

An *[Interrupted]* Bestiary

Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca

Introduction and Royal March of the Lion,^I Hens and Roosters,^{II} Wild Asses (Swift Animals),^{III}
Tortoises,^{IV} The Elephant,^V Kangaroos,^{VI} Aquarium,^{VII} Characters with Long Ears,^{VIII}
The Cuckoo in the Depths of the Woods,^{IX} Aviary,^X Pianists,^{XI} Fossils,^{XII} The Swan,^{XIII} Finale^{XIV}

First Edition
Printed September 2022
in Chicago, Illinois

Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca
with Abhay Ghiara and
Shelf Shelf, alongside the
work of Essi Kausalainen
and Every house has a door.



Quire I

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Introduction and Royal March of the Lion

Preface

Begin from bewilderment

What kind of beginning might we choose?

In performance, she says, the beginning is the moment after the audience grow quiet in anticipation...

She counts three kinds of beginnings:

- 1 Those that begin with an introduction, telling you something about the performance or how to view it before it begins, like a pre-show announcement (that threatens to go on forever);
- 2 Those that begin with a more ritualized, nonverbal activity using time or duration as a means to gather the audience's scattered energy into a more directed focus; and
- 3 Those that begin *in medias res*, a beginning that drops the audience into the middle of something, into the disoriented feeling that the performance began before they arrived.¹

But, for her, performance also begins from bewilderment:

Bewilderment resonates with how I would describe the beginning of making a performance. It is important to me that I do not know how to control what I am initiating or that I do not understand where I am going. I need to feel that the material is more than or larger than what I think I can handle. I am in search of a performance that exceeds, defies, and punctuates what I know. Bewilderment guarantees that I need others to find my way.²

Consider *An [Interrupted] Bestiary* as an
act of thinking alongside performance.

Consider *An [Interrupted] Bestiary* as an
experiment in performance philosophy.

This book is and is not part of the
performance project, *The Carnival of the
Animals* by *Every house has a door*.

It is an *expression of contaminated diversity*:
both *distinctive and multiply derivative*.³

Here lies a bestiary:
a compendium of creatures.

But one that has been interrupted.
And interrupted.
And interrupted.

There is a correspondence between
the realms of performance and text.

Performers have their textual
and visual counterparts.

Consider *An [Interrupted] Bestiary* as its
own work—but one that lives within the
ecology of *The Carnival of the Animals*.

The text and images that comprise this book were created between October 2018 and June 2022 alongside *Every house has a door* as they worked on their ongoing performance project, *The Carnival of the Animals*. As the company describe:

The newest, large-scale project *The Carnival of the Animals* collects a series of modular performance works following the 14-movement structure of Camille Saint-Saëns's 1886 musical suite for children. The *Every house Carnival* considers endangered and extinct species, with an original performance devised in response to each of Saint-Saëns's titles, following those imaginative classifications. With sections of varying durations, media, and casting, Finnish artist Essi Kausalainen's handmade costumes provide the visual/material common vocabulary, facilitating the

celebratory transformation of human into hybrid entity. The intricacies of non-human life provide the foundation.

I worked on the text and images during company residencies in Chicago in October 2018 and January 2020, and at a residency in Saari in Finland in September 2019. When the Covid-19 pandemic intervened and prevented a planned residency in Rijeka from taking place in May 2020, I worked on the material from our then home in Surrey in the UK and then finally in our new home in the Netherlands. The first of these I considered as a ‘remote residency’ because the various company members were also working on the project at this time wherever they were, responding to director Lin Hixson’s directives and creating new material according to a distributed yet connected formation.

October 2018 feels both like yesterday and a lifetime ago. Another world that was before the entangled events of the pandemic, George Floyd’s murder and the Black Lives Matter movement, the growing awareness and acknowledgment of climate crisis—not as a universal future to be imagined, but as thick and already long-established presents, unequally distributed across the globe. Then, our daughter Aoife was 2 years old; now she is 6. Then, our son Eoin was 5 going on 6; now he is 8. Then, we lived in the house you see pictured throughout this book; now we live elsewhere. Then, my Dad was alive.



This book has come into being during a time in my life when I have found myself in a deep experience of bewilderment and vulnerability—following the death of my father in February 2020, a matter of weeks after my first residency with *Every house has a door*.

Before Dad died I had already identified—in theory—the fundamental importance of experiences of both ‘not-knowing’ and ‘unlearning’—the need to occupy states of openness, to suspend judgment and dismantle pre-existing assumptions—in order to make way for more reciprocal encounters and ethical ways of knowing nonhuman animals. But it was not until the last weeks of Dad’s illness and

then his death, that I really found myself propelled into the lived experience of what Fanny Howe (1998) calls ‘bewilderment’—a complete disorientation or loss of compass, but one that has the potential to open out into the possibility of re-orientation, the kind of not-knowing that might make space for new ways of knowing.

And then Covid came. A few days after my father’s funeral, the UK went into its first period of lockdown. Through thinkers like Arundhati Roy and Roshi Joan Halifax, I have come to understand this period of personal grieving through a pandemic

(alongside and entangled with other kinds of collective grief over racist violence and climate crisis) as a kind of portal, ‘a gateway between one world and the next’ (Roy)⁴ and as a rite of passage (Halifax)⁵: a forced incapacity to carry on ‘as normal’ that is both unbearably painful and potentially transformative.

At times, this has been a profoundly painful process, but I have also come to experience it as a vital ongoing lesson in how to practice new ways of knowing that affirm vulnerability rather than mastery (following Julietta Singh).⁶ Rather than thinking of my grief as something that was merely stopping me from doing the work or as the ‘background’ to the work, I have come to appreciate that this *is* the work on an important level.

I am at the threshold.

I am walking through the woods, listening to Roshi Joan Halifax talking about the pandemic as a global rite of passage.

For the last few days, I had been really struggling with ‘this grief thing:’ coming up against a weight of feeling that could have no solution, distraction or escape. A feeling, that—whether ‘I liked it or not—was simply to be gone through.

I was experiencing a kind of frustration or guilt about this. Getting annoyed with myself for not feeling like doing any ‘work.’

But listening to Halifax talking helped me start to appreciate—in my bones, not just in the head—that *the grief is the work*, and if I can find a way to open myself to it, it could be a

real gift and opportunity for transformation—particularly in the context of the pandemic.

I have so much unlearning to do.

If we have the strength to occupy it, the threshold is the lived event when the knowledge structures of the past are exposed as no longer adequate to think the future.

At the threshold: Let go!

Structures of certainty have caused so much suffering.

On a strong day, I might shout into the dark:

I cannot return to the world as it was and I don't want to.

On a hopeful day, I might see pockets of light—something glimmering: What will your loss have taught me?

What am I learning from *being in the churn*? What gifts can I bring over the threshold into the new landscape?

She says: *Make an ally of not-knowing.*

She says: *Have our hearts break open, not simply break.*⁷

But the threshold is also a place where deep grief and fear are experienced. I will have been a bystander to suffering.

There will have been days when it is too much.

I am at the threshold.

Finally, the performance of *Aquarium* was scheduled: to be performed on September 11, 2022 at the boat house in Humboldt Park, Chicago. Not long afterwards, I spoke to the company and heard that they had decided to change the title of the piece from

Aquarium to Broken Aquarium. There was no desire to pretend or to seek to cover over all that had taken place between the initial inception of the project and the impact of this context on the nature of how it would manifest itself at this much delayed premiere. Like a linguistic act of *Kintsugi* or *golden repair*, this re-titling treats breakage and repair as part of the constitutive history of the performance, rather than something to be disguised.

Thinking alongside, the title of this project has also been altered to embrace its manner of coming into being: an experience of interruptions; comings-and-goings including the time needed for re-memembering and return as a way to reconnect after a period of absence; and of coming to terms with remoteness—seeking the possibilities for remote connectedness—in exchange for collective presence.

I am at the threshold.

Had this been before, I would have been spending these five days in your company: in proximity, sharing a habitat, thinking alongside you.

But since these five days are coming now—are the future of this now, not that now—I will have to find other ways to swim into the waters we have been exploring together.

Today, this means preparing for being together. Since I am no longer going anywhere, I do not need to pack.

But I do need to remember.

I am at the threshold.
To return to the work,
I must scroll back through images taken in a time before
you were dead.
I cannot describe the pain of this scrolling.
The mismatch of the gesture to the feeling is gargantuan.
The images are both part of a world that had you in it and
part of a world that does not.
I cannot scroll over the threshold of these worlds.
I am scrolling over the threshold of these worlds.
I am returning after contagion.
I am returning after a killing and in the midst of rebellion.
I am returning with grief.
Some days I can wonder how much of this 'outside'
will find its way in.
Others, it comes full force
whether I like it or not
buffeting the waters, churning up the bed.

Presented here are three Quires of the fourteen-Quire structure of
An [Interrupted] Bestiary.

I *Introduction and Royal March of the Lion*
VII *Aquarium*
XI *Pianists*

The texts in this book have emerged through a range of processes: as responses to directives provided by Lin Hixson and company co-founder and dramaturg, Matthew Goulish; as letters in correspondence with performer Abhay Ghiara according to a structure and set of constraints created by Abhay; as grief writing;⁸ and in working with a wide range of both found and devised text materials during in-person and remote residencies.

The images in this book have also arrived through a range of methods—as responses to directives; working with found and devised images gathered during research periods, including drawings by my son, Eoin. In developing *An [Interrupted] Bestiary*, I have also found my way into a practice of collage working with a range of visual materials, including photographs taken during *Every house* rehearsals. This practice affords the opportunity to think alongside the performance in a visual sense, but also to recreate or reimagine the performance anew through processing of subtraction and recontextualisation.

- 1 Create three black and white images of actions or events, that you perform, for an unknown future. Use *Aquarium* as a source for the actions or events.
- 2 View the attached documents from performances made in the 1960s and 70s as a guide. Consider that these documents were made in a time when the future of performance was undefined.⁹

On the 20th May, she wrote:

Laura dear Laura,

Many thanks for your email. It is so wonderful to hear from you.

