wanted: all desires are abolished, for they seem definitively fulfilled ... A moment of affirmation; for a certain time, though a finite one, a deranged interval, something has been successful: I have been fulfilled (all my desires abolished by the plenitude of their satisfaction).” (Barthes 2002, 104) This is what I want and long for. But when this is done with works of art in a museum, and not with lovers, it is called vandalism. It is not written about by semioticians and French theorists, it is admonished with arrests and court hearings. Time and law are most certainly *not* suspended, Roland.

If I am to be a vandal, why am I a vandal? There are many reasons and kinds. Hammering at and fracturing the Madonna because your own skull was fractured, leaving you unstable. Whiting out Ofili because you are taking out blasphemy. Spray-painting *Guernica* “...to retrieve it from history and give it life.” (Lerner 2013, 45) Being provoked by the artist, as was the case with Ai Weiwei’s vases in a Miami gallery. The vases, which had already been *altered* by Weiwei (Han Dynasty urns entirely painted over) were then smashed by a Mr. Caminero because, as he states, “I saw it as a provocation by Weiwei to join him in an act of performance protest.” (Madigan 2014) Some work even vandalizes itself, created for its own destruction—like Jean Tinguely’s *Meta-Mecanique*, which beat itself to death at the MOMA sculpture garden in 1960. Work can be destroyed for political reasons, to change the nature of what art is, because of outrage or love or fear, or deeply held philosophical beliefs. But for me it is not really any of these things. Picasso said that “a picture is a sum of destructions” (Lerner 2014, 43)—do I long for destruction for destruction’s sake because that is what a picture is? Do I realign with my young, ecstatic *Iliam* self? Would I say what Rindy said, that “It was an artistic act provoked by the power

of Art”? Is that what I would say, smeared with black lead instead of red lipstick?

I long. Not to be a vandal or for a drawing or for destruction or for the object or for specific memories or souvenirs. I long to absorb and be absorbed by art, and what does that mean? I cannot say. Absorption and art are a matched pair, not unlike desire and longing. Walter Benjamin says “a man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it ... in contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art.” (Benjamin 1969, 239) I want to break apart this oft-quoted canonical pairing. I want to concentrate so hard on the work that I absorb it—literally, not figuratively. I will synthesize it not in words, not in this essay (because it has become clear that I cannot), but I will synthesize the work through physicality and time. Absorption would, of course, involve destruction in the case of Rickard’s works. But this will transform them into what longing is truly about: temporality. (Desire + time = longing). There is an assumed temporality to art; a masterpiece is that which endures, across generations and cultural shifts, it survives across time in the museum. More and more art is made to be, not that which endures, but that which is happening in a place (performance, video, time-based creations). It can “stick with you” only mentally, not physically, and perhaps I am afraid this work will do neither and I want to stick it on

me. I want to destroy it and that impulse is about the temporal contradictions of art. It is the high places phenomenon of wanting to obliterate in order to preserve. My longing towards these drawings is not about my desire, these objects will not fulfill me. My longing is larger than me, it is about inserting myself into the temporality of art, into time—a perversity. To destroy the work would successfully remove it from time forever, to make it immortal (in 1713 Addison’s longing: “whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire, this longing after immortality”) (Stewart 1993, ix). The perverse is fulfilling the desire of the other. I am not acting on my own but for the painting, and that is why this feeling is longing. It is not my desire, or about me at all. It is a true longing that can never be understood or finished or quenched. The art has already stuck with me, and I want to stick with the art.

