



CROCOITE

Justy Phillips

LOST ROCKS

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The conditions that obtained when life had not yet emerged from the oceans have not subsequently changed a great deal for the cells of the human body, bathed by the primordial wave which continues to flow in the arteries. Our blood in fact has a chemical composition analogous to that of the sea of our origins, from which the first living cells and the first multicellular beings derived the oxygen and the other elements necessary to life. With the evolution of more complex organisms, the problem of maintaining a maximum number of cells in contact with the liquid environment could not be solved simply by the expansion of the exterior surface: those organisms endowed with hollow structures, into which the sea water could flow, found themselves at an advantage. But it was only with the ramification of these cavities into a system of blood circulation that distribution of oxygen was guaranteed to the complex of cells, thus making terrestrial life possible. The sea where living creatures were at one time immersed is now enclosed within their bodies.

Italo Calvino, *Blood, Sea*. Excerpt, 1967.

In weaving forward these fragments of history and confession I do not claim to speak for the hole in my heart, but rather to speak-with the shared experience of our telling.

I. Let me tell you a story.

Inside this body there is a heart. Not like yours.
A pulsing orb of spectral colour and flow. It's a
waterfall. Now a rainbow. Now a snow storm.
Splitting shards of light into mist and colour.
With every beat of this body. I want things.
Regret things. Diminish. Forgive things. Inside
this body there is a heart. Just like yours.

02. We are all born with a hole in our hearts.

In the womb of our mothers, before we are breathing air, this hole acts as a kind of trapdoor that allows blood to bypass the lungs. In most cases this trapdoor closes itself during the first few days after birth. In rare cases, its hole remains open. This hole, you might come to know, as an 'organism that persons'. A seam that grows-with. This is what happened to me.

Medically, a hole in the heart or 'patent foramen ovale' can present in either the upper (atrial) or lower (ventricular) chambers of the heart, causing what is known as atrial and ventricular septal defects. These congenital heart 'defects' or rupturing malformations, enable blood to travel abnormally between the chambers of the heart. This diversion allows oxygenated and de-oxygenated blood to mix in the heart itself. Consequently, a person with a hole in the heart may suffer shortness of breath, increased heart rate, abnormal heart rhythms or 'arrhythmia', structural changes to the heart and increased risk of stroke, heart failure and unexpected death. For some unfathomable reason, it also makes this particular organism an exceptional swimmer. In some small basins of attraction,¹

71. she remains a Yorkshire champion.

At the Carnegie Gallery (2008) in Hobart, I draw lines between a father and child. I name the work, *fifteen years*. I make giant boxes of light and move row after row of crisp black letters to illuminate my grief. I make a greetings card with all the words in one easy-to-find-again-place and wrap it in cellophane for visitors to take away. But nobody comes. Not many anyway. Maybe it's the abundance of light or the crushing weight of such incomprehensible breakings-of-faith that keeps these five boxes of illuminated writing away from this city's inhabitants, but when only two people show up for my artist's talk I feel at its most acute, the loss of my making. At first I am deflated but as these two tentative bodies sit and read I begin to feel the space transforming. As they attend to the work, these people who are not strangers to me, I feel that I am sharing too much, too private, these words that will forever remain too difficult to tell. But when I see their rupturing pour out of their bodies and across the gallery floor, it is their presence that begins to move my lines of writing. Now we are three, floundering in the shadows of parquet flooring and reflected fluorescent tubing. *This* is the work. *Fifteen years*, my desperate plea for a father to choose my family over the one he

cannot bring himself to leave, etches itself deeper and deeper into the crystal white glow of this, our temporary re-unification.

18. To enter the life of a hole,

one must first engage with the event of its making. Its activity. Its history. I can tell you that my hole was created through congenital abnormality. You may have found yours in the street, in the brickwork of your home. In the words of a lover. In shadow. These are the holes we consume through breathing and eating and moving and speaking. And sometimes these holes begin to consume us. They grow inside us. With us. Through us. This is what happened to me.

03. A practice of rupture.

In *Tides Apart* (2006) at Inflight ARI in Hobart, I make *letters for dad*, a text-work that spans three walls of the gallery. *So many fathers*. I make some writing and bind it in the form of a small book. On the front cover is a short letter to my dad that I will never send nor speak. Printed in fluorescent orange ink that both illuminates and deafens our silence, it reads:

And then I see it.

There is a single plate on the kitchen table. In its centre, sits a large piece of cake, which has been cut into two perfect halves by my father. I will never forget that image; two halves separated by a bone handled knife on a plate, which is older than I am.

As the minutes pass in that kitchen, I can't help but see the layers of dust and dirt and cat hair, which have collected in the awkward places of this room. The used coffee grains placed in empty cat tins; the dead plants, the fossils, the single sheep horn.

Basking in your soft northern light, we sit together and pick the fancy icing from our

independent cakes. You look so proud. And then it hits me. You do not see anything in this room anymore, only your daughter and your cake, and in this, the briefest of moments, we are alone in this heaven and it is wonderful.

11. Dad, your eyes are filling up again.

19. It started as a tiny hole.

From the day I was born to the day I was thirty. It grew as I grew. It was one of the largest holes they had ever seen, they said. And so quiet compared to all the others they had ever heard. They stood in turn with their heads to my chest and no one was allowed to breathe. Except me. And no one could hear its unusual shape. Except me. I was sitting in one of those fake velvet club chairs when I first heard the news. When a hole was still a whole. Listening to the words fall from his body into mine I was immediately oppressed by two violent forces. One: The thought of my chest wall cracking into two as they reached inside to extract my punctured heart. Two: The repulsive touch of that fake velour skin pressing into my heart from the outside. Too much flapping. Too much breathing. Not enough air for everyone.