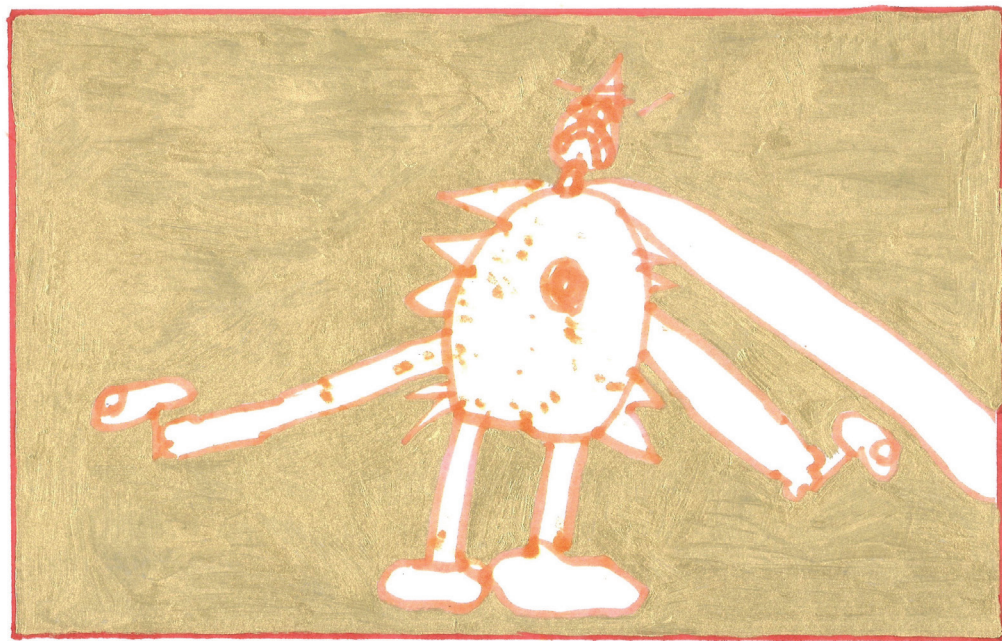
Please use the directive any way you wish. But I would like to add a few suggestions. I think (and this is what you may be thinking as well) that the images should be directed toward The Bestiary. This is obvious but to be clear—they do not need to be black and white photos documenting an action or event that you perform. They could be drawings/collage, drawings with text, or anything that inspires you at the moment. These images are directed toward an unknown future. Might it be that you revisit or respond to the Aquarium creatures, like Vaquita, trying to capture the forces of an unknown and precarious future for this being/us? This precarity was already present in the work. In fact, it is probably one of the underbellies of the whole project. You established such a beautiful process with The Bestiary with such eloquent results in this direction. I'm just encouraging you to continue on this path. The directive is really a way, in my mind, to return to the piece. I am thinking of the word return as so many ruptures

*have transpired for us as a group and for us individually.
Does this make sense? I hope it is helpful. We can discuss
all of this further so please let me know what you need.
I'm not sure how the photos of performances from the
60s/70s might intersect with your thoughts. But use them
(or not) as you wish.*

Lin

return
precarity
images directed toward an
unknown future
a delicate offer of focus

Introduction



CO-----CCO-----LI-----THO-----PHO-----RES

We may laugh, patronizingly, at the medieval bestiaries.

But still today there are creatures like the giant squid who *live so impenetrably deep down that much of what we know about them comes only from studying dead ones that have washed up on beaches, and so our imagination is left to fill in the gaps.*¹

To fill the gap between the dead and the living?
What gap?
At what scale?
They are so slow
And so vast
Or so small
And so fast
I have no idea where life begins and ends.

*Huge sponges of millennial
growth and height*

*Unnumbered and enormous polypi*²

He wants to know if the Kraken is real.

He wants to know where hurricanes happen,
tsunamis, earthquakes.

He wants to know if people die.

As I start to name countries, he says: I am not going there.

What temperature are our nightmares?

The burning flames or the chill of *the abysmal sea*³

Now, perhaps, they are neither hot nor cold, but the very
heating of the water.

The dark remains dark.

The night stays obediently on her side; the day on his

*Until the latter fire shall heat the deep.*⁴

We may laugh, patronizingly, at the medieval bestiaries.

But what extraordinary eyes you give us to nonhuman worlds:

*A bird which can tell if a sick man will die, and
can cure disease*

A beast with a head so heavy it can only look down

A creature that likes to sing, forgetting all else

*Creatures so cold they can extinguish any fire*⁵

The invitation of the Christian bestiary tradition was to consider
the nonhuman world as a book, authored by God as a means of

instruction for humanity. ‘Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or **let the fish of the sea inform you.**’ (Job 12:7–10). No evolutionary emergence then, only creation: a worlding of non-accidental creatures whose projected characteristics have the anthropocentric purpose to act as examples of how to live for human animals.

*The young care for their elderly parents
An animal that is slow and resists commands
A crafty and deceitful animal that never runs in a
straight line⁶*

But how to read these creaturely books otherwise? To be immanently informed by ‘endangered sea entities,’ without the transcendence of moralising judgment. To notice the intricacies of non-human life in a way that animalizes the book itself and the act of ‘reading.’

To begin
Let me tell you a story:

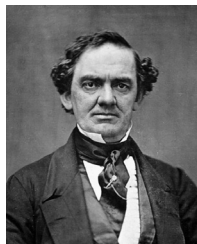
Barnum’s American Museum—owned by the famous showman, P. T. Barnum, located at the corner of Broadway and Ann Street in New York City, United States—opened on January 1, 1842.

Among the museum’s many attractions, visitors could enjoy dioramas, panoramas and ‘cosmoramas’, a flea circus, a loom

powered by a dog, Ned the learned seal, Native Americans who performed traditional songs and dances, and two beluga whales in an aquarium.

Native Americans who performed traditional songs and dances, and two beluga whales in an aquarium.

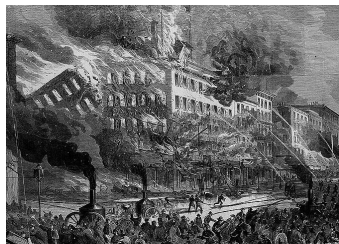
Though he had never seen a live whale before, Barnum prepared the basement of the American Museum in 1861 as a “small ocean” to receive two belugas captured near L’Isle-aux-Coudres in Quebec’s St. Lawrence River. The museum proprietor settled on a tank made of brick and cement, 40 by 18 feet... and oversaw the belugas’ fitful capture and journey by train to New York City in boxes filled with just enough salt water to periodically sponge their blowholes and mouths. Two days after Barnum moved his “monsters” to his basement, they died. The museum had accommodated the subarctic whales in tepid, noncirculating fresh water, and they had to breathe air permeated with gas lamp fumes. But the short-lived attraction bolstered Barnum’s reputation so much, both along the 700-mile rail route from the St.



Lawrence River and in Manhattan, that he declared in Struggles and Triumphs: “Thus was my first whaling expedition a great success.” Still, Barnum wasn’t satisfied with his all-too-brief experiment and tried again. This time, he bribed City Hall to rig the water system to route sea water from New York Harbor to the museum. “Having a stream of salt water at [his] command at every high tide,” Barnum created the world’s first functional oceanarium. He moved a new set of whales to the second

floor, giving them what he figured was adequate fresh air. “I am sorry we can’t make him dance a hornpipe and do all sorts of things at the word of command” Barnum said he told his visitors. The water in the tank was unfiltered and dark. The whales usually remained at the bottom, hidden from the visitors, but could be seen for a moment when they surfaced to breathe.

One day, a woman attending the museum with her daughter got several quick glimpses of a whale after watching for a half hour, then marched to Barnum’s office and declared: “Mr. B., it’s astonishing to what a number of purposes the ingenuity of us Yankees has applied india-rubber.” She insisted that the whale was actually made of india-rubber, powered by steam and machines, allowing it to surface at regular intervals and blow air through a bellows. Barnum let her believe she had cracked his secret, even telling her he was impressed that she was the only visitor shrewd enough to uncover his trick. His priority as a budding oceanarium director—as with his other amusements—was to give visitors what they came for.⁷



On July 13, 1865, Barnum’s American Museum burned to the ground in one of the most spectacular fires New York has ever seen. Animals at the museum were seen jumping from the burning building, only to be shot by police. Many of the animals unable to escape the blaze burned to death in their enclosures.

DISASTROUS FIRE.

*Total Destruction of Barnum's
American Museum.*

* * *

Nine Other Buildings Burned
to the Ground.

* * *

LOSS ESTIMATED AT \$1,000,000.

* * *

A History of the Museum and
Brief Sketch of its Curiosities.

* * *

Scenes Exciting, Serious,
and Comic at the Fire.

* * *

The Police Prompt and Vigilant—
The Firemen Earnest and Active.

GREAT EXCITEMENT
IN THE CITY.

Thirty Thousand People in the Streets
Pickpockets in the Crowd
Accidents and Incidents.

* * *

THE AQUARIA.

THIRD FLOOR FAMOUS PETRIFICATION,
THREE MEN OF EGYPT, THE FOURTH FLOOR,
THE HAPPY FAMILY, ORIGIN OF THE FIRE.

SCENE WITHIN THE MUSEUM, COMIC
INCIDENTS, A FEARFUL PANIC. PROGRESS
OF THE CONFLAGRATION. ARRIVAL OF
THE METROPOLITAN POLICE. THE FLAMES
EXTENDING. CLOSING OF SHOPS. THE
FIRE CHECKED. INCIDENTS. THIEVES
ARRESTED. ACCIDENTS. LOSS OF CURIOSITIES.

THE SUFFERERS AND THE LOSSES.

DISASTROUS FIRE.

As fire consumed the building, the salt water in the beluga whales' tank started boiling. Someone broke its inch-thick glass wall in hopes that the cascading water would quench the flames. Instead, the two beluga whales—captured in Canada only one week before—were beached on a scorching floor before falling to the street below as the building began to collapse. The carcasses lay rotting for several days on Broadway, far too heavy to dispose of quickly.⁸

I do not want to capture you
I do not want to imprison you in my collection
I do not want to make you my pets, my ornaments
No matter with what hospitable intent
No matter how carefully prepared the environment
All your favourite dishes
served up on a silver platter
Is still your last meal.
the salt water is boiling
the salt water is boiling
And so damn loud
Raising our voices to hear each other over your relentless noise
So much for the silent world

[He drives his ship into a pod of whales to get a close-up view. The ship strikes one whale in the process before the baby is lacerated by the prop.]

We are gilding the cracks.
The glass has already broken and been repaired so many times
Did you even notice?
How many more times must we repair ourselves?
I didn't see any of this only
the dark wave. Even the size of a whale
*I don't see what I look directly at.*⁹
a performance with a warm surface layer and a cold undercurrent
a performance the length and width of a human eyelash
trying to see from on the ground looking
*from a plane thousands of feet above*¹⁰
*listening so determinedly that you stop breathing*¹¹
*listening on a curious diagonal,*¹² one ear turned towards the
future, the other towards the past
a performance with multiple time signatures
for all that is already gone
for all who are already gone
for all you could not see as you columned your incalculable loss.



Preface

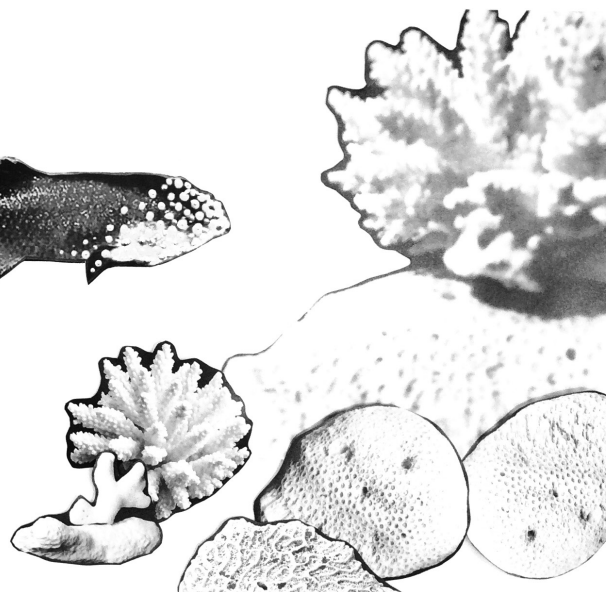
- 1 This is adapted from a section of writing by Lin Hixson: Will Daddario, Matthew Goulis, and Hixson, Lin, "In the making: an incomplete consideration of the first decade of *Every house has a door* 2008–2018 as performance philosophy," in *The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*, ed. Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca and Alice Lagaay (Routledge: London and New York, 2020). For more on the matter of how performance begins, see the *Every house* project, *9 Beginnings*. In the iteration manifested in Bristol, UK in 2012, the project restaged the beginnings of nine historical performances found in the archive, and reimagined them as a new composition: *Every House has a Door*. "9 Beginnings." accessed December 4, 2020, <http://www.everyhousehasadoor.org/9-beginnings>.
- 2 Hixson in: Daddario, Goulis, and Hixson, "In the making," 426.
- 3 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015), *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press), pp.32.