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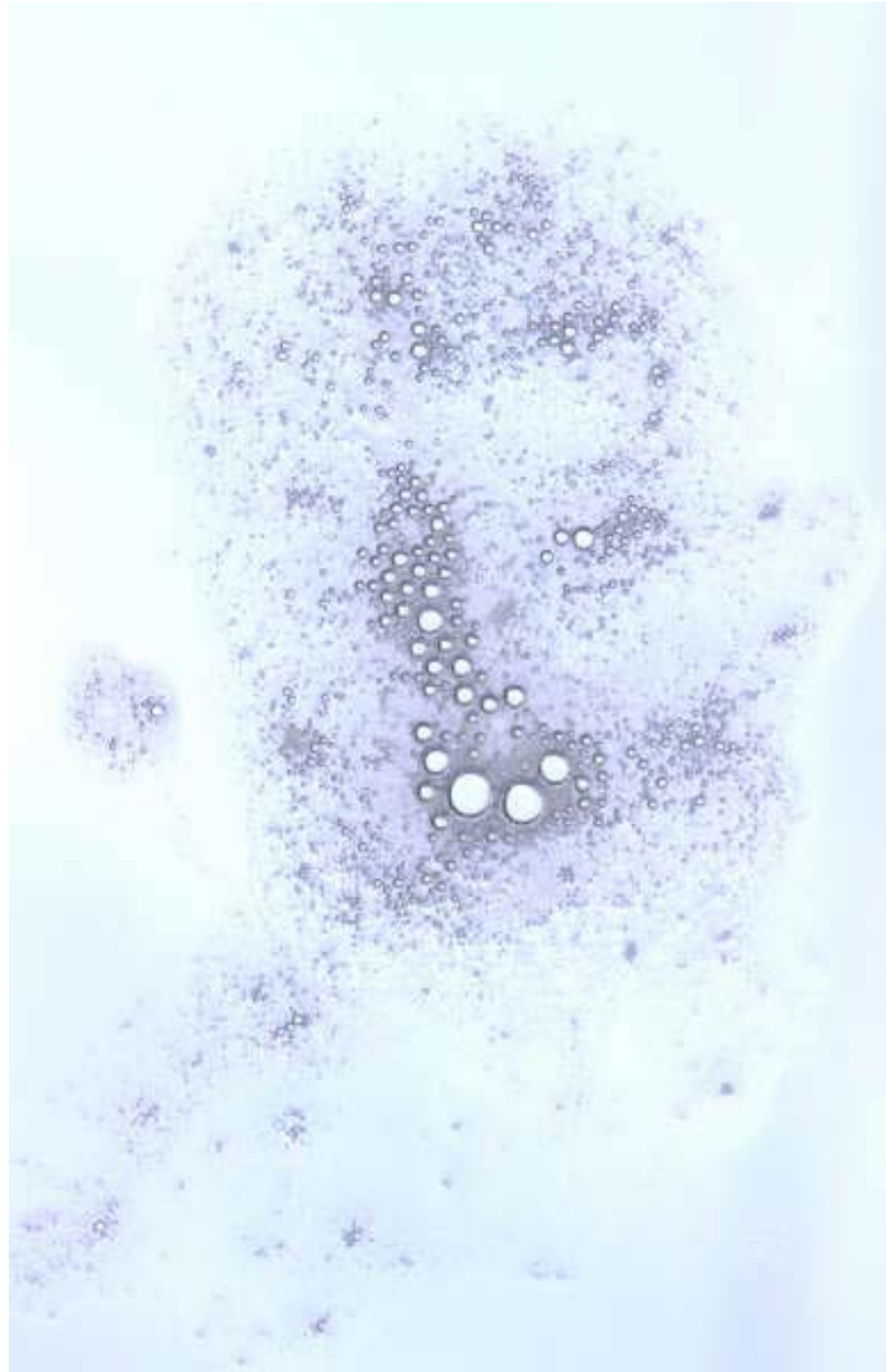
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Channeling Franz Marc's Prelapsarian Longing in Joan Jonas and Lee Lennox

The animal has the central position in Franz Marc's oeuvre, a body of work too easily dismissed in the age of the "institutionalized irony" (Wallace 1998, 68) as sentimental and even naïve. The prescient painter expressed a deep yearning to regain the lost connection with animals we shared in the idyllic past, even as he imagined a future in which we would be reunited with them. We see a resurgence of Marc's desires in the animals who, as embodied subjects, inhabit the 2004 Lee Lennox music video for the Presets song "Girl and the Sea" and Joan Jonas's 2009 video installation *Reading Dante II*. Jonas and Lennox enact a tricky dual recovery of both Marc's avant-garde visions of Eden and explorations of wishfulness and melancholy. In this essay I investigate these longings for the animal world as a vector of *Nachträglichkeit*—an "afterwardsness" of recovering the animal in art from trauma, even as we grieve for "real" animals.

In June 1914, just weeks before the war began, the Bavarian artist wrote "Das abstrakte Theater," an essay on how rituals of performance overlapped with *die neue Malerei* (the new painting), and the evolution of both into political action (Marc 1978, 99-100; 1912, 468-471). The prose is riddled with metaphorical and literal references to blood and trauma, but the essay's peak analytical maneuver is Marc's reminder that revolutionary praxis is not available *only* to the dispossessed. He insisted the conservative tendencies of capitalist distractions such as film and theater could lead to unexpectedly radical results, particularly when those tendencies are diverted for the recovery of what materialism had cost us—first and foremost among these losses, our connection to the world of animals.

Marc, who was adept at "performing" himself, certainly recognized the theoretical and cathartic pos-

sibilities of formal performance, having introduced and thus launched the collaboration of Wassily Kandinsky and Arnold Schönberg. Even setting *Nachträglichkeit* aside, Marc provides an interesting case study for avant-garde as vanguard. Over the course of his career as a painter he maintained an interest in experimental performance, often attending offbeat concerts and plays in München and Berlin, as well as envisioning and planning numerous productions for the stage and even film. Marc thought that the technology and temporality of film, music and theater would be the next frontiers for advanced art. In "Das abstrakte Theater" he predicted with eerie foresight that intermedial performance would be capa-

ble of “recovering” the *Blaue Reiter’s* practice of “pure” painting with popular intertextualities, including interactive, musical and photographic codes of representation that could nonetheless be transformative, even spiritual, experiences. I agree with Marc that these recuperative experiences are often found across visual culture, but particularly in the democratic medium of video.

In *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (1996) Hal Foster proposed a way of understanding the historical avant-gardes as an interrupted mission whose urgency can return to us in forms both recognizable and wholly innovative (Foster 1996, 8-20). Foster clearly distinguishes between the Lacanian Real that foments revolutionary social change by breaking traumatic cycles and the simple repetition of past practices. Foster thereby responds to and leaves behind the “dead star” critique of the neo-avant-garde levied by Peter Bürger (Bürger 1984, 18). Yet while writing specifically about this opposition, Foster did not address the issue of how or if “deferred action” would continue to manifest into what is now our present. What I aim to do here is extend and apply Foster’s ideas to video in the 21st century. I propose we can find Marc’s *animalische* activist embers, an “afterwardsness,” in the work of Jonas and Lennox. Their creative recovery of Marc’s leitmotif, namely an elaboration that transcends repetition, includes important elements of *Nachträglichkeit* that manifest as longing for reunion with other species. This activity is not at all predicated on a direct reinterpretation or even knowledge of Marc’s work. Here what is “real” are elements of mourning and grief for a loss of

connection, a yearning for the time when animals and people could communicate and constructions of an alternative reality where we can rejoin them.