113. In a Montréal hospital I lie awake.

A new body forms. Is you is me is the starched cotton sheet that is our life. Raft. I am connected to tubes and needles and voices and liquids and tentative hands. You are connected to me. We are connected to tubes and needles and voices and liquids and tentative hands of inexperience and puncturing that stings and stings. And stings until the right amount of crimson blood flows in the right direction for the last time in its life. For the first time in its life.

You lie along the length of me. Make me twice as long. A circumference without line. Just an amoebic something that can only be the middle of unknowing. This line that opens and opens and opens. Desperate for traction in anything. Your iPad. Your long warm hair. In a sea of fluorescent tubes and plastic chairs and a sign that laminates 'only one visitor per patient'. As if a lighthouse could organise the waves.

When you inadvertently contaminate the ECG machine by holding my cold feet in your hands you are scolded for creating the joint echo of our heart. From now on the cardiac machine monitors us closely. All cables and crocodile clips. All tentacles pinching skin. Now we are octopi.

Now we are sponge. Now we are dull ache. Now we are hospital air.

06. In 1975, the celebrated nature writer, Roger Deakin cuts an exquisite seam, by swimming across his native England through her land locked bodies of water. ²

In Waswater we think of him as we drive our icy limbs towards the scree. Beneath our pounding chests, two thousand metres of black steal our depth. Turn frigid water into blood. Pull the hairs from our veins. In darkness. We turn for shore. Dad smoking.

16. *In Search of the Miraculous* (1975).

Exactly forty eight days before the day of my birth, 33 year old artist, Bas Jan Ader sets sail in the North Atlantic Ocean⁷. His solo voyage on the 'OCEAN WAVE' is the penultimate living experience of a catastrophic trilogy. At just over 12ft in length, his boat is, I am told, the smallest craft in which such a feat had ever been attempted. The work begins in 1973 when the artist documents in a series of photographs, a night-time walk through the city of Los Angeles, from the Hollywood Hills to the ocean. On the back of each image he writes the lyrics to the Coasters' song *'Searchin'*. Embracing the ocean, Ader decides to continue his journey to Amsterdam, drawing his trilogy to a close with another night-time walk in the city of canals. In 1975, as a prelude to this solo, trans-Atlantic crossing, he exhibits *In Search of the Miraculous* at the Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles. For this exhibition, Ader invites a group of his students to sing traditional sea shanties alongside an accompanying slideshow. On the 9th of July, 1975, Ader says goodbye to his wife and sets sail from Cape Cod. After three weeks at sea, all radio contact is lost. Reportedly, small remnants of his boat are found off the shore of Ireland. Ader is forever lost at sea.

In an article titled ‘The artist who sailed to oblivion’, art critic, Richard Dorment writes, ‘*To this day, no one knows whether Ader was swept to his death by a freak wave, became disorientated and jumped overboard, or whether, from the first, his intention in staging his last work had been to commit suicide.*’³ Later, I read about the devastating events of Ader’s childhood, his father murdered by the Nazis for harbouring Jewish refugees, his mother given fifteen minutes to flee their family home. Dorment suggests that in his solo voyage, Ader makes a conscious decision ‘*to place himself at the mercy of a force greater than himself... surrendering himself to the ocean as he had surrendered to the force of gravity*’ (Dorment, 2006, para. 6). Sometimes the living experience of a hole in the heart can distil too much. Subtract too much of one’s holding. I think this might be what happened to the miraculous life of Bas Jan Ader.

112. The Iceland Deep Drilling Project strikes magma at 2100m.

This is only the third time in recorded history that magma has been reached.

96. Experiencing an event that did not happen or

97. It happened to Justy.

When I chance upon the ex-voto paintings of Daniel and Luis Vilchis at a pavement market in México City I think immediately of you (Dear Oso Polar). I think immediately of us. Their stall is a riot of confessional colour. A saturation of devotion and heartfelt thanks for death-defying acts of misadventure that so very nearly ended in death. Juanito and the bread truck, Pablo Ramirez and the bone saw in the butcher's shop, Víctor and the cañi and the rogue bull in the pulque harvest. Offering thanks to every one of God's patron saints, they find their way to the famous Vilchis brothers to commission the gaudy details of their lives from the jaws of death. Amongst the saints on display today are Our Lady of Guadalupe, Saint Christophe and Saint John. Now I am not a religious person. I do not believe in destiny or fate. I believe in small things like sunshine and rock. I believe in authenticity. Which is maybe how we got off on the wrong foot, you and I. In the unknowable event of the living hole one has to imagine, invent and draw from future experience a world that will always create in itself, reality and fiction in unequal measure. Underestimating the power of this relation was my first mistake.

98. Asking Daniel Vilchis to paint an ex-voto for me was my second.

07. Run your eyes slowly from my clavicle. You'll soon see the scar. That no gravity can hold.

Just beneath the skin on the left side of my chest a cardiac monitor reads the murmurations of a closed hole. Most of the time it sits idle. Just goes where I go. Loops-with my fielding. Embedded. Embodied. I haven't used it in over two years. In fact I'm waiting for it to be removed. But until then, I can press a button on a hand-held device and instantly recall the last three minutes and capture the next three minutes of my life. By the time you read this the cardiac monitor may be gone and for the first time in a long time I will be forced into the irretrievable chaos of the present. No way of protecting the future with the past.

08. Not at the push of a button anyway.

Temporality in liquid state and a body kissed on every surface by the memory of its wash. This is the 'interval', a duration expressed through movement that philosopher Erin Manning defines as the *the metastable quality through which the relation is felt*. The interval, writes Manning, '*never marks a passage: it creates a potential for a passage that will have come to be*'.⁴ A multiplicity of bodies: a hole and a heart, a brick, a shadow, a lover, a stiff rabbit on the side of the road; black ice reaching for the sun.