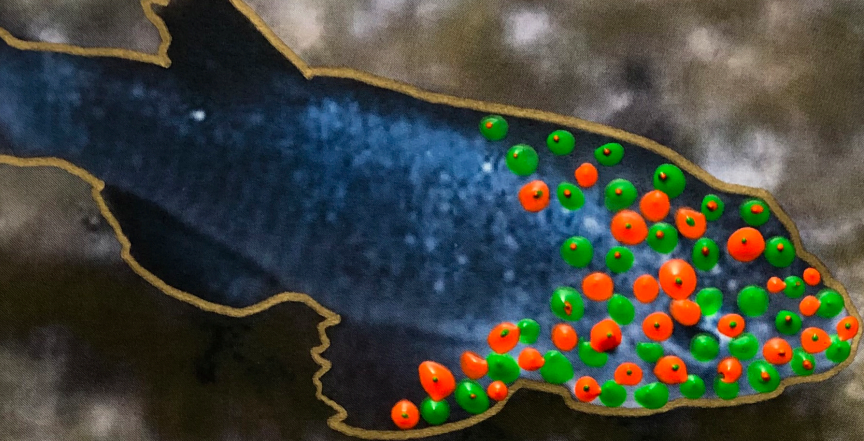
- 4 Arundhati Roy (2020) "The Pandemic is a Portal", *Financial Times*, published April 3, 2020, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>.
- 5 Roshi Joan Halifax (2020), "Grief in a Time of Not Knowing", *Irresistible* (fka Healing Justice Podcast) <https://irresistible.org/podcast/63>
- 6 Julietta Singh (2018) *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham: Duke University Press).
- 7 Halifax (2020), "Grief in a Time of Not Knowing."
- 8 This writing has been strongly informed by the important creative grief work of Will Daddario and Joanne Zerdy through their company Inviting Abundance. <https://invitingabundance.net/>.
- 9 Directives provided by Lin Hixson during remote residency, May 2020.

Introduction

- 1 Charlotte Runcie, from the chapter 'Creatures of the Deep' in *Salt On Your Tongue: Women and the Sea* (2019).
- 2 Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Kraken* (1930).
- 3 Runcie, *Salt On Your Tongue*
- 4 Tennyson, *The Kraken*.
- 5 David Badke (2022) *The Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages*, available at <https://bestiary.ca/index.html>.
- 6 David Badke (2022) *The Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages*, available at <https://bestiary.ca/index.html>.
- 7 Bosworth, Amanda (2018) "Barnum's Whales: The Showman and the Forging of Modern Animal Captivity", *Perspectives on History: the news magazine of the American Historical Association*, published April 2, 2018, available at: <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2018/barnums-whales-the-showman-and-the-forging-of-modern-animal-captivity>.
- 8 Bosworth (2018) "Barnum's Whales", np.

- 9 Ed Roberson (1998) "I Don't See" from *Just In: Word of Navigational Changes: New and Selected Work* (Talisman House).
- 10 Ed Roberson (1998) "I Don't See" from *Just In: Word of Navigational Changes: New and Selected Work* (Talisman House).
- 11 Adapted from Elise Cowin.
- 12 Elise Cowin





Quire VII

| | |
|----|----------------------|
| 04 | Eyelash Seaweed |
| 09 | Lesser Electric Ray |
| 13 | Red Pencil |
| 34 | Devil's Hole Pupfish |
| 40 | Vaquita |

Eyelash Seaweed

I Description:

Eyelash Seaweed (*Elise enters*)

delicate ancient
They have only just begun to learn about you, let alone from you.

They found you in their year 2000
On intertidal boulders at the mouths of the Rakautara and Ohau Streams, north of Kaikoura.
And only there.
Here and there: 2 sites, 4 kilometres apart.

This will have been a lesson about the uniqueness of place: the singularity of this rock, this seabed, this boulder—and the life it affords.
There is an absolute integration of life and locality.
In your case: the co-evolution of a reproductive strategy specific to your storm-lashed habitat.

What is it, exactly, that you need?

there's the Rakautara Stream
remains of pots used to render the whale blubber
on the town foreshore

so here I stand by the Rakautara Stream
all alone by the Rakautara Stream
12:02am, November 14

You are thought to be extinct after the earthquake in their year 2016.

12:02am, November 14
Your home moved to the northeast by nearly 1 metre, and rose 70 centimetres.
Overnight, 1 of the 2 places where you have lived was destroyed.
A movement so complex,
A movement going in 21 directions at once
They had to unlearn what they thought they knew about how the Earth choreographs itself.

Looking at photographs of the seabed shelves thrust up from the ocean by up to 2 metres, I felt as though I was seeing something I shouldn't, like someone peeking through a window at night. But I should look.
Or find other ways to trace a path between
Here and there:
so that the island is no longer seen as an island.

Ambassadors speak on your behalf:
They say you are the size, length and thickness of one of their eyelashes
What is the scale of human love?
They say you are 1.2 billion years old
What is the duration of human love?

You are only a 2 or maybe even a 1 on the scale of attractiveness, she says. So who knows how many will join the search party.

2000, 2, 4

12:02, 14

2016

12:02, 14

1, 70

1, 2

21

2

1.2

only a 2 or maybe even a 1

Do you count?

II Lesson:

Listen:

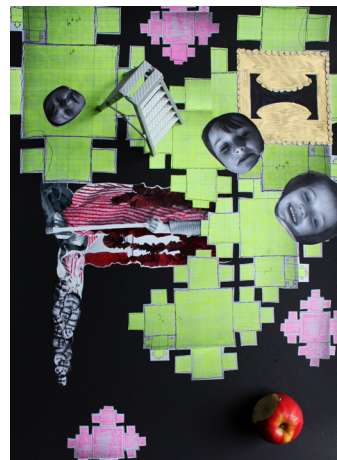
A lesson on the anthropocentrism of declarations of existence

I am here, you just can't find me

I am here, you just don't even know how to begin to look for me

I am here, for myself and others, and have been for longer than you can imagine

But it is not that you *cannot* imagine me.



You are just out of practice.
You have not been exercising.

How to approach a creature? Someone you have never met, whose world you cannot comprehend, whose body and senses operate with completely different vocabulary and scale from yours? Or someone you didn't even consider as a creature... When entering the Textile Discount Outlet in Chicago, my shopping list might say: Eyelash Seaweed, Lesser Electric Ray, Red Pencil. The list is an invitation for the materials to address me. Although I might have an idea what an electric ray looks like, the fabrics help me to see in a different way. My understanding of the Eyelash Seaweed grows by stitching 15 meters of tangling fringe into a five meters long tunnel of cotton and by lining that tunnel with polyester. By creating ripples and folds in light weight synthetic membrane and seeing these folds animated by Elise's body. By watching the movement they create in Elise and in me, in muscle and in emotion... The textile habitats and prosthetics are created from the point where the imagined body of a seaweed, the width of a human hair, and the body of Elise in wave like movement meet. They are a documentation of a dialogue, of bodies coming together in absence and presence.¹

Consider imagining an ecological imperative.

We have to imagine.²
Elise as Eyelash Seaweed.
I do not know what it is like to be you.
And yet, I can imagine.
I have to imagine.

The uninitiated interpret Imagination as something 'imaginary,' in the popular sense of the word; i.e. something unreal.³

*But imagination is not a faculty of the non-existent—it has its own reality.*⁴
On this construction site
Imagination is at work
We are ‘building an image’ together.

Eyelash Seaweed
to the sound of the last piano
You taught me to unlearn death

dione arcuata.
You will have been on the brink of extinction.
This is how it can happen
It is not dramatic;
It is a mounting fatigue.
This is how it can happen for me, too.
Not at all suddenly
But as a gradual extinction
Towards the embers
Fading glow
Until

Take me on your dolphin skin!

I shall be absent soon!

*Saving the tallow with capable hands
Seizing with the loyal closed eyes of foliage*

*Puff*⁵

Lesser Electric Ray

I Description:

Lesser Electric Ray (*Bryan enters*)

Narcine brasiliensis

Let me find you on the list:

Creatures Who Live On or Just Above the Seafloor or Lakebed;

Fishes Who Have Five to Seven Gill Openings on Each Side;

Fishes Who Capture Prey by Protruding Jaws;

Nocturnal Swimmers;

*Species that are not in peril, not in immediate risk
with a higher potential to recover from exploitation than others.*

I have it on good authority that you do not fare well in captivity: the closed recirculating systems of public aquaria.¹

They say: You are your power as one of those rare creatures that uses electricity to communicate with others.

They say: You are your capacity not only to send out your own electric signals, but to eavesdrop on those of other fish.

They say: Electricity is how you defend yourself and how you communicate.

But they do not really know.

So they put you in a theatre to try to find out.

They put you on a concrete stage, shouting: *Just act natural!*

Let's rehearse an attack and see what you do.

Let's rehearse an attack and see what you can do, how far you'll go.

I'll play the predator and you play the prey

The audience sit back and watch your attempts at escape:

Did you get what you came for?

And there, amongst the abandoned folios, I even read how they used your kin to try and save themselves from themselves:

We first investigated the electric power generation of one member of the family, by physical stimuli to confirm its generation capability. They are often caught in winter in the sea (Supplementary Text 2). During measurements the head was pressed continuously by hand to make it generate electric pulse (Fig. 2a,b). Details of the measurements are described in the Methods section. Short, repetitive pulse type signals were observed for a few minutes (Fig. 2c). The measured peak voltage was about 19 V and the peak current was about 8 A. These values were roughly comparable to previously reported values although the ray species was different. To show that the generated pulse energy was sufficient to drive a device, LED lighting test was carried out by directly connecting LED to the dorsal and ventral side. As

a result, short time lighting was demonstrated (Supplementary Movies 1 and 2). Therefore, those used in the experiments were considered to have sufficient electric power generation performance.²

II Lesson:

Mr. Hulot squeezes his horn—which emits a sound like an immature and peculiar breed of duck—to ask the dog that is lying the road to move out of the way of his car. The dog obliges.

The Lesser Electric Ray is a reminder that—whilst humans may be primarily focussed on communicative acts involving seeing and hearing, and (less consciously) touch and the olfactory, the wider realm of nonhuman animal exchange includes multiple modalities—encompassing the electric, but also the seismic (communication through vibration) and the thermal (emitting and receiving temperature signals). And indeed, even an engagement with the different ways in which nonhuman animals perform visual communication: gestures, facial expressions and so forth—begins to afford ways of making human displays of body parts and movements for communicative purposes strange to us again (in ways that may take place in or have productive implications for performance-making). What happens to human choreographies if we consider movement as an act of revealing or emphasizing a body part (as it may be considered in the context of animal communication)?

Bryan: Let me present to you: my hand (*Bryan shows hand*). This hand will tell you when it is time to eat. When I tap this hand towards the ground—like this (*Bryan, hand tapping towards the ground*) You will respond by tapping my hand with yours—like this (*Bryan, tapping one hand with the other*).