E. Ann Kaplan sets out some helpful parameters for the contemporary task of understanding and mitigating trauma:

The structure of trauma is precisely that of repeated rupture of safety and comfort by terror from some past incomprehensible event. The event possesses one without one having known it cognitively. The event was not processed through language or mechanisms of meaning. (Kaplan 1998, 34)

Since our task is somewhat extraverbal (particularly as interlocutors of the visual), we must accept that univocal answer or recovery is not yet possible. The Real we return to also requires a two-front approach, one that allows Foster’s mechanism to deploy, to see Marc alight in characters’ quests of *Reading Dante II* and “Girl and the Sea.” The second plane—a processing of reality—calls us to press harder as we examine devastation to the animal world of our present, and grieve over our failure as a species to protect and cherish the creatures in our betrayed Eden.

As we come now to a visual appreciation of our artists it is important to note that Marc, of course, did not just *write* about his prelapsarian urges. He also devoted his most personal and heartfelt artworks to an exploration



of this theme, including one shown here, *Paradies* (1912)—an enormous mural showing a scene of humans and animals in a modernist Eden that Marc made with his wife, Maria and beloved friend August Macke. Marc shows his own figure in *Paradies'* concurrent scenes of humans and animals touching and communicating, and also expressed himself tenderly in writing about this subject. Marc is best known for his paintings of horses, deer and cows, though he most often located the animal he wanted to communicate with in his dog, Russi, who the artist photographed, painted and mused over in writing (Mark and Lankheit 1978, 11).

Both Jonas and Lennox employ as main characters (though in very different ways) canine protagonists who interact with and comment on fraught or failed relationships with human beings. The dog figure who emerges as *Reading Dante II's* persistent avatar is both surprising as narrative usurper and congruent with Jonas' tradition of mythological-symbolic performance and preoccupation with fairytales, through which she has often voiced animal characters, beginning with 1974's *Funnel*. *Reading Dante* debuted at the Biennale of Sydney in 2008 as a performance piece



with video components and simultaneous live readings of the 14th Century epic poem *The Divine Comedy*. Jonas continued to travel *Reading Dante* through 2010, including the live performances and sometimes augmenting them with tapes of earlier readings. At the Venice Biennale of 2009 the installation was modified and titled *Reading Dante II*. *Reading Dante II* relied on the rudiments of video: the effects of light, sound and image in a darkened gallery. The installation consisted of just two video projectors, two facings screens and an audio component which included some music and some spoken text, people reading the *Divina Commedia*, going in and out of phase.

The projections of the ad hoc performances by various people reading, many of them school-age children, were distinctively polished, harmonious, clear-sounding and free of the ominous clatter of background hiss and wow that distinguishes some of Jonas' work (including later instantiations of *Reading Dante*) (Jolly 2009). Occupying the one cool place in all Venice, I was also alone for the duration of the looping video—and alone again the next day when, mesmerized, I went to see it again. Of course, I am prone to focusing on images of animals. Around that time, I had just read *Return of the Real* for the first time and, in the affective way of *Nachträglichkeit*, the notion of searching for Marc's "afterwardsness" must have been circling my subconscious.

The video images of the characters reading includ-

ed the performers—Jonas herself in some cases—in fox, dog, cow, squirrel and deer costumes, enunciating the prose in English, sometimes to each other, other times to a filmed audience and sometimes directly to the camera. Some were dressed in classical Greek drapery, some in contemporary street wear and some of the students wore their school uniforms. Jonas' contemporization of Dante was not a consideration of the afterlife; rather a vision of an alternative reality, in which animals were equally as voluble and visible as humans (Jonas and Schneider 2010).

However, the manifestation of the longed-for animal appeared for me in the cryptic apparition-like dog's head, a voiceless figure. One of Jonas' well-known techniques of projected lumened chalk drawings, erasures and re-drawings, this poignant white on black figure was accompanied by relatively quiet, recorded sounds of the wind blowing over old-fashioned glass soda bottles and the sounds of a far off transistor radio. (What dogs hear?) This image is recurrent throughout *Reading Dante II* and thus becomes a dominant part of memory formation. In all of the iterations of Jonas' video the dog sketch most closely approximates an overall sense of longing, as we desire both the drawing to be completed (and for it to stop being erased) and also for the important repeated character of the dog to participate more fully in the titular reading. This type of rugged but precise sketching also calls to mind what Peter Singer and J.M. Coetzee find in cave drawings, our first signs of mourning for our separation from animals.