52. His name is Benito Gonzalez.

Eyes as black as coal. I see his meek and rounded ears at first. Glossy against the backdrop of the soft, dark trees. And maybe he wouldn't have turned his head had I not placed my hand on his shoulder. Let the pine needles swim over my feet. Two endangered animals, he and I.

30. Some people have a pathological fear of holes.

It's called tryphobia. It manifests as an aversion and even revulsion to clustered holes in materials – matters like honeycomb, seed pods, skin, meat and plants. More commonly, a hole is understood as an empty place or cavity held within a solid body. Often used to refer to some kind of situated absence, suggesting an absence of matter *in place* – a hole in a shoe, in an argument, in a bitumen road. A hole is an anchor. Not in time or space alone – not a dead weight that grips the sea floor – but an active flow – a hol(e)ding of experience.

118. Ever since I saw that image

of Bas Jan Ader fixing sail on the tiny deck of his 'Ocean Wave', I have thought long and hard about what might motivate a man to take such a wild and unrelenting risk. But when your beloved father climbed into the crystal blue waters off that pontoon, no one knew that he would slip so easily from the reef.

120. A note of warning. For a hole can be very difficult to hold.

54. Using contractors to excavate an enormous hole

in the floor of a New York gallery, Swiss artist Urs Fischer fashions a crater eight feet deep that spreads almost to the gallery walls. He names it *You* (2007). From the core of its pit, the hole extends more than thirty feet in all directions, revealing a bed of ochre dirt where once there was only concrete floor. When I enter the gallery, there's a man standing down there in the bowels of Fischer's earth. Dark suit and balding head. Fischer's extraordinary gesture transforming rubble into breathable air. Like me, other visitors peer into the hole from its precipitous edge. An experience only made possible by Fischer's choosing to leave behind a precarious fourteen-inch ledge. On which I am standing. A palpable space from which I too can taste the cool air of Fischer's hole-ing. I feel naked. I am not naked. But Fischer's peeling away of these layers of concrete and skin leaves me vulnerable to spontaneous openings that I don't yet understand. All I know is what I feel and that it is deeper than the eight foot depth of Fischer's man-made New York crater.

166. The size of a walnut with yellow red shell. Flotsam everywhere I look. This is the second time I think of him. Your father swimming.

55. Each time another person ventures into the hole they are accompanied by tiny pieces of its outside.

Grains of municipal New York sand break away beneath their ballet flats and knee-high black-tan boots. Very soon the ledge on which I am standing will be ten inches then six inches then no inches at all. I am captivated. He knows this of course and titles his artwork accordingly. By naming his removal of tonnes of dirt from a gallery floor, *You*, Fischer activates an audacious gesture of relation. Sedimented concrete, the imprint of a Nike running shoe, histories, memories, whispered conversations, bodies in and out of love; these are the archaeologies in which Fischer constructs his magnificent hole. It's as if in this act of carving air out of solid ground, the artist somehow materialises in language, all the gravities of loss and the complexities of their holding. It is this materialising of nomenclature that prises open the pit of Fischer's giant hole. Not from the middle of the gallery floor but from the middle of 'You' the balding man. 'You' the woman standing on the precipice. 'You' the sand that clings to the bottom of her shoe.

Propelled by the eruptive force of its core, the living hole is bound only by this inside edge of

its looping, for its outside edge does not belong to it but to the material body of which it is a part, to the body of its holding. A hole to a woollen jumper. A conversation to a mouth. In order to relieve the pressure extruding from its core, the living hole cuts away from itself, eventing into the body of its holding / cuts into itself, eventing away from the body of its hol(e)ding.

140. All these colours from other people's mouths. Painting yellow.

31. Let me tell you a story. Inside this body there is a heart. Just like yours.

The heart is 'conscience' and 'desire'. It is the 'innermost part of anything' and the vital, essential, working part of something. Dictionary entries for the word 'heart' include the hollow muscular bodily organ, the centre of vital bodily functions, the seat of life. The heart is also defined as the stomach. As the mind. It is the seat of perception, of understanding and, albeit rarely used, of memory. The heart is the white tender centre of a cabbage. It is purpose and inclination. The seat of courage, of energy, of ardour. Always more than a mechanically defined organ of the human body, the heart remains intrinsically linked to conceptions of humanness, however we embrace its more-than-human tonalities, the heart as organ(ism); as spatial, durational more-than-human assemblage of vital matter. As *living* hole.

101. As the temperature rises,

the openings of heart and mouth do funny things. Lash out. Make hurt. Soften the single digit minutes as they leak from lip to lip. Crust to core. The goddess Frigg, wife of Thor, pleads with every living substance in the nine known worlds to weep her son, slain Balder, out of Hel. In the tender white centre of the cabbage, red-lead chromate boils. And cry they do. All except for Loki, the shape-shifting deviant whose dry eyes cast dear Balder into an eternity of dying death. Seams that leak. Scabs that itch and bleed into the most beautiful three minute crystalline loops you ever saw.

68. *The Arctic Circle is geometry*

in the Arctic Ocean. It mimics the shape of the planet. I'm approaching the Circle now, a few miles more and it will be visible. Circles aren't usually hard to see and mostly they all look the same except some are larger than others. The circle's out there in plain sight on the water. This far north nothing obstructs the view. The ocean opens an enormous, unbroken expanse of horizon up here, big enough that there won't be any problem seeing an arc of the world. And I want to see the arc. I want to see the shape of things from among the things themselves... After staring out at the ocean for some time I notice that everything out there coincides precisely with the earth's surface, making it extremely difficult to distinguish the Arctic Circle. At the far right and left of the view, the ocean gradually and symmetrically drops off and out of sight. It gets darker farther out, as any arc would. But the curvature is so subtle it appears flat. If I didn't already know the earth was curved, I never would have seen the arc at all.⁵

Dear Roni Horn, I have never stepped onto the Arctic Circle but I have come very close. Waiting for a polar bear on the Skagí Peninsula in Northern Iceland it almost touched me too. I just didn't know it at the time. I didn't see the Arctic Circle because I was looking only for the bear. For the looping circuit of this material hole that beats erratically. Intermittently. As continuous line. That you should distinguish an arctic circle

in the darkness of this arc inspires me to look again in the shadows. At the black blue light in which our circles cut and cleave. I too want to move-with the far right and the far left of the view. I too want to move out of sight.