Then I will feed you.
Ok? Understand?
Good.

What happens to contact improvisation re-imagined in a field of electric forces on the threshold of human perception? Re-imagining touch with rays: when I swim towards you, my hand extended, your electricity can touch me from a foot away.³

But yours is also a lesson on invisibility and survival
and of night time dances.

They say: the lesser electric ray warns off predators with an invisible electric aura,
hardly appreciable by humans.
The same process used for movement is subverted to generate an electrical field.⁴
The same process used for dance is used for survival.

I find you in a book of 'Dangerous Marine Life in Texas'.
Some tell stories of how you can knock them unconscious.
But you are subtler than that:
your invisible warning only keeps those that would do you harm at bay.
As kin you come together:
seeking out contact
frill touching frill.

Rest during daylight.
Flutter vigorously to dig a shallow pit.
Rock back and forth to bury yourself in the sand.
Camouflage.
Evade their observation.
Let them call you cryptic if they will.
The darkness is yours.
To swim.
To gather.
To nourish yourselves.

Lesser Electric Ray
I sense your passing shadow.

On the vertical axis, your habitat is the cloak of a mystic;
we witness your slow, stilled pilgrimage
across the coral skeletons.
On the horizontal axis, your habitat is a frilled circular pocket.

We are lying on the seabed watching from below
as you flap your wings
in urgency, or, emergency;
signalling through the currents
until you are exhausted by the poverty of our monolingualism,

the laziness of our listening.

But this is not a show:
her determined listening,
your private act of faith.
If you stop dancing you will die.
If we stop dancing they will die.
Dancing not to die⁵

Red Pencil

I Description:

Red Pencil (*Abhay enters*)

Red Pencil (*Abhay, who used to think his name was Bobby, enters*)

Red Pencil (*Abhay, whose name sounds like up-high, enters*)

Abhay (*Red Pencil enters*)

He says:

At no point am I playing at being Red Pencil

At no point am I pretending to be Red Pencil

*Who to be and how to be if my very beingness is under question?*²¹

Your species were ‘discovered’—as colonial humans like to say—by a collector, Martin Mortenthaler, and named after him: *Nannostomus mortenthaleri*.

Known earlier as *Nannostomus* ‘Peru’ or sometimes also as ‘Peru red’, you were supposedly caught for the first time by Mortenthaler not so long ago—in the spring of the year 2000—in the Rio Nanay, near the town Albarenga in northern Peru.

so beautiful
your bright red pigmentation

so beautiful
your colour changing from dark purple to blood red
your black or brown stripes
their black or brown stripes
over there, their black or brown
so beautiful
their bright red
so beautiful, so colourful
so vibrant
so exceptionally charming
their black or brown
believe me, *due to their unquestionable charm and beauty, these little ones can make
any tank, even a small one, the centre of attention during social gatherings. And they will
reward their keeper for their care with their beautiful colours, which appear at their best
against the background of a dark bottom and lush greenery.*²
their black or brown
so exceptionally charming
believe me
well worth boasting about
so beautiful
their bright red
so beautiful
but can be aggressive
quite aggressive
so beautiful

but aggressive
believe me
the males could kill one another.

II Lesson

Red Pencil: you school us on categorization.

On human categorisation of the nonhuman as a live, material practice in the context of embodied encounters with an ever-mobile diversity. This practice requires a heightened power of attention to that which differentiates, but not—necessarily—to difference in itself. How far apart are the male fishes' stripes? How dark? But not: how is this fish happening? They say you have a colour rhythm in synch with the cycle of day and night; in your case, the entire colour pattern paling considerably at night, although your dark lateral stripes remain visible. Experienced aquarists take great pains to re-stage your preferred habitat: noting your preference for broken lines of sight; places to hide; no sudden changes in illumination. They say you feel safe among the floating plants (but do you ever feel safe?).

A spacious aquarium should be used and décor arranged in such a way that plenty of broken lines-of-sight are provided. Don't worry if your fish look different when you switch on the aquarium lights after dark or in the morning as like most Nannostomus species it assumes a different colour pattern at night, in this case the entire colour pattern paling considerably although unlike in N. rubrocaudatus the dark lateral stripes remain visible. This diurnal rhythm has been shown to occur in blind specimens, suggesting it's an automatic response that the fish cannot control.³

Let's be clear then.

Red Pencil.

Charming, yes.

Thinking, no.

A violence with the lightest touch

A barely perceptible exclusion

But an exclusion nonetheless.

You are not an actor.

You do not belong on stage.

Real pretending is what we do.

What you merely do, we mean to do.

But I am an automaton too.

He says: In the Middle Ages, the colour 'red' signified the danger of being swallowed up by Hell. *Similarly, for us 'red' at traffic lights still signifies 'danger,' but programmed in such a way that we automatically put our foot on the brake without at the same time engaging our consciousness.*⁴

Red Pencil: you school us on categorization.

You school me on categorization.

But what do I know about it?

After all, dear teacher, we've barely met

Is it just one more presumptuous hobbyist who says:

You have been subject to violent categorization.

This does not define you; but you are also this.

Categorization both exhausts and does not exhaust you.

Your gifts.

Because you have also taught me how beautiful it is to be told:

You are not special, not specialized,

You are general,

'You are' in the most generalized sense as equivalence to all life.⁵

You are in the most generalized sense as the equality of thoughts.

So play your part as part:

With the imaginary,

Alongside the ghosts

Beside the rocks.

We may laugh, patronizingly, at the medieval bestiaries.

But what do we know about the equivalence of the satyrs and salamanders?
Of stones and what they can do?

*[At this point in the story, we are on the inside of the aquarium looking out.
Or, if the aquarium is not the name for the tank itself but the name for the building
that houses the tanks, then we are inside the tank and they—ostensibly—are not.
Either way, what matters is that we are on the watery side of the glass now. Floating,
suspended, wet and—because observer has become observed—alone. No one is looking at us.
And yet, we are, still, the real authors of their dreams: the observers. We speak through
them if not to them, and are heard even if they prefer to pretend that we are not.]*

The House of Philosophy is in ruins.
The Cave is in ruins
The Watchtower is in ruins.⁶
And, The Oceanarium has burnt to the ground.

In its place, they are building a Pink House⁷
A home built on the economics of reciprocity
Not on the illusory ground of independence
Not on the *what's in it for me*
Because there is no me that is not also you, we, they, it.

We refuse to pay your dividends.
We are not your Wonders to Unveil.
A part of your stamp collection.

And, if in doubt, ask yourself:

- 1 Are we swimming back and forth freely and energetically?
- 2 Do we have a vibrant glow to our skin?
- 3 Do we appear fearful of others—cowering in a corner or backing away?
- 4 Are we breathing regularly? Irregular breathing may be a sign of distress.
- 5 Do we seem to enjoy eating?

And as we take back the grounds, we take back the words:

He reminds us that the word ‘economy’, comes from the Ancient Greek οἰκονομία (oikonomía, ‘management of a household, administration’), from οἶκος (oîkos, ‘house’) + νόμος (nómos, ‘management’).⁸

Can we take back ‘aquarium’ too?
Not as The Ocean on the Table
Not as The Lake in a Glass

What if, aquarium = ethics
What if, aquarium = ‘a place for relating to’ underwater lives
What if, aquarium = aquatic relation where no One gets to say relation = x

*For a collective practice in all its contradictory divergent solutions.*⁹

*Philosophy is a house
that is too small*

*for what it would like to put inside of it,
to unfold nebulae,
to compile an inventory of stars...
The sky would not be enough.
How can we accommodate a world where complexity alone is universal?*¹⁰

APPENDIX I: BEING BROWN
BY ABHAY GHIARA

From: Abhay Ghiara
Sent: Mon., Sept. 14, 2020, 5:51:13 AM
Subject: Being Brown

Dear Aquarium friends

As far as I can remember I have never once talked about race.¹

With a nod to one of my favorite artists, Joe Brainard, here's a list of what I remember.²

I remember in 1988, in Evanston, Illinois, a woman on the street, a complete stranger, walk up to me to tell me that she knew how women were treated in 'my country.'

I remember in Milwaukee in 1989, when we had been dating for three months, Krista's mother inviting her Danish ex-boyfriend to their home for a week-long family visit over Christmas. And not inviting me.

I remember between 1990 and 1992, never being shown a single apartment advertised as being available east of the El line in Evanston. On four separate occasions when Krista made the call but I showed up, I was told that the apartment was no longer available.

I remember in 1994 riding in the car with Krista driving. We were stopped by

a cop when she took an illegal left turn on Belmont or Fullerton. She didn't have her license so the cop just let us go.

I remember members of a powerful real-estate nonprofit group, tasked with promoting racial harmony in Oak Park, in 1995 arguing amongst themselves whether Krista and I should be allowed to stay in an apartment in the 'white zone,' all along the eastern border with west Chicago. The zone was created to prevent border creep and white flight. We were finally offered the apartment (which we did not take) with the admonition that when we were ready to leave we would show it only to white people. "Just hang up or don't open the door," I remember her saying.

I remember traveling in India with Krista in 1999. At the airport after I walked through the x-ray machine, the officer stopped me and started hurling abuses at me for no reason, perhaps looking for a bribe. When Krista walked up to us he said, "Oh, are you two together?" And seeing her nod, "I am so sorry Madam," in his best British subject English. As he let me go, the same officer who had called me a Sister-Fucker in Hindi, was wagging his head ingratiatingly at us and saying, "Just like Amarta Sen," referring to the Indian Nobel laureate in economics of the previous year, who was also married to a white woman.

I remember shopping for vegetables at the Berkeley Bowl in 2008 and a man, also shopping, call out, "go back to where you came from," while looking defiantly straight at me. No one around said anything. I remember being silent. Silent, just as I was when visiting Wellesley College in Massachusetts for a conference and headed to Boston looking forward to lobster and the same thing happened then. I remember I did not end up eating lobster that day.

I remember riding my bicycle in Berkeley in 2011 and being stopped by a cop who asked me for my 'citizenship papers,' and 'registration.' When I handed him my California driver's license, he proceeded to give me a ticket for speeding and that the ticket did not mention that I was on a bicycle. I remember paying the ticket and not telling Krista.

I remember in 2012, the very day I was informed of having been awarded a United States Fulbright Senior Research Scholarship to India, our identities had been stolen without our knowledge and the loan shark calling to retrieve his shady firm's loans simply going down his list of new people to harass, addressed me as 'scum,' and Krista as 'Maam.'

I remember in 2013 visiting the gift shop of the Catholic basilica in Old Goa, India, with Krista. There I remember they

sold little dolls of baby Jesus with blonde hair, blue eyes, and Snow White skin.

I remember in 2014, when Krista was so sick with cancer, and I had taken her to Los Angeles for surgery. I pulled the rental car curbside to check our bags while she remained in the car. The young black skycap seemed not to notice me and served others even though I was at the head of the line and kept trying to get his attention. He would not look at me. Finally Krista came out to the counter and the young black man beamed at her saying, "Welcome to skycap service, how can I help you today?" When Krista pointed at our bags, he took the two bags I was holding. I remember tipping him \$10 after that saying, "I can feel your pain," and him smiling at me after that. I remember that beautiful smile.

I remember trying to buy deodorant on Bohol island, Philippines, earlier this year and realizing that all of many brands sold had skin whitener in them, that the many brands of hand cream sold all had skin whitener in them.