While conceptual video installations are still a relatively

new sector of the canon of the arts, they are well-established and arguably the dominant medium of global art fairs. Also, *Reading Dante* is one of Jonas's more carefully calibrated, polished and "friendlier" projects. Many evaluations of this work have centered on its playful aspects, and the fact that the *Divina Commedia* has a seemingly recessional role in the overall production. I would argue, though, that the opprobrium-wielding poet is very much present in *Reading Dante II*—particularly as a manifestation of the animal characters. Throughout the poem, Dante consistently praises not only his love Beatrice but also some of the encountered sinners while offering only criticism for others, and makes a special point of orienting his readers toward a political self-understanding: What occurs in *Hades*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* is to be imagined in analogy to our participatory obligations to the living in the broader world (Alighieri 2004). For Jonas this world includes animals, or it should. The liquefying form of the dogs frees up the human-animal binary, and in the undoing of the dualism, we recognize, miss and wish to recover our separation from them. The dog also subverts the idea of "reading," which we can then replace with feeling.

We see mythos and fairytales—particularly *The Little Mermaid*, but others too—subverted in the 2004 video for the song "Girl and the Sea," written and directed by Lee Lennox. Performed by the Presets, the song is typical of the Australian duo's downbeat EDM which often feature uneasily defiant, but protagonist-nonspecific lyrics. The story is told as a sequence of nonchronological memories connected by association. The narrative, however is distinctly propelled by both longing and refusal. For a short (three minute, forty-five second) video, Lennox employs a complicated motif that moves around in time and reflects the points of view and memories of the characters. This includes a Jungian sequence in which the girl dreams of neither ocean, nor land mammal but rather of a knowing owl, whose eyes glow as it flies confidently through a dark passage into the sunlight and sky.

The ostensible twist comes close to the beginning of the video when the girl, shown dragging herself across the ground and seemingly disabled,

flings away the skirt sheathing her lower body and reveals not the infirmity we expect, but instead a dolphin's fluked tail that we see only for a moment before she plunges from a cliff into the ocean. Here she is at home, performing graceful leaps and dives and breathing easily both underneath and above the waves. The wolf who has cared for her from infancy grieves, detaching and throwing his own tail into the sea where it is recovered by the girl. The pair is separated. This is the real surprise, the reversal of the *Little Mermaid* (and also the "taming the wild child" mythos of *The Jungle Book*). This strange hermetic character is fond of the wolf but longs more for independence, and that is what she gets, at a high cost. The titular girl ultimately chooses an environment where she can move freely and be free, over the companionship of either animals or humans.

Lennox's character of the wolf is a clear homage to Yuri Norstein's 1980 *Tale of Tales*, though "Girl and the Sea" is populated, save for the title character, entirely by animals and its storyboarding craft is more akin to high budget fantasy narratives such as Wes Anderson's *The Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009). One of the more haunting, nonlinear images—which is repeated ambiguously several times through the video—is of floating, snow-covered apples. At once heavy and ripe and lighter than air, these apples represent a lost and missed Paradise, and a closed impenetrable shape.

Even without the elements of the independent child and the lonely wolf, the video evokes a sense of melancholic longing because of its strong cues for sensual perception, feeling, physical reaction and symbolic thought, allowing us to involve and integrate different parts of ourselves with the animal and half-animal characters. The narrative itself is potent because of its preponderance of iconic and indexical signs. Icons that operate through familiarity are particularly effective because they fire the imagination, conjuring up the *possible*; it is much easier to long for something that could, however remotely, actually exist. The indexical signs, in contrast to icons or



metaphors, are based in what I think of as the “imagined actual,” wherein identifying with being part human and part animal comes to us almost as if it were a real prior experience.

When we see videos indexing unhappy animals, abandoned children and separation we are reminded of a wide swath of feelings and experiences, perhaps even taking us back to our deepest moments of grief. Because the feelings and memories around childhood pretending are particularly intense for many people, so these have the ability to conjure intense reactions. Indexical associations, moreover, are powerful because they transcend the individual to access the affective experiences we share, thus creating communal bonding—between humans and animals—in the process. The emotional salience of the video is also enhanced through the indexicality of place, referencing forests, cliffs, snowscapes and the ocean. By rationalizing our identification with the wolf, the girl and their mutual loneliness through the perspective of magical agency, we make sense of the sadness in the story that transpires.

As a genre which is characterized by the speculative, animal narratives are often “what if” scenarios concerning transformation and borders of both humanness and bodily integrity (Sobchack 2008). “Girl and the Sea” offers the enticing possibility of being part animal as a positive form of body alteration that in turn promotes freedom and multiple identificatory positions (Sobchack 1997, 37). While Lennox’s and Jonas’ characters may not embody Donna Haraway’s