In *Pi* (1998), you assemble 45 images that you have made along the Arctic Circle in Iceland. These photographs, six years in the making are, 'a collection of circular and cyclical events' (Roni Horn aka Roni Horn: explore the exhibition, themes, Pi, 2009). You combine seascapes and bird's eggs with portraits of Hildur and Bjorn Bjornsson, who harvest eider feathers from wild nests by day and watch endless episodes of *Guiding Light*, an American soap opera on the TV by night. The repetitive familiarity of popular entertainment and the natural cycles of the eider harvest bleed into the imperceptible yet continuous horizon of your Arctic Circle. At the Tate Modern in London (2009) you hang the photographs at an awkward height, creating a horizon that enables the room itself to become the earth and me, the pulsing basin at its core.

70. Roni, your sensitive lines are re-drawing me.

In the window of Friða Frænka in Reykjavík I see the white porcelain bear. But walk out with the raven. Black as black. His eyes biting into mine. I can only imagine how he had been waiting. To be held. I ask the price, which is high but worthy. Run my fingers over his silky cool wings. You can feel where other people had handled his plume. Completely smooth but polished on one side. He has been adored before. I hold him gently, allow the glaze to suck the warmth from my pulsing arms. It's only been three days since Dagné held my palm. Read aloud my future, untying all my forks and spoons with her fingers and her eyes.

We sit there, she and I, with sheepskin rugs and fake candles. Painted folk tales on the walls. And as she runs the edges of her fingers through my life, all I want from her touch are the good things. *Every little cell in my body is happy.* But it all floods out. The polar bear motionless in the window. Shards of broken history fall like bitter chocolate from her mouth. And I, like a wild pig, gorge on all the pieces before their roots take hold in this faltering ground. And the cold smooth raven in my arms. Black as black as black.

122. One thing now at least is certain. You don't move a living hole. It moves you.

I feel immediately oppressed by the rhythm of its moving, of its hole-ding. I am now the sedimented material of its cutting. Paralysed, almost, by the weight of our histories and our mis-making. That we might lose each other. Already lost each other. You are the water and I am the tank and our wanting, the green bear that loops and loops inside of the pool. I am afraid. But a part of something bigger than myself. A part of something bigger than the bear and the tank and the provincial zoo. There is a comfort in this. In the potential of using all of this, all these other parts of this assemblage, to make out of these relations something new. I feel-with my body, the shape of these words, these speeds, these relations-in-the-making, of which I am now a sedimenting part. And I too begin to experience a coming undone from the core. The touch of a lover. The complexity of grief. How these things undo us.

106. Dear Roni Horn, without you I never would have felt this blade at all.

78. Cadence. Inflection. Meter. Lilt.

In, *Fall I, Los Angeles*, 16mm, duration 00:24 seconds, (1970), I watch Dutch artist, Bas Jan Ader, along with the chair on which he is sitting, tumble from the roof of his house. In *Broken Fall (Organic)*, 16mm, duration 01:44 seconds (1971), the artist is hanging from a tree. Precariously, his long body swings from side to side as he shifts his weight from arm to arm, edging his way further and further down the overhanging limb. 00:35, at least five body-lengths below him at the bottom of the screen, a shallow stream mirrors his reflection. 00:50 and the outstretched limb is now perfectly horizontal, with Ader perpendicular to the glistening stream. 01:04, now flailing and kicking, the artist inches further still towards the narrowing reaches of the limb. 01:23. He is stiller now. 01:45. He falls. Breaks the mirror with the shift of his rhythm. His legs crumple in the shallow water sending ripples towards the other bank. Tight-lipped waves broken only by the reflected glory of the overhanging branch. In these documented performances, Ader uses the physicality of his own body to test the limits of gravity. When asked why he chooses to fall, Ader answers,

66. *because gravity overpowers me*

A living hole is a volcano, viscous magma venting from the core. Heating, pushing, pressuring the walls of its confining. Its spluttering, stuttering arrhythmic lines always driving territories from the deep. We like to imagine the centre as a fixed and static point, however slight. We imagine it as equidistant from its edges. But like the molten core of words spoken in haste, the centre of a living hole is constantly moving. If the centre is not anchored to anything, but is instead flowing in any and every direction, then what and where is the centre after all?

79. *The middle is not the mean, but on the contrary an excess. It is by the middle that things push.*⁶

As I read these words, I re-enter the vortex of *Tornado*, (2000–10), a ferocious experience in which the Belgian artist Francis Alÿs attempts to take me with him into the eye of a small tornado.

With a hand-held camera the artist runs towards the spiralling dust and rocks that dance across the dusty field that is this Mexican landscape. At first I hear the frantic sounds of the artists' panting breath and then a ferocious blast of air ripping particles from the earth. As Alÿs forces his body into the middle of this whirling mass, it is the deafening roar of rocks on flesh and plastic and glass that I feel with my body. This image in which I'm enveloped, once a horizon of blue and brown is now consumed by a deafening, middling grey and I, along with the artist, am blinded by his compulsive re-entering of the tornado. The centrifugal forces of which seek always to push him away.