I remember just yesterday, going to Church and noticing once more that the statue of Jesus was snow white and that his eyes were bright blue and hair light brown, even though research on ancient skeletons in Palestine suggests that Judeans of the time were biologically

closer to Iraqi Jews than to any other contemporary population. In terms of physical appearance the average Judean of the time would have likely had dark brown to black hair, olive skin, and brown eyes.³

I remember several moments ago wanting to share this writing with friends in the Philippines and deciding against it because I would hurt their feelings by openly talking about skin whitening products and questioning the color of God's skin.

I remember but I wish I did not remember.

Abhay
Pink House
Bohol island
The Philippines
14 September, 2020

APPENDIX II:
A CORRESPONDENCE WITH
ABHAY GHIARA

Friday 3 June, 2021

Dear Abhay

I'm sorry that I've not been in touch before now. I got swept up in some sagas at work and then rather overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of different things happening across work and life.

But then I was thinking of you this morning, and wondering if you too were perhaps struggling to stay in connection with the world of the Aquarium that was built with Matthew, Lin, Essi and the rest of the company... I have been feeling a bit distant, and looking for ways to re-connect and to re-animate the "Bestiary" project I started, writing alongside the Carnival.

I am so sorry that the Helsinki conference had to be postponed too—not least because of what it might mean for you and the opportunity to present your thinking on Aquarium.

I would love to see that thought and writing emerge regardless, and wondered if our correspondence might be a place for that to happen?

You were kind enough to already prepare us a structure for writing, back in

February—which I copy below.

If that structure and set of constraints still feels good to you, then I am ready to start whenever you are.

The constraints make my head buzz (in a good way), so I am already very grateful to you for the stimulus.

I hope it is ok, but my letters may also sometimes include images because I am thinking along with the project visually as well as in writing.

Much love, and sorry again for the delay in being in contact,

Laura

Structure

I write to you and you write back to me. The end of each letter contains a question for the other to answer or respond to in some way.

Constraints

From Gandhi I derive the equation $x = y$. Given Gandhi's peculiar way of thinking the question can be an answer and the answer a question. Each letter is simultaneously both an attempt to answer the last letter but also to pose a fresh question.

From J. Krishnamurti I derive the equation $x = 1$. So each letter contains, in some way, the entirety of the

correspondence however ever each of us may define it.

From U. G. Krishnamurti I derive the equation $x = 0$ so the letters should not be an attempt to add up to something but rather be imagined as carving out negative space, creating a space for open exploration, a meditation in the present.

We reach the temple very late at night. A beautiful soft melody fills the air a voice so light and high it could be the voice of the beautiful young Radha singing to her lover Krishna, the blue cow-herd god, but we realize as we step into the inner sanctum that it is Swamiji himself singing and Krishna and Radha are swaying gently from side to side as if in a dream. Swamiji offers us prasada, a blessed offering, with a smile and says like it is a fact, it is to be: you will eat with us and you will stay here. The Yakshagana temple performers keep swaying in rhythm and soon we are bundled off to the temple tap to wash our feet and soon sit cross-legged on the floor of the temple eating off banana leaves small helpings of food so simple and delicious it makes us want to either cry or laugh or impossibly do both. We sway gently like everyone else as we eat and Swamiji's high and precise voice is now the lullaby that my mother and her mother sang to us in the middle of the night when the screeching sirens would awaken us in those dreadful

years in Bombay during Indira Gandhi's Emergency rule.

Dear Laura

I

My life is made up of unlikely coincidences. I spent the academic year 2012-13 with my wife Krista in India as a Fulbright-Nehru Senior Research Scholar in Performance & Economics. When Krista and I got to India in fall 2012 Krista had already been facing cancer for over a year. The long flight made her legs swell up and we found a yogic clinic in Kerala that could treat her without Western medicine. A chance meeting with K. V. Ramesh, in a school just outside the clinic, determined the course of the next several months of our Fulbright research. Ramesh, along with his two sisters and two brothers, is a thirteenth-generation direct descendant of the founder of the performance form of Yakshagana.

India, October 2012 to April 2013.

2

Swamiji, who is now an old man, has been the head of the Edneer Temple Complex in Kerala, southern India since the age of seventeen. He is a Shankaracharya, one of the great scholar-philosopher-performer-leaders of Advaita, or non-dual, Hinduism. I am spending several months

living here at the temple complex with Krista. What interests me about Swamiji are economics and performance, my two objects of study as a Fulbright scholar.

Swamiji is credited with having brought the only post-independence Indian dictatorship to an end. When Indira Gandhi's undemocratic government snatched the Edneer Temple Complex land and property along with millions of other hectares of temple-administered land around the country in a misguided socialistic act of 'land redistribution', Swamiji successfully sued the government by demonstrating the delicate web of socio-economic interrelationships that the Temple Complex created within the community. The Supreme Court declared the constitutional changes enacted by the Indira Gandhi government to be unconstitutional. Down came the laws snatching away the temple lands and with that down came "The Emergency" rule of Indira Gandhi. Thus the restoration of democracy may have been an unintended consequence of the restoration of the Advaita Edneer Temple Complex's lands and as the proceeds from the lands funds all temple activities, the preservation of the performance tradition of Yakshagana.

3

The Edneer Temple Complex is one

of the last refuges of the great temple performance tradition of Yakshagana, a complex movement-based, musical, improvised performance of stories from the great epics of ancient India featuring not only humans but also birds, frogs, tigers, monkeys, elephants and also avatars of the gods such as the wild boar and fish, that is performed non-stop from dusk until dawn. Just a generation ago these performances lasted three or four days and nights without a break. Swamiji hand-picks the performers from within the community and they grow up and into the characters they play over the weeks of preparation for the performance season each year. In fact saying that they play characters is incorrect and shows the inherent weakness of using a foreign language to describe that which is older than the language itself. For there are no characters and no bodies according to the ancient philosophy (we may call it that for lack of a better word) of Advaita. After watching a performer 'assume his character' over three consecutive weeks of preparation I casually ask a question of his day-job as a bank employee. He turns to me and says simply, "I am Krishna," and I am immediately taken out of my Western scholarly mindset and taken back to my life in Bombay as a child in a family of yogis, a young initiate in an

ashram, and a follower of the great mystic masters. And suddenly I understand him.

London, U.K., October 2018.

4

Krista died a few days ago in Germany. Karen Christopher, a founder member of Goat Island, invites me over to stay with her and her husband CJ Mitchell, also a former Goat Island member. I am happy to take the short flight from the Black Forest in Germany to London. Grieving, I make a book of drawings for Karen and CJ, cook and bake with them. Karen and I create a private performance to grieve Krista.

On Thursday I find out that they have a house-guest coming Friday so I leave them to stay in a room overlooking Tavistock Square, my favorite spot in London. On Thursday night I get a call from Matthew Goulish and Lin Hixson, founders of Goat Island and Every house has a door, who happen to have just arrived in London to give a talk. We decide to hold a private memorial for Krista at the Gandhi statue in Tavistock Square the next day. On Friday, after our impromptu memorial, Lin and Matthew ask me if I would like to perform.

Chicago, Illinois. August 2019.

5

Lin Hixson is the director of Every house has a door. Lin's directive to us four performers of Aquarium is brief. Embedded within the newest, large-scale project of Every house has a door, Carnival of the Animals, Aquarium is one act of the 14 movement work engaging the titles from Camille Saint-Saëns's 1885 musical suite for children, but with a concentration on endangerment and extinction. I will only reproduce below part of Lin's directive to me and our email exchange that followed. I use this material with her permission.

For Aquarium:

Each of you will be introduced in the Aquarium section of Carnival as an endangered aquatic being.

Please demonstrate or construct 30 seconds to three minutes of movement from the following source material. These are videos I found on the internet of the fish or plant you will be working with. Please watch them without sound. Also feel free to do research on your own.

In addition, please bring 30 seconds to 3 minutes of material from the source below of water.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-HfHwUIZbc>

Abhay

Red Pencil

Nannostomus mortenthaleri, commonly known as the coral red pencilfish, is a freshwater species of fish belonging to the Lebiasinidae family of characins. It is one of the most colourful of the genus, being suffused with a bright coral red colouration over its entire body and fins, in striking contrast to its horizontal jet black stripes. It was originally described as a subspecies of Nannostomus marginatus, but it is now recognised as a species in its own right. Mature males have a thickened anal fin. Maximum length is 29mm.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nannostomus_mortenthaleri

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGhiuFRcxc>

Email from Abhay & reply from Lin:

Lin

While the directive regarding Red Pencil is clear (a movement) can you clarify 'material' in the second directive, involving moving water.

To me material can be movement, sound, words, gibberish, text, film, a Filipino drinking joke..am I on the right track?

Love

Abhay

Abhay dear Abhay,

I was just going to write you to say how happy, happy, happy and excited we are that you will be with us and that we will see you soon. I can't tell you what a dear loved you are in our lives! And apologies for not being in touch sooner. Life has been surfing us with family and school demands. More soon.

BUT to answer your question...To me material can be movement, sound, words, gibberish, text, film, a Filipino drinking joke..am I on the right track? could not be more perfect. Love love love to you.. Lin

6

Though avatar has come to mean incarnation or the process of incarnating, the ancient Sanskrit meaning of the word was to step down or step into. My tradition teaches me that the body does not exist. If the body does not exist what steps down into Red Pencil fish? For lack of a better word we may call it Spirit.

In several esoteric traditions in India the Spirit needs to be invoked by a series of often contradictory rituals and thought processes. For me to animate Red Pencil fish, I must develop a private ritual of contradictory awakening. To do so I look to Mahatma Gandhi and the philosophers J. Krishnamurti and U. G. Krishnamurti, three great thinkers of our time whose

lives and ideas have profoundly shaped me, but who seldom agree on a single point.

7

And that, dear Laura, brings me to the question that I ask myself as I develop the avatar of my persona of Red Pencil fish:

If the body does not exist who/what is the performer? If the body does not exist how may I, as a performer charged, by my director Lin Hixson and dramaturg Matthew Goulish, with developing the avatar of my persona, the endangered Red Pencil fish, proceed? Who to be and how to be if my very beingness is under question?

Dear Abhay

I

My Dad loved new technology—within reason—and could tinker about for a long time with new phones, smart radiator systems, audio recording devices. Combining his love for saving money and his and Lib's shared commitment to being eco-friendly, he was an early adopter of solar panels and, more recently, a fully electric car.

My favourite example though is the technological wonder that he and Lib referred to as “badger-cam”—an audio visual set up that brought together Dad's

interest in animals and his love of technology. Badger-cam consisted of a small camera that Dad hooked up outside the door into the kitchen in order to capture the nightly visits of “Bill the Badger” who came to feed on the peanuts, fish skins and other treats that were left out for him. Dad then arranged for a live feed from the camera to run through to the television in the sitting room. This meant that he and my stepmum, Lib could simply switch from watching an episode of favourites like *Call the Midwife* or *Foyles War* on one channel, to check and see if Bill had arrived on another.

Many guests had the opportunity to enjoy badger cam. But it particularly delights me to remember that in the summer of 2010, Dad and Lib were kind enough to host a dinner at their house for Matthew Goulish and Lin Hixson who were visiting for the Edinburgh Festival. I wrote about Goat Island's work for my PhD and since then Matthew and Lin have become both key mentors and close friends. I will never forget crouching at the back door, in the dark, with Matthew, Lin, Lib and Dad to watch Bill's visit “live” and then rushing upstairs again to see the mediated version on screen. Dad didn't really know who Matthew and Lin were in a professional sense. But even if he had, he would have continued to be

himself: which meant sharing his own enthusiasms un-self-consciously and without agenda.