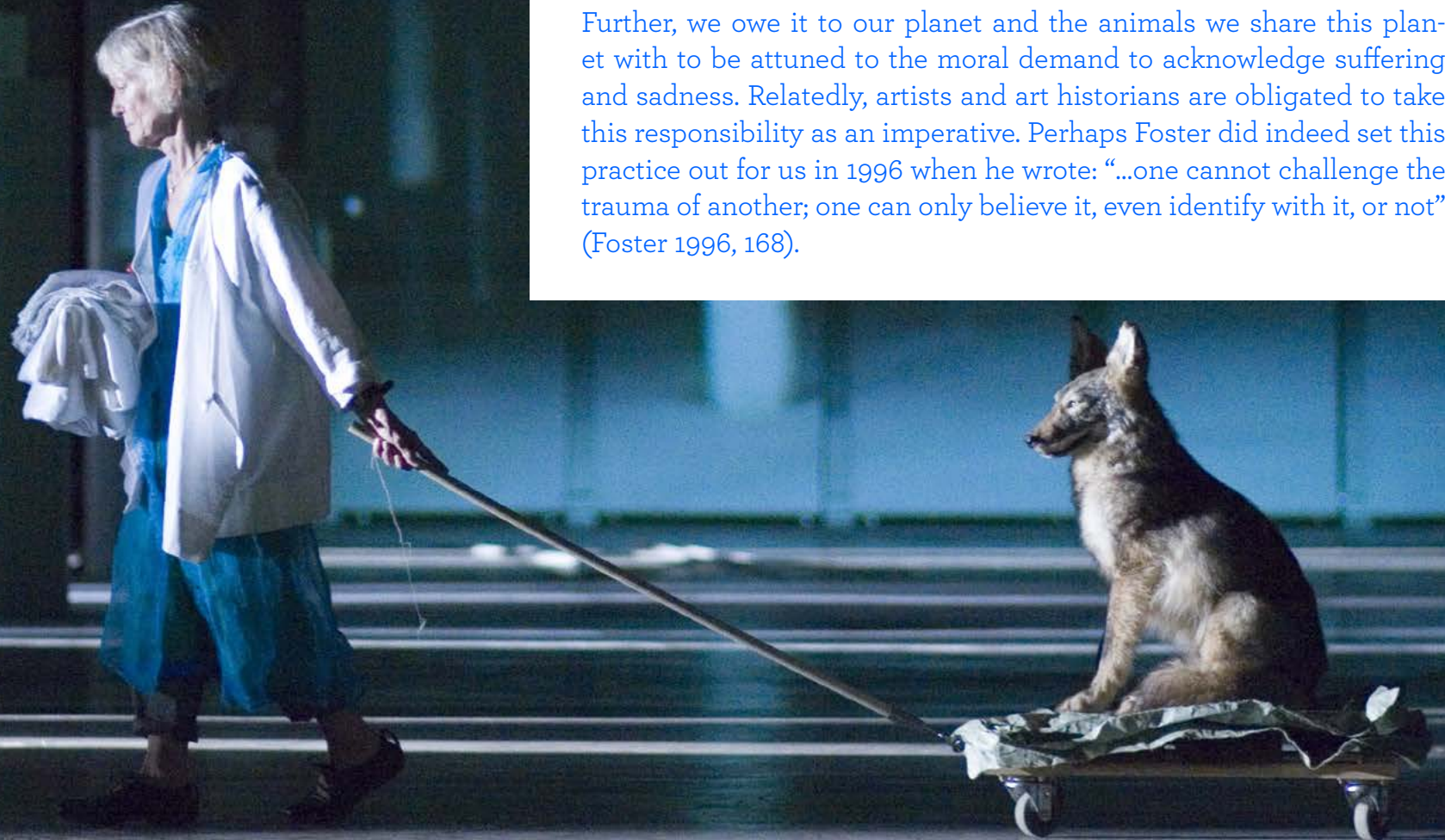
cyborg in its literal sense, they are also “boundary creatures” residing between human or animal, child or adult (Haraway 1991, 181). So what we are left with is an Eden or Paradise that has no origin story, which itself inhabits a destabilizing place in Western evolutionary and biological narratives. The hybridized relationship between the wolf and the girl is another sort of lonely positive, in that it rejects and eliminates the desire for a patriarchal, nuclear family, and questions the borders of humanness and the natural. The video is effective in evoking longing because it conjures the items we call forth from childhood memories, and the sense we have of the archetypes of myth—apple, forest, snow, wind, light, fire, water, dark—as part of those memories, whether they are “real” or not.

Marc’s originary longing, was, I think, something like what we experience in the Jonas and Lennox videos many years hence. Marc’s art was an extension of his relationship with real animals, and the cheerfulness that permeates so many of his images came from both lived experience and desired completion. It is not surprising that *Nachträglichkeit* has fallen somewhat out of fashion both in the disciplines of psychology and art history, even as trauma has become something of a pop culture buzzword. Despite the fact that there is a general acceptance that deferred trauma is both real and Real, there has been a broadening of trauma’s parameters to seemingly far-fetched extremes, which in turn has provoked a backlash to “trigger warnings” about anything potentially upsetting in various types of media.



“Girl and the Sea” provoked an emotional rupture in perception that allowed me to make the connection between Lennox’s and Jonas’ mediums, Marc’s *Paradies* and Jonas’ *Paradiso*, and the canine characters representing our love of—and separation from—the animals in all three works. I saw that Marc, as the Real, had indeed returned in a way that was challenging and satisfyingly open-ended. This type of *Nachträglichkeit* is personal, which makes it difficult to quantify as a formulaic mode for apprehending artworks. But “afterwardsness” is a common experience, and being aware of its existence increases opportunities to make intuitive leaps.

Further, we owe it to our planet and the animals we share this planet with to be attuned to the moral demand to acknowledge suffering and sadness. Relatedly, artists and art historians are obligated to take this responsibility as an imperative. Perhaps Foster did indeed set this practice out for us in 1996 when he wrote: “...one cannot challenge the trauma of another; one can only believe it, even identify with it, or not” (Foster 1996, 168).