Through sound and dust and digital imaging and flesh and projected air, I wander back into the escalating spiral of every one of Alÿs' tornadoes as a way of not only articulating, but feeling, the intensity of Deleuze and Guattari's 'middle'.

In throwing himself into the eye of the storm, Alÿs not only experiences the force of its spiralling propulsion but in the act of his moving, he feels the imperceptible venting of its boundary.

Just as a tornado uses its axis to funnel inwards a spinning column of vertical air, a living hole is forced to consume the sedimented material of its cutting. It *infoliates*. And just like a tornado, a hole in the heart uses its core to propel its body outwards, driving absence away from itself and towards the rest of the world. Out-desire. This relational act of infoliating pre-supposes 'a coming undone', not from the surface but from the core.

107. To move-with a living hole you first need to immerse yourself in it.

One cannot simply stand back and observe the force of its moving. As in Tornado (2000-10), Francis Alÿs's swirling column of vertical air, *'the artist neither stands outside of the violence in a place where he might attempt to assess it, nor does he implicitly suggest a way of combating it... Instead, quite actively, he runs towards and immerses himself in it'*.⁷ To move-with the becoming body one needs to feel the force of its moving. In the parched highlands south of México City, Alÿs and his camera feel the force of this moving as the articulated movement of dust and air. Chasing a calm in the eye of a storm is their way of moving-with this moving. To move-with the becoming body of the living hole you must embrace its assemblage by first allowing its assemblage to embrace you. Allow its airborne rocks to mark your skin. Enable its language of memory and holding, imagining and feeling, object and sharing to move you. To cut you away from the inside edge of your hole-ding.

144. I go to Iceland, stopping on my way in the north of England to visit my father.

We are losing eight minutes of light each day now. I'm here to witness the big swim. It's 8am and I am standing on the rocks looking out there trying to decipher lines of grey. I've been waiting here for days, battered by the cold and the rain. I have a flask of coffee and a Lava bar. Eyes on the prize. The dark water. The chaff and the churn. I know he won't come unless I am watching. Unless someone can witness his swim.

The down in my jacket is starting to weep causing delicate rivers of Arctic rain to collect around my wrists. And inside I am clammy and white. And somehow the black from out there has engulfed the white from in here and suddenly I am full of something else. In the north of England, big black clouds of rising damp are swelling in the walls of my father's bathroom. And into my father. And it's drowning him. And he has become the polar bear. And he is swimming for his life. Then flaying in the chop. And he can see no one. And no one sees him. My father. In his off-white pelt. Bedraggled and wretched, stands in awe. How the skins of all the other bears shimmer outwards in this light. Returning shards of yellow to the sea.

146. Five weeks later I am on the Skagí Peninsula waiting patiently for another polar bear to arrive.

But I'm still thinking of him. Wedged in between the Bactrian camels and salted candy floss.

147. Days and days of imperceptible geometry in
the Arctic Ocean reveal nothing.

148. Another morning and another barrage of
horizontal frozen rain holds me captive to the
inside of the studio-cum-fish-processing-plant.

149. I decide to make my own polar bear head by tearing up the mountains from Icelandic geological magazines.

It takes four days to shape it and cover it in layered strips of pictographic paper and two more for it to dry so that I can paint hairlines onto his fur. I carefully place upwellings of mafic magma in the fracture zones behind his ears, lessen any downsagging of the crust around his lower jaw with pages and pages of line-drawn volcanic belts. I draw up his cheekbones with buoyant mantle plume, causing his small black eyes to spread outwards the perspective of our view. And beneath the black and white marks of my paintbrush are numerous accounts of scientific expeditions to the most notable features on the island; Vatnajökull, Reykjanes, Snæfellsjökull, Vestmannaeyjar and the now infamous Eyjafjallajökull. It's beautiful alright. I leave it rough around the neckline to suggest the existence of a body now missing a head and place it on my bedside table so that his are the first eyes to greet me in the morning.

123. How lead devours the blood of sleep.

151. When I receive a telephone call from the Mayor my heart sinks. He would very much like us to meet.

He is perplexed by my invitation but expresses excitement about what we might encounter during my guided tour of his town. On the municipal noticeboard, a lioness and her cubs somewhere in the African savannah. I've been here in Skagaströnd for nearly four weeks and I still have no idea how to undertake this speculative endeavour. I fill my days with cliff-top walks overlooked by the North Atlantic Sea. Looking outwards in the vain hope that I might move closer, further, nearer, sooner to a solution to my audacious proposition, I am paralysed by an intense and crushing fear. Of failure. There are only four more days until I meet god knows how many people at the house of the fortune teller Þordís Spakona. I feel nauseous all the time and the only thing I can think of is inviting the bear to guide the tour for me.

152. Testing our compatibility for such a venture, the bear and I leave the studio together. For the first time.

With my head in his head I walk around the frozen streets of Skagaströnd. I play on the swings. I hang out at the petrol station, wait for the supermarket to open. I document this event of our wandering, the bear and I, in a video I come to title *When your head is a bear*, 2012. In the last scene, the sun is setting over the ocean. The bear and I stand and stare as the horizon fractures its sky with shards of pink and orange. We wait there patiently at the water's edge until gravity and dark water smudge it all away.

155. Through wandering and eventing I begin
to language this body that bites my fingers with
mouthfuls of sub-zero air.

All I need is one more image.

156. At exactly 3pm the next afternoon the bear
and I mount a (wild) Icelandic horse.

I'd like to say that things start well but they
don't. As soon as I find my grip on the leather
reins I realise my mistake. My corrupting of their
relation. But it's already too late.

157. The horse takes exception to the bear, to the sound of its chicken wire frame. Rears. Throws me off its back. Then bolts.

158. The feathers from my down jacket fall like snow flakes overhead. I hear my own nervous laughter and suffocating pain.