Balerno, Scotland, August 2010.

2

In the past, I have written: “Recent years have seen an exciting surge of new scholarship and practice in interspecies performance. Moving away from using nonhuman animals in theatre and performance as metaphors for human concerns or as aesthetic short-cuts to a certain reality effect, contemporary interspecies performance research investigates, for example, to what extent performance might be something that humans make for nonhuman animal audiences, allowing humans to see the world from the animals' point of view. But what can performance offer to the understanding and practice of an ethical approach to knowing nonhuman animals? What constitutes an ethical way of knowing nonhuman animals, and how can it be practiced in and as interspecies performance?”

Then, when I thought of interspecies performance, I tended to think first of a performance bringing the distant into relation: two clearly different species into an encounter.

But now, thinking of it alongside your creature, the Red Pencil fish, I am

reminded that species can be so closely related as to be barely distinguishable; with ongoing and ever-shifting categorisations of creatures moving into and out of “sub-” and “full species status”.

For this interspecies we need expert eyes to develop heightened degrees of attention to colour, pattern, shape, in order to perceive the characteristics that tell creatures apart.

They say: “*N. marginatus* is immediately distinguished from the other two by the fact it lacks red pigmentation on the body in males, but *N. mortenthaleri* and *N. rubrocaudatus* are more easily confused”.

3

I am in a car with Matthew, Lin and Essi driving toward our rehearsal for Aquarium at the Graham Foundation. As we drive, I get a message from my stepmum in Scotland to say that my Dad's health is rapidly declining. He has been receiving treatment for cancer and another condition over a number of years, but things now suddenly seem to be getting worse. We talk about whether I need to come back from the residency right away or if I can complete the week but change my flight so I can go straight to see Dad on my way home.

I fly from Chicago to Edinburgh at the end of the residency. My Dad has

very little energy, so mostly he lies down on the sofa in the living room. I sit at his feet or in a chair next to him. Whilst I am there, I take photographs of a collection of coral skeletons that belong to my step-mother as my Dad observes. The coral look and sound like bones as I arrange them on the black cloth.

Chicago, Illinois. January 2020.

4

To my fellow inhabitants of the Aquarium

On April the 3rd, Arundhati Roy wrote: Who can use the term “gone viral” now without shuddering a little? Who can look at anything any more — a door handle, a cardboard carton, a bag of vegetables — without imagining it swarming with those unseeable, undead, unliving blobs dotted with suction pads waiting to fasten themselves on to our lungs?⁴

And, in the same vein, I thought: how can we use the term “contamination” now—a term which we had, in part, borrowed from Anna Tsing and had invited to infiltrate the performance language of our piece, Aquarium?

What I loved about Lin’s initial engagement with the term “contamination” was its unexpected positivity. Putting the word’s dominant pejorative associations to one side temporarily, Lin invited us to think contamination anew.

Contamination as we know it is ‘the action or state of making or being made impure by polluting or poisoning’. With Tsing, Lin offered us a new kind of contamination understood as transformation through encounter.

To be more precise, this is not contamination without its negative connotations, so much as contamination expanded beyond the purely pejorative—towards the descriptive, perhaps; or, according to a gesture that invites consideration of perspectivist ethics (or ethics in the context of radical in/equality). For Tsing: ‘We are contaminated by our encounters; they change who we are as we make way for others... Collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination... Transformation through collaboration, ugly and otherwise?’

But now, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, who can use the term “contamination” without the shudder Roy describes? A shudder because for growing numbers contamination means death.

The number of cases worldwide this week crept over a million. More than 50,000 people have died already. Projections suggest that number will swell to hundreds of thousands, perhaps more. The virus has moved freely along the pathways of trade and international capital, and the terrible illness it

*has brought in its wake has locked humans down in their countries, their cities and their homes.*⁶

Perpetual reporting obsessively attempts to enumerate the dead. But it is also, as Roy suggests of India, that: “People will fall sick and die at home. We may never know their stories. They may not even become statistics”. At the same time, we cannot even begin to count those thrust into this new grief, transformed. Grief denied its rituals. Mourning without gathering.

And yet, alongside this shudder of contamination as death, Roy also suggests that the pandemic might also—eventually—bring with it a different kind of transformation: “a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves”.

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.⁷

And yet.... I fear there is a violence to

this “And yet”. I want to expand contamination to include this hope of imagining but not by excluding the pain of those for whom fear, poverty, hunger, violence, illness—and death itself—makes such imagining impossible.

Sending much love to you all—from my aquarium to yours,

Laura

Liess, Hampshire, April 2020.

5

At the rehearsals at the Graham Foundation, you were not there.

You, Abhay, were being played by a substitute, Sarah Skaggs—the producer of Every house has a door.

I am watching Sarah as Abhay as Red Pencil: a head without a body looking out.

I am watching Sarah as Abhay as Red Pencil: with her hands over her eyes.

Matthew gives Sarah as Abhay as Red Pencil a red card to hold.

For me, it is not that bodies do not exist—but that existence is in the form of temporary and mobile aggregates: a beingness that is always more than one, always stepping down into others and—reciprocally—being stepped down into by others. A beingness that really persists and continues to live through acts of remembrance and memorial.

Might what you call Spirit also be

called Memory is a very real, material and powerful reason why the boundary between life and death may not be as rigid as we think it is? What role might memory and memorial play in stepping into Red Pencil's endangerment, its precarity?

Dear Laura,

As you know, I have been meditating seriously for well over forty years. When you meditate for that many years, strange and seemingly inexplicable things start to happen. You realize that your subconscious has a sense of humor. And that a great power resides in it.

A few months ago as I lay dying I had a vision. I saw a beautiful hand-crafted teak-wood boat with elaborate off-white silken flags and sails. I was irresistibly drawn to this boat. As I glided towards it Death said to me in a soothing voice, "It is time to relax, the struggle is over. You have earned it." But then I was shown another boat. A small, makeshift bamboo boat just like the one used by fisherfolk on my island. The contrast between the beautiful boat, a house-boat like those found for centuries on the many lakes in Kashmir before separatists and the Indian Army together turned the Indian state of Kashmir into a graveyard, and the patched together flotilla of a poor fisherman was darkly comical and I had to laugh aloud until I saw that

the bamboo boat had a name. Its name was arc angel, a play on words transforming the word, arch, into the word arc, a hint from my subconscious 'guardian angel.'

Soon I heard St. Michael's words, "Not yet." I changed course and drifted towards arc angel and settled in. That afternoon my mystery illness which had kept me bedridden for two months with Jane serving as my nurse was suddenly lifted. And I was well enough to travel to Bend, Oregon, where I took up my post as a professor of economics and sent money home as often as could afford it.

I

A few days ago I talked to Lin. She was excited about Every house has a door's latest project, a third film. What she wanted to talk to me about was that Lin and Matthew had thought I could perform in the film and also serve as a narrator. There was also an Aquarium live performance being planned for the spring, and I would finally get a chance to play Red Pencil, the avatar of my persona that I have, as you know, been developing since 2018, and been invited to lecture upon in Helsinki in 2022.

Talking to Lin is always such a wonderful experience. Gentle as Moses, and just as sharp and clear, as if guided by an invisible power to create magic in performance and life.

2

Dear Lin and Matthew

An old man, bald, eyes squinting, walks about, clipboard in hand, very slowly in the neighborhood of Pilayre Street where we live in provincial Philippines. He was once a surveyor and many years ago suffered a head injury while surveying. For forty years now he has been going house to house, store to store, declaring that he is here to conduct a survey. Sometimes we allow the surveyor to survey Pink Store, the community convenience store that Jane and I own. At other times we give him some crackers and ask him to give us a day or two to prepare for the survey. In that case he nods politely and walks away, slowly. And returns a few hours later.

A young boy with an intellectual disability also walks about the neighborhood. He uses only one word, "Hi!" and uses it all day whenever he comes across anyone. His "hi" is immediate and fresh every time. Even if he and you have just greeted each other many times, he will look at you with new eyes and say, "hi" as if for the very first time. The boy has endless patience. If he finds you involved in any form of physical labor, he will watch you for hours, taking in every detail of your movements. In that case he is completely silent.

Red Pencil, like the surveyor and the young boy, moves about in the neighborhood of his aquarium, seemingly in endless loops of repetition. He seems constrained, limited. However that is not quite accurate. Seeing Red Pencil (and the surveyor, and the young boy) as limited is from our point-of-view. The vantage point of us, outside, looking in.

I have lived with Red Pencil since August 5 2019 when Lin Hixson introduced us. Living with Red Pencil inside the aquarium for all these months has allowed me to experience Red Pencil from the inside. Red Pencil's point-of-view is not just the opposite of us, outside, looking in.

Red Pencil looks not only outside but also inside. What is Red Pencil's world looking both in and out? In many significant ways that world, as is that of the surveyor and the young boy, is one of life's great mysteries. In small, perhaps insignificant ways that world of Red Pencil, the one I have lived in all these months, is documented in the photographs for an imaginary performance in an unknown future.

Abhay Ghiara

Pink House, Bohol Island, Philippines
2 June 2020

Dear friends

I remember like it was just yesterday, J. Krishnamurti's public talk in 1985 in what was then Bombay. Each year we Bombayites (as we called ourselves) would welcome him back with open arms, treating the event like the return of the city's long-lost son. But that year was special. It was his last return to our city. The next year he was dead.⁸

We would gather in an open area behind the University and sit cross legged on the ground. Krishnamurti would sit, also cross legged on a slightly raised platform under a large banyan tree. The banyan has a network of aerial roots so we would see him as if through a mystical cobweb. He would talk late into the evening, sometimes late into the night. His audience, or as he preferred to refer to us, his 'friends talking together,' numbered in the thousands. It was a very Indian scene: rich and poor, politicians, scientists, ordinary people, housewives, and children, gathered together to listen to a great philosopher talk. The environment would be no different for a gathering of an evening of Indian classical music or dance or poetry.

On both sides of my family we have been Bombayites for three generations. In my family we had been going

to Krishnamurti's Bombay talks since my grandfather's time. Krishnamurti first came to Bombay in the 1920s, when my grandfather was a student at Bombay University, and continued to visit often, even after he had moved to Ojai, California. So after my grandfather, my father, also a student at Bombay University, and then me, we all counted ourselves among Krishnamurti's Bombay 'friends talking together.' A city that no longer exists bound us all together, over a hundred years and three generations and Krishnamurti.⁹

In what was to be his last public talk in Bombay, Krishnamurti said, "All time, past, present, and future, is contained in the now." And I said (though not aloud) "But the now is not contained in the past or future." That was an important insight for me and exactly in the spirit of what Krishnamurti strove for: for each of us to develop his or her own understanding of life from 'friends talking together.'

I am going to try to explain that insight in writing for the first time. And then I will tell you a story.

All thought is memory. When we think we must base the very process of thinking on known matters. What is known is memory. And memory is always located in the past.

It is not possible to be present when

thinking. As thinkers we are stuck in a complex web along a continuum of the past. But never in the present.

If I contemplate the present moment I think. Ninety-nine percent of that thought, the very ability to contemplate, is memory. One percent is the present moment.