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EMBERS

On Loss and Mediation

When something disappears, a certain metaphysical space opens up. We are left to our own devices. Disappearance implies both potential and dread; something lost is irretrievable even with the blackest of boxes. What disappears becomes an eternally polymorphous fiction, merciless. And it doesn't get easier, it only becomes different. What disappeared things—especially people—leave behind, becomes matter that provides a reference, or functions as a stand-in for what was. What is curious is the artistic practice wherein the artist incorporates themselves into these amorphous presences. It seems natural that artists are revisiting, processing and negotiating past personal experiences, emotions and fraught cultural histories through mediation with documents and materials that act as embers.

With painting, time passes and all the people painted die. When we look at portrait paintings by those so casually dubbed The Old Masters, we bear witness to a moment in time. Stylistically, we draw relations between the aesthetic and the exigencies surrounding its creation. But more so, as contemporary viewers, we are witnessing an artefact that refers to someone who actually existed. The older the paintings get, the further we grow from those whose physical forms instigated the work. The connection between the viewer and the subject(s) depicted continually wanes, like the tiniest letters on the bottom lines of the eye chart. We'd be hard pressed to recognize even our own blood lineage; no criticism of the accuracy of representation, only that it's a rendering at all. The focus is ultimately turned on the object itself—it becomes a mere reverberation of the creator.

Subjects in photographic portraits, on the other hand, may slowly fade from recognition, but somehow those depicted do not ever fully suit the status of "lost". Photography yanks at our pant-legs, showing us flesh that could bleed, not impasto.

Walter Benjamin said that there is a different nature that speaks to the camera than what speaks to the eye: "Instead of a space worked through by a human consciousness there appears one that is affected unconsciously" (Benjamin 1936). He gives the example of being able to describe how a person walks but that it's impossible to describe the moment that they begin to walk, arguing that photography can capture these moments. Photography, therefore, presents a situation whereby the subjects never yield entirely into art. The photograph not only becomes a component of the photographer's oeuvre, but instigates something of the subject which cannot be silenced. It is these documents, which beg for the attention of the living, that function as sites for manipulation and reengagement.

Fabiola Carranza's *Corrida, 1929* (2013) is one such example, forging a new, soft-handed aesthetic and sensory relationship between herself and archival video footage. The four minute, thirty second film shows home-made documentation of a bull fight, shot by Man Ray. In the artist's words (which is the extent of the didactic offered for this work on her site): "I cast the light from two flashlights over the

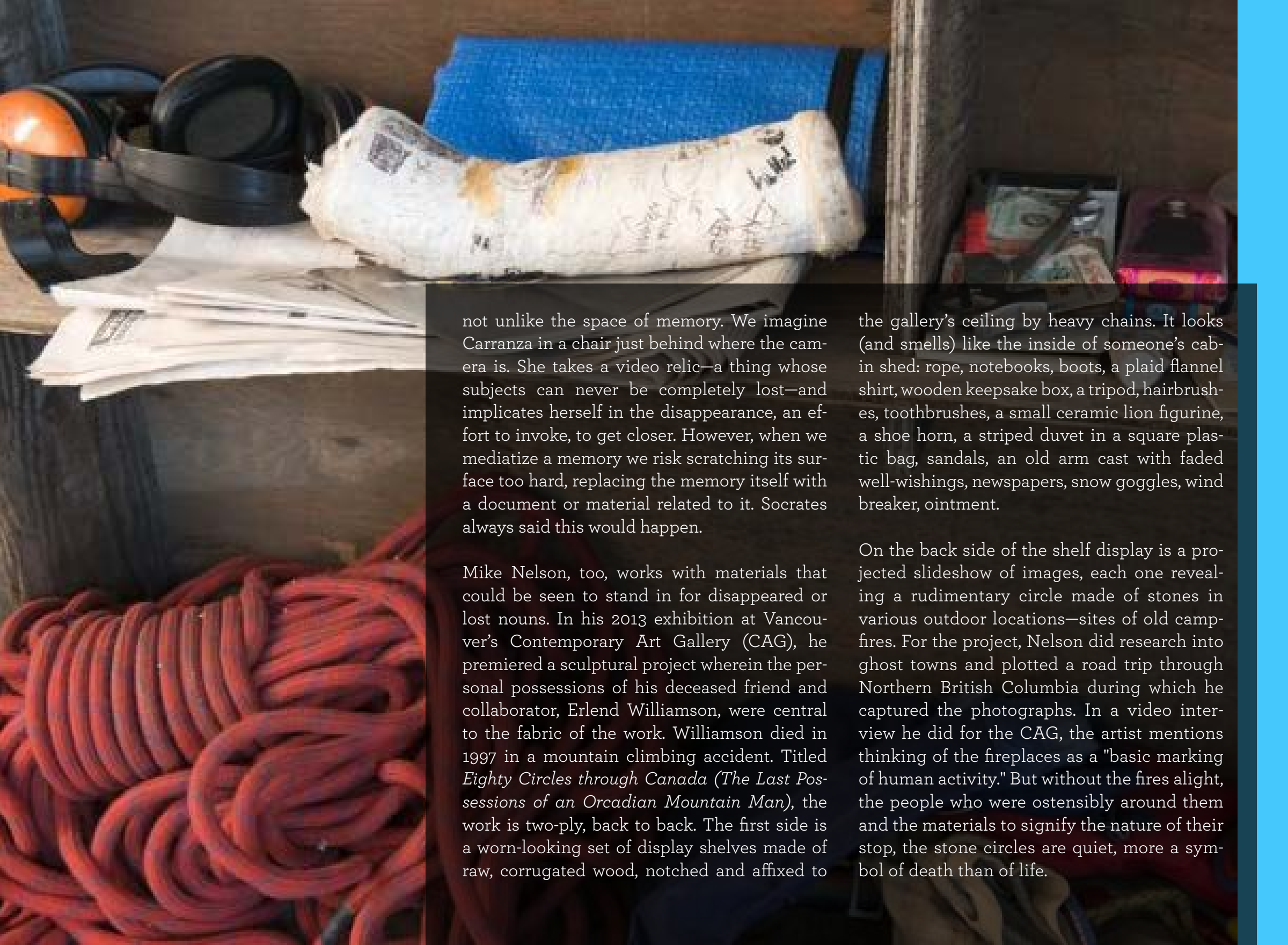
projection of a home movie of a bull-fight in Spain shot by Man Ray." The artist is present in the film in the form of two warm-toned, incomplete circles created with flashlights, tracing the movements of both the bull and the fighter. She is implicating herself as an empathetic contemporary witness to an event that exists in isolation as a document.