159. I fracture my skull. And my back. And my
shin hurts like hell.

160. Someone catches the horse. But the bear
head and the artist lie motionless on the
frozen ground.

127. "Is it I who did that?" Upheaval. A hysterical sense of leaking. Only a thread holds me fast... A monster surges up from the sea, surrounded by living fish. The sun shines intensely when suddenly it begins to go out. The fish: dead, their white bellies upward. Then the sun shines again, and the fish are alive. The monster has disappeared into the depths, the fish along with him. I am saved.⁸

100. Capsicum. Stilton. Paint tin. At my father's house. Fresh bitumen. Stiff roadside rabbit.

129. Eighty four days of serious concussion.

169. I must be on the other side of the highway.

At first I see only darkness and then the silhouette. Matte black and immobile, I join its lines into a shape that appears as two-dimensional horse. After a few seconds, illuminated momentarily by a passing silver-grey sedan, its score of distended ribs etches diagonal lines into the back of my late-night eyes. A lone, emaciated horse standing on a highway in Tirana. I am transixed, not by its absent light-dead body but by the backlit landscape of its standing. Yellow-green light from a nearby apartment block hangs from concrete edges, making the shape of the horse's undercarriage into the horizon of an imaginary mountain-scape. It is so quiet and so still this air, that I almost do not feel its violence. Drifting in and out of focus, he and I share lines of fuzzy concrete that blur his standing into mine, intermittently. It is unusually quiet on this highway. Has someone doctored the sound? The muted tones of distant automobiles and barking hounds do nothing to soften my concern. For its welfare. After a few minutes another car, this time with horn blaring and yellow-white headlights. Only now do I see the horse balancing precariously on just three legs. The fourth, a rear hind leg, it draws into the light-filled mountain of its holding. This is the

violence. This threshold that is not-yet death. Time and again, my view is obscured by passing trucks that suck the horse's image out of sight. And then back again. Vacillating abstractions. Please don't fall. I grip my hands and synchronise my breathing to the horse's wavering leg. Please don't fall. What I really want to say is, "Please don't fall while I am watching".

Between life and death. This is how we make our relation felt. This faltering Albanian horse and I, carving space and time with our passing. In a duration of just five minutes and twenty-two seconds on a backlit LED screen, I feel the unbearable weight of his lumbering frame as the unknowable darkness of our falling. This is my experience of *Time after Time* (2003), Albanian artist Anri Sala's intimate video document of an emaciated horse's not-yet falling into the speed of oncoming highway traffic.

Three good legs hold a precarious betweening of duration's making. Precarious, because it is full of risk. Betweenness, because it is porous – an experience always in the making-already made felt. In this awkward middling of Sala's unfolding, I recall my eventing of the underwater bear in event number 20, Short Circuit Green, whose looping Arctic body threatens to drown us both.

With my face pressed against the thick glass wall of his enclosure what I feel is the slippage of our water. Yellow-green light. Grey-green bear. In the illuminated speed of Sala's oncoming traffic, I watch the yellow-grey lines of my father's hair. Disappearing into darkness. And I am forced to confront the shocking intimacy of a living hole as shared relation. Faltering body. Drowning horse. Green-bear-looping-fracture. Now recording.

04. Forgive me for not holding you in my arms.

05. In the wake of your courage I swim.

25. It begins with a sensation, a friction between metal and flesh.

It's August 2004, one week before my thirtieth birthday and I undergo a surgical procedure to repair the Atrial Septal Defect in my heart with an Amplatzer Device™. At its widest point the defective rupture in the internal walls of my heart measured 32mm in diameter. An opening just large enough to hide a walnut. The Amplatzer Device™, a composite of titanium and nylon, is commonly referred to as 'metal with memory'. With the aid of medical imaging, these material devices are shaped to the individual dimensions and contours of holes in hearts in hospital operating tables around the world. Whilst looking at an image of my ruptured heart, a cardiac surgeon in his late fifties gives memory to this technologically advanced metal by shaping it between his hands. He gently teases the metal between forefinger and palm, presses it into itself as if releasing rare earth metal from its core.

When clamped to the walls of my heart, this surgeon's touch remembers everything. I am sure of it. As all the air and all the blood flows freely and in the right direction for the first time in my life I can't help but wonder,

26. How might the shadow of his life now illuminate this hole in mine?

109. Watch this river flow. Black ice eats the road.

171. Skin in water. Always.

Desmond Morris proposes the 'aquatic ape', a theory in which our ancestry is intimately linked not to the savannah but to the sea, we can begin to feel in scientific evidence, that a soldered heart might weave the memory of its cybernetic metal with a more ancient memory of the sea. Where the kidneys evolved to deal with excess salt. ⁹

How out of sorts. Our salt-emitting kidneys must feel.

33. It is claimed that the heart sends more information to the brain than the brain sends to the heart.

Moving against the flow of many in the scientific community, Cultural historian, Fay Bound Alberti, locates these counter-narratives of affective intelligence in materiality and a new scientific discourse,⁹ which is reworking and redefining the nature of the heart to include a concept of body memory known as 'cellular memories'. This hypothesis proposes that it is not only the brain, but the body itself that is capable of storing memories of lived experience. If metal has memory and body has memory, could a living hole not have memory too? At the Institute of HeartMath, a Californian research centre dedicated to exploring the physiological mechanisms by which the heart communicates with the brain, scientists are targeting what they believe to be a 'little brain' in the heart. This 'heart brain' is thought to have extensive sensory capacities and the ability to act independently of the cranial brain. With this ability to participate, a piece of metal in a heart is no longer a prosthetic but ontogenetic proposition.