Almost everything we do throughout the day is an act of remembering. The future is simply the past extended. After all, the future does not exist. It is entirely made up. The future is also memory and has no existence outside of memory.

So the past and future are memory. And we can not be present in memory. Don't get me wrong. Memory is important for practical matters like driving a car or teaching. Memory is important in maintaining continuity in daily life. I am talking of memory of the psyche when I say that we can not be present in memory.

The only way to be present is to forget. To be clear, the only way to be present (in the psyche) is to forget.

We forget unconsciously all the time. We forget where we put our glasses, parked the car. Unconscious forgetting is not being present.

To be present we must consciously forget.

The story is told in parts of India of a very old enlightened man who awaited

the return of his only son who had left home and alleged to have wandered for years looking for enlightenment and to have found it. However, no one knew who the son was, what he looked like now, after all these many years, and where he might be. So our old man would wait right outside his village at the crack of dawn each day with the hope that one day his son would return. Since travel was forbidden in the region at night, he wanted to accost anyone coming to the village early in the morning in case one of them was his son. Day after day someone or the other would come by and stop and speak to the old man. But none of them was ever his son. The old man was so old and it had been so long that he did not even know what his son might look like. And his eyesight was fading. But he knew in his heart that none of the early morning travelers who had spoken to him day after day, year after year, was his son.

One day at the crack of dawn as the old man waited, a man came by on horseback. "Old man," he said, "what are the people in this village like, for I wish to move here." The old man squinted at the man on the horse and said, "fair enough, but may I ask you one question first? What were the people like where you came from?" Upon hearing the old man's question the man on the horse started

fuming at his mouth. “Liars, scoundrels, cheats, all of them! I hope to never see their faces again!” The old man looked kindly at the man on the horse and said, “In that case you should find another village to move to. For the villagers here are even worse than the ones you describe!”

Upon hearing these words the man on the horse rode off to find a better village to settle down in. A little later a family arrived in a bullock cart. The man steering the bulls called out to the old man, “Old man I have come to this village with my entire family to settle down. Can you please tell me what the villagers here are like?” The old man squinted at the man and his wife and five children sitting in the bullock cart (his eyesight was poor and could see only their shadows) and said, “fair enough, but may I ask you one question first? What were the people like where you came from?” Upon hearing the old man’s questions, tears of gratitude poured out of the man’s eyes. “They were as pure gold, so gentle and kind and loving. We had to move only to escape the plague that was sweeping towards the old village. It breaks my heart to even remember!” And at his words his wife and children also started crying. The old man looked kindly at the family on the bullock cart and said, “In that case you have found your perfect new home. The villagers

here are even gentler and kinder than the villagers that you describe!” The family was elated and rode into the village.

A little later a young bare-foot man in rags walked by. He called out, “Old man, what are the people in this village like, for I wish to move here.” The old man squinted at the young man, taking in his bare feet, his rags, and asked, “fair enough, but may I ask you one question first? What were the people like where you came from?” The young man answered, “I do not remember,” upon which the old man hugged him tightly and holding him in his embrace said, “welcome home son.”

Abhay
Pink House
Bohol island, Philippines.
24 September 2020

4
Dear Lin and Matthew

Last evening, just after Jane and I returned home to Pilayre Street from the market in a borrowed ‘multi cab’, the surveyor dropped by. The multi cab along with its older cousin the Jeepney are World War II era American military jeeps and vans left behind after the war with the Japanese and inventively reimagined as public transportation vehicles. In the absence of real public transportation these privately owned ancient vehicles

have served as a privately provided form of public transportation since the mid 1940s. They can also be borrowed for personal use (in our case for restocking Pink Store).

As we unloaded the multi cab the surveyor walked into our driveway and up to the multi cab and boarded it stating Pilayre Street as his destination. Pilayre Street is the name of the street where we (including the surveyor) live. He looked a little concerned that we were taking so long with our unloading but bore the delay with patience. Once we were done the driver drove a few feet out and stopped the multi cab just outside our gate. Jane called out to the surveyor, “Pilayre Street!” The surveyor nodded, got off the multi cab and walked away.

Much love
Abhay
Pink House
16 June 2020

5

The Pandemic brought our community to its knees and Jane and me to the brink of starvation. Pink House, our experiment in humanizing and integrating two unlikely bedfellows, mediation and commerce, had failed. Our fund raiser raised only about a quarter of what it would cost to replace the leaking roof and after we had

spent the entire amount that we raised in patching the roof, we were visited by a Deluge of Biblical magnitude one night that kept us awake all night filling bucket after bucket with rainwater using dippers in a seemingly vain attempt at saving our home, community store and community mindfulness center. We prayed every moment as we dipped dippers and emptied out water collecting in the living room, kitchen, community areas, bedrooms. And we cried.

By the next morning I was severely ill. Jane later confessed that she was ill as well but simply told herself, “I can not be ill, Abhay needs me,” and was able to nurse me in bed for two months.

6

The Surveyor died quietly during the Pandemic. The family held a very small funeral, out in the open, as is traditional on our island, slaughtered a pig. But there was none of the usual gambling and drinking and nightly vigil for a week as before. The Surveyor slipped away.

The young boy with his bright, curious eyes, and ever present, “Hi,” disappeared from the community. It was said that his grandma took him away, deep into the provinces, where he could wander maskless and unconstrained.

In my conversation with Lin, excited as I was to be in Every house has a door's new film and the Aquarium live performance in a house boat in Chicago, we were both stumped as we realized that given my new duties as a professor of economics at Central Oregon Community College and the remoteness of my location in Bend, Oregon, there was simply no time that worked for both of us. We toyed with the idea of me making a lightning visit to Chicago during the Thanksgiving holidays but then Lin simply said, "No I can not do this to you Abhay. I am thinking of what that will do to your health."

Lin said that I would not be in the film and that I would not perform in Aquarium's house boat performance.

Beloved Lin, gentle as Moses, but with the quiet strength to lead a caravan of her people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

Red Pencil will not be in that caravan.

Dear Laura, at this point in our story, a story that began in 2019, does Red Pencil simply alight the teak-wood boat with its silken fineries, soft sails, and sail away? Will Red Pencil be forgotten, and in that ultimate act of forgetting the past land squarely in the present?

Love
Abhay

Dream Room
Bend, Oregon.
30 August 2021

Dearest Laura,

Please ignore / discard if not useful.

This I have learned after losing my father at age 16. I am now 55.

When we lose our fathers we lose a part of ourselves. It is a gaping hole that can never be filled. A part of ourself is missing, always.

The only point of power we have is this: We can invite life (human-animal-plant) in. That hole becomes a circulating library of material checked out and never checked back in. Material with a date-stamp that indicates that loans from this library are overdue even before they are borrowed.

In a sense we cease to be as we were, as material, literally parts of ourselves, leave never to return. We are hollowed out and our hollow becomes a harbor for life. That is the most we can do to honor our fathers.

Much love
Abhay
Bend Oregon
26 December 2021

Dear Abhay

I am writing to you from self-isolation, as I just tested positive for Covid.

Lying in bed, I was both comforted and saddened by the sound of Matthew's voice reading the latest Every house newsletter. And then surprised to hear your voice too.

I realised—as the tears swelled—how much I miss Every house too. How much I miss the sense of home that is gathering at an Every house performance.

And bound up with this missing of Every house is the missing of my father. I feel connected to him again every time I work on the Aquarium project because his illness and death are entangled in its process.

I am trying to understand what it might mean for my hollowness to be a habitat for life.

I am trying to understand whom I might invite in or who is already knocking at the door.

Somehow it feels to me that the life I need to invite is the life that models in its own way what I miss from my father.

Above all, I miss the connection to his life as one lived with acceptance, contentment and attentive care for the ordinary.

These things do not come naturally to me. I need to stay close to those who practice them in order to learn, to live

otherwise.

And these are not the singular values. Not the only ones I want.

My father was not my only compass and I know that I need others: to orient my relations to power and injustice.

But he was still such a precious species. With so much to teach me.

I lovingly illuminate his folio in the Bestiary:

The Pianist
Laura
Soest, Netherlands
31 December 2021



Devils Hole Pupfish

I Description:

Devils Hole pupfish (*Selma enters*)
Cyprinodon diabolis

I never even saw you live.
When I was there, you were not
And someone else was taking your place.

But I see now,
your furious grief
was there after all, even without you
building a resemblance in your substitute
as she climbed the ladder.

What is a Devils Hole Pupfish?

Although the answer to this question appears straightforward—a Devils Hole Pupfish is one that lives in Devils Hole—this question of identity is deceptively complex. It might be argued that the fish are dwarfed by certain environmental stimuli. In other words, perhaps the environment make the fish: it might be possible to place pupfish from somewhere else and after a few generations get something that closely resembled resident fish.

When you cannot escape a hostile environment, you learn to become someone else.
To grow wings. Rising temperatures evolve new tactics; emergent strategies.[†]

II Lesson:

Devils Hole Pupfish

You school us on the act of counting.

You are the world's rarest fish. Your home is in the upper 80 feet of a deep water-filled cavern and sun-lit shallow pool at the cavern's entrance. The smallest geographic range of any vertebrate species on the planet where you have lived since the end of the Ice Age.

How did you end up here? In the middle of the desert, in the middle of one of the hottest places on earth. The Death Valley National Park. 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas. Above, your home is surrounded by 10-foot fencing capped with barbed wire, surveillance cameras and radio antennas. Below, it is connected through subterranean channels to underground water throughout the region.

They count you every spring and fall. Scientists dive to count you in your cavernous home, starting at depths below 100 feet. Others count you on the shallow shelf at the waters' surface. This spring, the official result was 175 observable pupfish, the highest count recorded in 22 years.

Their counting must mean that you count, for now.

But who is counting who counts?

You weren't always so special

The boundary between those deemed worthy of protection, and not, shifts.

For now, you are 'objects of historic or scientific interest'

For now, you are part of a 'National Monument'

But value has a speed.

Especially for such uncharismatic fauna²

Stickers on their cars say

SAVE THE PUPFISH!

KILL THE PUPFISH!

But what does pupfish say?

I don't need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker.³

Who is counting who counts?

How long before they ask again:

Can you make them dance a hornpipe?

Can they cure diseases?

Can they save us?

Who is counting who counts?
Which extinction
Those that occur at the borderline
Those that occur in transit
Those who are found
Those who are missing
Those who have disappeared

You gathered around sewing machines
stitching together love and rage
your collective mourning dress
embroidered with the words
'They can't kill us all.'³⁴

Eyelash Seaweed

- 1 Adapted from Essi Kausalainen (2021) "Every house has a door. Two films from The Carnival of the Animals. ESS Quarantine Concerts event Zoom script March 13th, 2021". Available at: https://static.squarespace.com/static/5868136329687f6648f789ff/t/604d0d923fcd2f003c5185f2/1615662482848/Every+house+has+a+door_Transcript.pdf.
- 2 See Inviting Abundance (Will Daddario and Joanne Zerdy) on imagination through grief as social imperative, *Let's Imagine, Shall We?* (2022) <https://mailchi.mp/a069420ce6ee/grief-imagination-self-advocacy-a-little-sweetness?e=9b4310bde9>
- 3 Resurgam (1987); 'Some Thoughts on the Imagination' p.47. quoted in Ó Maoilearca, John (2022) *The Image is not Imaginary*, unpublished lecture.
- 4 Ó Maoilearca, John (2022) *The Image is not Imaginary*, unpublished lecture.
- 5 Guest, Barbara (2008) "Saving Tallow," in *The Collected Poems of Barbara Guest* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press).