Carranza is meddling with the physical and metaphysical spaces that disappearance occupies. The movements of her two flashlights seem to have no preference for the bull or the fighter, the victim or perpetrator. In fact, the perception of victim and perpetrator is a fluid one, something implied by the erratic but sensual gestures of the flashlights. The lag of the flashlight's stare calls to mind what from the past has slipped away, invoking the kind of terror that comes from being on the precipice of remembering something long forgotten only for it to immediately dissolve into a sense of wonder prompted by what was, *almost* becoming a recollection.

The flashlight has an effect of both illuminating and blocking out—does Carranza attempt to obliterate the form or emphasize it? If we can imagine illumination and blockage as folded over on each other, it's sensible to interpret the artist's work as an attempt to offer a sense of privacy between fighter and bull in the public sphere. If Socrates cringed at the thought that humans would write their way into the future instead of moving forward through dialogue (for the fear that all information would be relegated to documents), Carranza attempts to conserve some level of intimacy and privacy within the document. When parts of life become documents, it is assumed we gain control in some way. However, Carranza leaves the fine details of the bull and the fighter's encounter to them, an ambient homage to that which cannot be reproduced. The flashlights often seem to anticipate the movement of the subjects, only for the subjects to defy the prediction.

To trace these motions with warm-toned flashlights and record the effect as a performance invites the viewer into an intimate space,





not unlike the space of memory. We imagine Carranza in a chair just behind where the camera is. She takes a video relic—a thing whose subjects can never be completely lost—and implicates herself in the disappearance, an effort to invoke, to get closer. However, when we mediatize a memory we risk scratching its surface too hard, replacing the memory itself with a document or material related to it. Socrates always said this would happen.

Mike Nelson, too, works with materials that could be seen to stand in for disappeared or lost nouns. In his 2013 exhibition at Vancouver's Contemporary Art Gallery (CAG), he premiered a sculptural project wherein the personal possessions of his deceased friend and collaborator, Erlend Williamson, were central to the fabric of the work. Williamson died in 1997 in a mountain climbing accident. Titled *Eighty Circles through Canada (The Last Possessions of an Orcadian Mountain Man)*, the work is two-ply, back to back. The first side is a worn-looking set of display shelves made of raw, corrugated wood, notched and affixed to

the gallery's ceiling by heavy chains. It looks (and smells) like the inside of someone's cabin shed: rope, notebooks, boots, a plaid flannel shirt, wooden keepsake box, a tripod, hairbrushes, toothbrushes, a small ceramic lion figurine, a shoe horn, a striped duvet in a square plastic bag, sandals, an old arm cast with faded well-wishings, newspapers, snow goggles, wind breaker, ointment.

On the back side of the shelf display is a projected slideshow of images, each one revealing a rudimentary circle made of stones in various outdoor locations—sites of old campfires. For the project, Nelson did research into ghost towns and plotted a road trip through Northern British Columbia during which he captured the photographs. In a video interview he did for the CAG, the artist mentions thinking of the fireplaces as a "basic marking of human activity." But without the fires alight, the people who were ostensibly around them and the materials to signify the nature of their stop, the stone circles are quiet, more a symbol of death than of life.

Paired in this way, the work somberly plays with materials that are not themselves dead, but stand in for what is. *What do we do with our dead loved one's possessions?* It's tricky, in these cases, to not free-base nostalgia. Nelson offers a portrait of disappearance in a different sense. Similar to Carranza, he is posturing himself as an empathetic contemporary witness to something disappeared, faded and obscured, but not lost. To purport there is afterlife in a theosophical sense would be another kind of conversation, but there's something undeniably active and vibrational about certain materials left behind by those who are dead or gone. It's important to the process of grieving not to simply stow them or trash them, but to negotiate the changed nature of their form.