07. A house that is a castle. Only darkness inside.
A plate of marigolds across his chest.

138. The first time I saw her eyes. Yellow buoy.

172. They say it appeared overnight.

This jack-knifed refrigerated carrier that spills its guts into the flow of early morning traffic in Bristol's Centre Promenade. Nearly 25,000 bunches of freshly cut flowers discharge their futures of devoted vases and funerary wreaths into this busy street. This is civic rupture on a monumentally intimate scale. By the time I reach the scene it's late in the afternoon. Cornflower. Chrysanthemum. Peony Rose. The uppermost bunches bear the brunt of the early summer heat yet even this doesn't soften the fall. What is this extravagant and deeply poetic experience? An accident? A set-up? A constructed situation?

Right of centre and away from the spill, a young man in an ice-pink cotton shirt is mesmerised by this sea of articulated bud-burst. Hovering to my left and almost out of view, I see a woman in knee-length skirt and open toed sandals. She is the first one to participate in re-appropriating this horticultural mishap. She is the first one to liberate the stems. And then its carnage. Within minutes I see grown men grabbing bundles of colour from the wreckage. Fields of blood-red Gladioli and Lisianthus surge forward with bruising precision. Men in suits and high-visibility vests, office-workers, teenagers on push

bikes, skateboards. Mothers carry their babies, fill their prams with weeping Emilia and Lily. I instinctively head for the sunflowers. To lift their over-burdened faces from the ground. In a moment of shared hysteria, infatuated office workers and opportunistic passers-by draw petals from the bitumen, conjugating colour to their lives. By 7pm this devastating artwork by artists Heather and Ivan Morison (UK) has been wilfully dispersed across the city. Floods of people swimming home in armfuls of rupturing bloom.

A few days before their calculated 'accident', titled, *I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life has not been the same* (2006), Heather and Ivan Morison dispatch an ominous postcard that reads: *'African grey parrot, grey with red tail feathers. I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life has not been the same'*. I for one, never saw the postcard, only the truck and the armfuls and the heads above water. Only the pallets and racks and peach-coloured plastic tubs of aromatic blooms. And now life is not the same. Heather and Ivan Morison, life will never be the same. My encounter with your audacious installation is tearing me apart. With every beat of this body. I want things. Regret things. Diminish. Forgive things. Inside this body there is a heart. Just like yours. It's not by the jack-knifing of the cab or

the falling of the stems, nor the armfuls of the bleeding Gladioli. It's the choreography. The constructed 'spilling' that devours my all too public loss.

Like other imperceptible loops of contemporary art's making – Roni Horn's desire to see the Arctic Circle, Francis Alÿs' *The Loop Tijuana – San Diego* (1997), in which the Belgian artist circumnavigates the globe in order to travel from Tijuana to San Diego without crossing the Mexican/ United States border or Scottish artist Katie Paterson's *second moon* (2013), in which she couriers a fragment of the moon by air freight around the world for a year – living holes are imperceptible loops of space and time.

88. Every breath I take, every beat I make. Is etched into the memory of my three-minute loop.

Tick tock tick tock. Sandwiched between the luxurious weight of thick cotton sheets I lie awake for a long time trying to regulate my heartbeat with the alarm clock. Then the cathedral bell. I feel the arrhythmic pulsing of my heart through the side of my shin, my lower back, in my head. It might be strange for you to hear that a heart can beat through a shin. But I promise you it can. I hear traces of shin in the distant bell and back again. Try and bring the echo into play. Is anyone else hearing my beating heart-shin-bell too? All this distance. All this speed of a hole that's a shin that's an echo that's a bell pours itself into this bed until it pins me motionless to my fear. That I will die here in this room. Without you. Beating. Out of touch. Out of time. Out of line. And softly to myself I sing. Don't worry. Don't worry.

32. As I enter *This Variation* (2013),

artist Tino Seghal's Documenta 13 commission, I feel a room of almost total darkness. Skin on air meets vocal mutterings, or is it falling rain? Then, the almost familiar riffs of pop songs I might have recognized. Were I not eyes-wide-black. Not once do I get a hold of their rhythm. Nor the rhythm of our shared darkness-holding. To feel so many bodies and yet to feel the presence of none is both mesmerizing and terrifying in equal measure. The artist asks us what it means to belong as strangers to an unknowable whole. To open to each other these material holes, that not one of us does see. In the light of day.

38. In risk.

This is how we experience our living holes. They are our maybes. Our invisible, imperceptible events that somehow happen to us without our knowing. That happen to other people. They manifest as sensitivities, gestures, ruptures; as words, experiences, as feelings – these holes that compose-with each other, through each other, in spite of each other's not knowing.

21. In a green tank at Morelia Zoo I encounter a lone polar bear.

He knows he will attract people like me. People who understand the way things grow inside themselves. The camels are running now, kind of in formation and the salty pineapple I just bought churns my hurty insides. An island of fake rocks and a solitary polar bear circling the shore. Children wait at the underground viewing wall. Throw pebbles at his window. And the weight of the pineapple scars my chest like an anchor grasping for shore. The chimpanzees are staring at me. Where else should they look? A giant poster strapped to the wall behind their rubber tyre screams in drop shadow letters 'Thank you for calling me Yoltzin'. I don't know which one of you is Yoltzin and why the others don't have names. And why is the polar bear kept alone? Why not with other things that look like him? Other things in whom he can be seen. It's starting to rain now. I stare at the antelope and wonder if his insides are all twisted in the ocean like mine. And the skies are building. Slowly north.

128. At first when I saw you sleeping, I didn't see the corn cob lodged in your belly. The hole in the tyre though. Caught my eye immediately.