The modest presentation suggests homage, even if the work does attempt to mimic a natural state: the clothes are folded and stacked, not framed or individually illuminated. There is a chance that Nelson brushes close to camp here, but the projected images on the back side of the shelves burdens it. Where the possessions on the shelves allow the viewer to formulate an understanding of Williamson, almost conjuring him, the photographs indicate wordlessly what the possessions are too specific to suggest.

Where the presentation of personal possessions compresses our focus toward someone specific, allows us to imagine Williamson's character with every fold and chip, the slideshow of bygone campfires helps us to zoom out. The trend of stone circles establishes itself through repetition, transmuting the directive empathy toward one (Williamson) into contemplation toward death in general. The death of one faces us with grief, their personal possessions remind us of them. Then, so many things that were once neutral in our daily environments become imbued as signifiers for mortality more broadly. This is not to say that the grim reaper starts to stalk, rather that we happen upon things that remind us of our lives before the loss, these moments of disorientation a testament to the pivot point.

Nelson gets at this when he says:

The idea of trying to communicate loss through material became interesting to me. Amnesia seemed the closest I could somehow come, in terms of expression through words, of that huge experience of death... You have [your] life which carries on exactly the same and yet something happens within it. And you're going to get flashbacks to a life before that looked exactly the same but felt completely different somehow. (Nelson 2014)

This sense of passage, from one side to another, is manifested in the way the wall of shelves is set very close to the entrance of the gallery, obscuring the rest of the room from sight. When we move past the shelves, the room opens up and we are faced with the series of images. First, we are posited to focus on one dead man in small space, and then we move into an open room which provides more space (literally) to implore broader thought about what is left behind when the flame is extinguished.

The contemporary dancer Mathilde Monnier, in the documentary about her process made by Claire Denis, says:

Whenever you make an incursion into a space, that space is altered. I like this idea of leaving a scratch because that space is altered by that scratch after. It's like a piece of paper that has a mark on it and is no longer blank. There's something dirtying it... In other words, the memory leaves a mark. The mark is always there. (Denis 2005)

The same seems just as true for situations where the incursions are unintentional. This is the case with a project called *The Risk of Being in Public* (2011) by Stockholm-based artist Meriç Algün Ringborg. The title of the project comes from something Diane Arbus said: The risk of being in public is accidentally appearing

in a photograph. Algün Ringborg notated 136 incidents over the course of one year whereby she realized she was being included in the photograph of a stranger in public. That's roughly one incidental photo-bomb every 2.5 days. These notations are displayed not as photographs, but as basic text headings—one per slide, as the slide projector cycles endlessly. A few examples:

YOUNG WOMAN TOOK A PHOTO OF LENIN'S MAUSOLEUM.

Red Square, Moscow

28.June.2010 14:25

or

OLD MAN TOOK A PHOTO OF A CAT FIGHT OUTSIDE
HAYDARPASA TRAIN STATION.

Haydarpasa Pier, Kadikoy, Istanbul

21.June.2010 09:42

The artist is a rigorous documentarian, taking a methodical, meticulous approach to observation. She has come to be known for exhaustive, time-consuming forays into formal texts (such as the dictionary or visa application forms) with resulting work that is surprisingly elegant. These works become accomplishments larger than the sum of their parts—extracting and uncovering poetry from structures that are, by nature, stifling and bureaucratic.

In *The Risk of Being in Public*, she has created textual portraits out of portraits that people were unintentionally creating of her. It calls into question our visibility to those we don't see but whom see us, and challenges Benjamin's assertion that the photo does not ever capture a neutral subject. Her work ascribes meaning to our anonymity, accidentally becoming part of somebody else's history. By existing in public, we not only become available as subjects for contemplation and viewing, but also come to define the entire environment (even if slightly) just as Monnier suggests.

In the opening essay about disappearance in Algün Ringborg's art book *Location: Date: Time* (2012), she addresses her thinking about what it means to be a background subject:

There are also those insignificantly occupying the background in a perpetual state of the trivial but nonetheless in historical existence in a sort of 'negative presence'—anonymous witnesses to that particular photo in that particular time.

Algün Ringborg claims for herself the portraits that she is unintentionally taken up in by way of being in public. In an attempt to not disappear into the low-focus backdrop, a mere speck in the photographer's environment, she instead creates an imagined album. She inverts the status that is assumed of a disappeared thing—a void. Rather, she pays attention to the haunting, provocative force of what was never hers, but which made use of her. She relinquishes the physical documents, grasping instead to her textual records which prompt a recall perhaps less concrete, but not necessarily less reliable.

What these works share is a fixation on the remnants, a gentle set of hands reaching for something that could very well detonate. Each of the artists clings in some way to material, or the immaterial, as a means to stay connected and to invoke the life of something that was but no longer is. While these artefacts may slowly, gradually, stop being able to provide clear relations to their original referents, they transform into artefacts that offer the potential for provocation.

Because our culture is inclined to understand everything from complex data to the most intimate feelings with the help of various media, it seems natural that artists are proceeding in this way. These photographs, videos, personal possessions, written records function as a reminder to defend against the slow-creeping, evaporation of memories; they are affirmations in moments of madness or delirium that there was a person at all, at some moment in time, who filled the shirt.

YOUNG WOMAN TOOK A PHOTO
OF LENIN'S MAUSOLEUM.

Red Square, Moscow

28.June.2010 14:25





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