103. Missing woman searches for herself.

A small tour group sets out for the waterfall Eldgjáfos in Iceland's southern highlands. On their return to the bus the driver reports one of the tourists missing as she has failed to return to the bus. The driver waits in the parking bay for an hour whilst the remaining tourists search for the missing woman. When the search seems futile, the driver notifies the police and continues with the tour. Search and rescue teams are sent to the area shortly afterwards. At 3am the search is called off when the missing woman realises that she had been on the bus all along, even participating in the search for herself. The woman, as it turns out, had returned from the waterfall with the rest of the group earlier in the day. On re-entering the car park the missing woman used the facilities to *freshen up*, taking the opportunity at the same time to make a change of clothes. Back on the bus, *'the woman simply didn't recognise the description of herself, and "had no idea she was missing"'*.¹⁰

101. Dear Oso Polar,

In light of every single event that has happened since I fell into your ocean at Morelia zoo, I find myself writing this short letter to you. It has been two years and three months since I stood with my hands against the walls of your man-made habitat, since I first saw your lumbering frame against the green. Yours and mine, just two bodies moved by the matter of our mutual enclosure.

I lied. That day we first met in your captivity it was not the water as I had claimed, but my interpretation of your looking that destabilised my delicate heart. I invented the episode with the children and the pebbles and then Daniel added the open teeth and the green canopies in the trees. It was he who made my hair blonde and replaced the sun with a flaming heart. And floated it overhead in the evening sky. That was all Daniel I swear. Even now, this long after the event, I still don't really know why I did it. Or why I felt so compelled to have Daniel retell the story of this event that we both know. Never happened. All I know for sure is that it has something to do with the water. And the yellow-green fur that's been growing inside me ever since we met. In clumps at first and then in long ribbons of knottable line.

Two weeks ago I met by chance a non-Maori, Maori-speaking man in Melbourne, Australia. And he looked into my eyes and he asked me the question that now fills my sleeping hours my days my nights my memories of you. '*Ko wai koe?*' He asks. "*Whose water are you?*". Immediately I want to answer that I am the water of your captivity but I don't think the others will understand. 'I am the water of a glacial lake in the north of England. I am the water of the Tasman Sea'. These are the words that I cast into the circle of bodies of which I am an eighth of an edge. They drift into the centre of this man-made loop where I see them bob up and down with all the other rivers and oceans and inland seas. Just for a moment we make the time to swim in here, to dive and splash and put our heads underneath the water so that we can hear each other's hearts beating as if they were our own. But now all of a sudden one of us is gasping for air. Blinded by the depth of their unknown the rest of us start heading for the shore. Line. Inundated by the swell of our misunderstanding. We pull away from each other just as the wave threatens to break our banks and we return to the treading of our individual bodies of water. When instinctively I reach to itch the small scar on the left side of my chest,

102. I wonder if it is your fur that's caught inside
its silky lining.

139. A twinkle in their eyes. Someone painted
this rock and cut these lips.

181. In the beginning I thought I was looking for my father.

But it turns out I was looking for yours. In the dark green elds of the north of England. In the throbbing pink flesh of my failing heart. Stretched to the limit. I thought I was looking for my father. But now all I feel is yours. I did not bother to check the ocean floor for upturned rocks. I did not think at the time that your grief was my grief. That your life was my life. That I could be of any assistance whatsoever in filling the absence of your loss. I did not think to sweep my heart with the currents of his life. I did not think you might still feel the salt in his hair. Late at night where you lie warm and pulsing in my arms. I did not see how all of this was growing inside me. Because I was looking for my father. And yours was already gone.

As blooms of rising damp scale the walls of his small bathroom. My father and I. And seep into the lounge where his television plays in the dark. The air is full of blue and white. Flecks of iridescent dancing light in the sweet haze of his home-made cigarette. A symphony of understated self-fulfilling neglect. He gets up from his chair and I can see the body he has left behind. Momentarily, to make another coffee. And

then back to the safe upholstery of his refrain. Secreting all the little things we cannot say because we don't know what to say. Because we are afraid. And all the things you could not say because of that day. When the ocean swallowed your father. Whole. Knitting his gentle organs into coral reef.

Back home, the giant kelp writhes in the depths of the Tasman Sea. He could have chosen that place. But I guess this is where he knew you would be. We're moving forward on a corrugated road when you recognise his eyes in the trees. In the place where a copse of silver birch sheds skin upon skin. Your Dad. It has to be. The mottled forest kisses him in slippery gills. And the car we are travelling in does not stop in time for you to ask him where he's been. For seventeen years adrift. At sea. And first it is you who cannot breathe. And then it is I who cannot breathe. The distance between the car and the verge and the ground and the sun and the broken tree which holds him motionless in this blue. Amphibious weight. A tidal rip cleaves you back into his glory plume. And me, to the sorrow of your Great Barrier Reef. I meet the crabs and the barnacles and the water fleas. Unleash from that day the most spectacular metamorphoses from free-swimming plankton to reef-dwelling father-lost-at-sea.

All our insides are on the outsides. Trailing. Trawling. Hundreds of metres cast from the window on your side of the car. Knotted and tangled they fall away in messy clumps of something once remembered so clean. I put my hand on your knee desperate to anchor this spectacular moment in more than the rivulets of petrified dirt that carve our wheels into all the things relentless summer rains have washed away. But the speed of this extrapolated body catches us both on the run. How badly I want to catch a glimpse. Of your dad looking out from his silvery ocean hide. To trace the gentle tufts of his eyes with mine. To squeeze into him these years of missing touch. My father not yours. To let him feel.

182. This mass of invertebrate life between us.

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COLOPHON

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I. Let me tell you a story.

Inside this body there is
a heart. Not like yours. A
pulsing orb of spectral colour
and flow. It's a waterfall.

Now a rainbow. Now a snow
storm. Splitting shards of
light into mist and colour.

With every beat of this body.

I want things. Regret things.

Diminish. Forgive things.

Inside this body there is a
heart. Just like yours.

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