Lesser Electric Ray

- 1 Dean, Mason & Nietfeld, Theresa &

Conklin, Daniel. (2005). Husbandry Notes on the Lesser Electric Ray. *North American Journal of Aquaculture*. 67, 58-65. [10.1577/FA03-064.1](https://doi.org/10.1577/FA03-064.1).

- 2 Tanaka, Yo et al (2016) "An electric generator using living Torpedo electric organs controlled by fluid pressure-based alternative nervous systems", *Scientific Reports* 6, 25899 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep25899>
- 3 Kaplan, Eugene H. (2006) *Sensuous Seas: Tales of a Marine Biologist* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press) pp.231
- 4 Kaplan (2006) *Sensuous Seas*.
- 5 This is adapted from both Bryan Saner and choreographer Flavia Pinheiro. Bryan writes of *Aquarium*: "I think about my performance as essential to my survival. If I stop moving I will die". Flavia Pinheiro describes her various choreographies, videos and urban interventions as having "a single goal: dancing not to die!" <https://www.atd.ahk.nl/lichting/2022/student/flavia-pinheiro/>

Red Pencil

- 1 Ghiara, Abhay (2022) "If the body does not exist who/what is the performer and how do I develop the avatar of my persona?", lecture performance given

at *Performance Philosophy Problems* conference in Helsinki, 16 June 2022.

- 2 Adapted from: Radek Bednarczuk, "Colorful Pencils for the Freshwater Aquarium," *Tropical Fish Hobbyist Magazine*, Issue September 2009, <https://www.tfhmagazine.com/articles/freshwater/colorful-pencils-for-the-freshwater-aquarium>.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Flusser, Vilém (2000) *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, (London: Reaktion Books), p.66.
- 5 Ghiara, Abhay (2022) "If the body does not exist who/what is the performer and how do I develop the avatar of my persona?", lecture performance given at *Performance Philosophy Problems* conference in Helsinki, 16 June 2022.
- 6 Adapted from: Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, 63.
- 7 Co-founded by Abhay Ghiara and his wife Jane, *Pink House* is a complex consisting of a community home, store, koi meditation pond & yogic meditation center on Bohol island in the Philippines <https://www.housepink.org/>
- 8 Ghiara, Abhay (2022) "If the body does not exist who/what is the performer and how do I develop the avatar of my persona?", lecture performance given at *Performance Philosophy Problems*

conference in Helsinki, 16 June 2022.

- 9 Ghiara, Abhay (2022), *ibid*.
- 10 This text is adapted from: Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, Chapter Three, 'The house of philosophy is in ruins'.

Red Pencil: Appendices 1 and 2 (notes by Abhay Ghiara)

- 1 I was married to Krista, who was white, for 28 years.
- 2 Joe Brainard, *I Remember*. New York: Granary Books; First Edition, 2001.
- 3 See Joan E. Taylor's *What Did Jesus Look Like?* London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark; Illustrated Edition, 2018. Joan E. Taylor is Professor of Christian Origins and Second Temple Judaism at King's College, London, UK.
- 4 Roy, Arundhati (2020) 'The Pandemic is a Portal', *Financial Times*, published April 3, 2020, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>
- 5 Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt (2015) *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press)
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 For his *New York Times* Obituary see

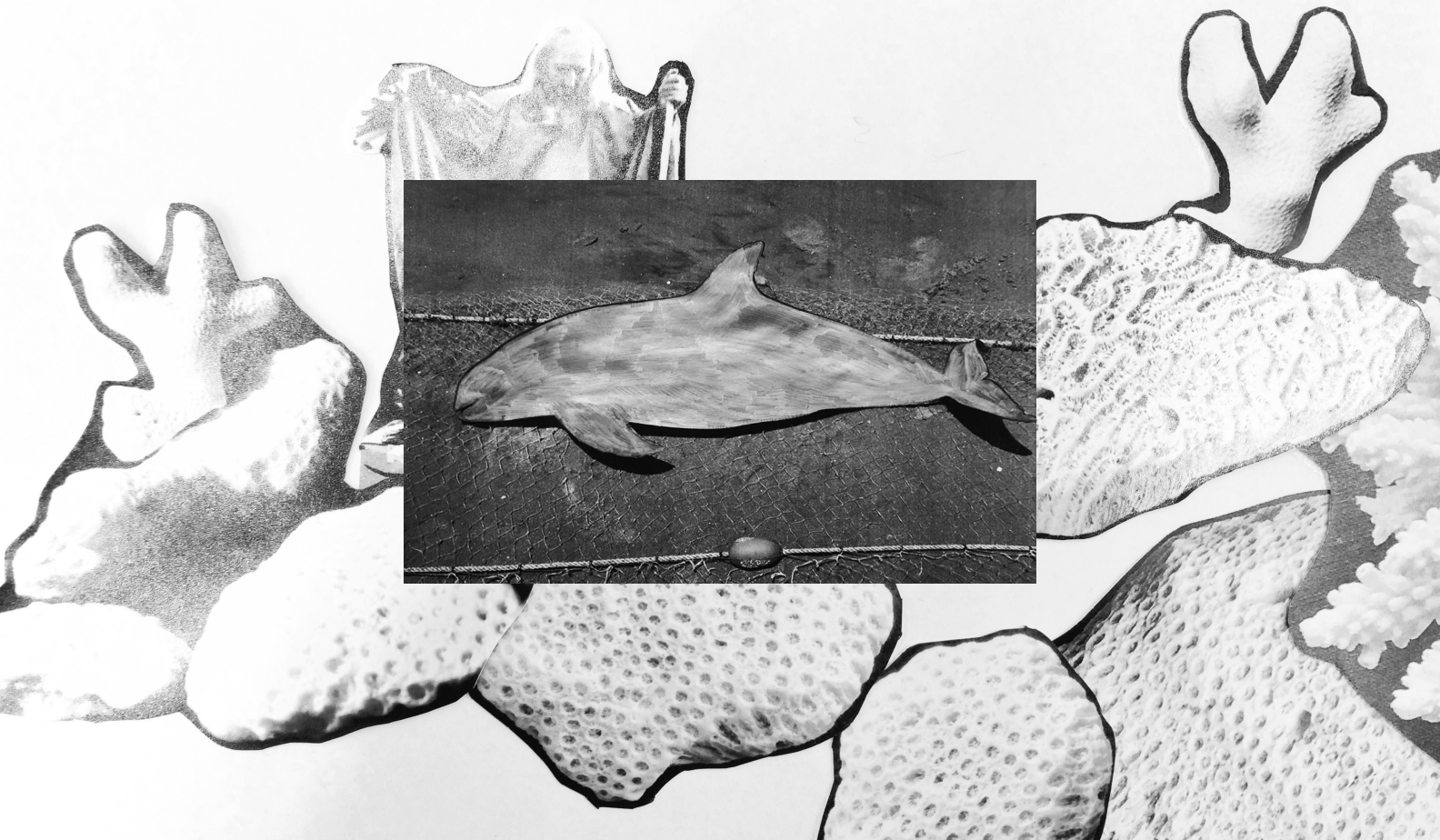
<https://www.nytimes.com/1986/02/18/obituaries/jiddu-krishnamurti-90-is-dead-religious-philosopher-from-india.html>. It must be noted that Krishnamurti was a great philosopher, not a 'religious philosopher,' as misstated in the obituary. He had no religion and did not believe in religion. The West still can not conceive of the fact that India too may have given birth to a philosopher on par with Socrates and Plato.

- 9 I too, graduated from Bombay University, in my case exactly one hundred years after Gandhi.

Devils Hole Pupfish

- 1 In *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (2017), adrienne maree brown defines emergent strategy as "how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for".
- 2 Brown, Kevin C. (2017) "The 'National Playground Service' and the Devil's Hole Pupfish," *Forest History Today* (Spring 2017): 35-40.
- 3 Moten, Fred and Harney, Stefano (2013) *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia/Minor Compositions), p.140

- 4 In response to the textile artwork, *They Can't Kill Us All - Love & Rage* crafted for International Women's Day by the *Women to Women collective* in collaboration with artist Selma Banich in the summer of 2020. See: <https://selmabanich.org/osmi-mart>





Quire XI

05 Pianists
11 Done Dying

Pianists



I Description:

(The Pianist enters)

the simultaneous striking of neighbouring white or black keys.

three or more notes at the same time.

You went somewhere else when you played. I'm not sure where you went. The music makes all kinds of uncontrollable things happen to your body—a heel tapping, lips pursing, eyebrows dancing, an irregular rocking as you move between being hunched over the keys and stretching back out on the stool. But this 'elsewhere' you have gone is also intensely here, perhaps more intensely here than at any other time. Because you are also listening—finding your way into new variations on a theme, catching the eye of the other players to lightly restate the gentle structure that holds your shared playfulness in place.

I imagine your moving body as I listen.

I image you as I listen.

I am building an image.

Listening builds an image.

Listening builds an image of listening.

I remember:

Sitting on the high-sided, soft, red and gold sofa in the living room. We have just finished eating and there is coffee and chocolate on the low table in front of me. You are sitting at the piano, which is to my left and slightly behind me. Sometimes, I turn to watch as I listen; sometimes, I am half-listening and half-doing the crossword; sometimes, I move to sit on the rug, next to Smokey and stroke him as we both listen.

II Lesson:

Not Pianists, *this* pianist
His is a lesson of care and interdependence.

She says: *Precarity is a state of acknowledgment of our vulnerability to others. In order to survive, we need help, and help is always the service of another, with or without intent.*¹ When his hip began to hurt, he enlisted the assistance of a stout stick. He became an encounter in motion, a man-and-stick: my father-and-his-father's-walking-stick.

Now, he is often between waking and sleeping, or both, or neither. His eyes are closed but he is listening, sometimes. He appears to be asleep here with us, but at the same time his body often volunteers gestures and words that belong to some other time and place.

He will have reached for a cupboard handle that is no longer there.

His feet dance of their own accord. At one point he tells me the medical name for this involuntary foot movement. He tells me to watch his left foot so I can observe the phenomenon for myself.

We are in a theatre of care, in this 4 bed ward.

I draw the curtain.

Amongst other things, it conceals the careful costume change:

an uncomfortable commingling

my body remembering the endless dressing and undressing
of my children (with varying degrees of cooperation and resistance)
and this new action I need to learn:

How to undo the buttons quickly enough so he does not
have to hold this position for too long; and yet without an air of
panic or fluster that will unsettle us both?

At this moment, what counts as care sits on a precarious
line between attending to what he can no longer do for himself and
what we can do to give him agency. Caring is not doing everything
for him or constantly asking what he needs. In trying to care, it is
all too easy to deny agency—doing things to him (albeit with the
good intentions that we are trying to make him more comfortable).

But what is needed is a subtly different practice of listening
to the soundings of agency at a lower volume—sensing needs and
interests when they come from him.



I am trying to attune to what his body is capable of now, in this moment, that will be different from the last and next. This body that is now an assemblage of oxygen flowing in one tube and antibiotics in another. In this moment, it is important to notice that he can lift the oxygen mask to eat this bite of sandwich by himself. In the next, it is important to be ready to lift the mask on his behalf.

A constant improvisation of assuming neither too little nor too much capacity to act; here, affirming competence and independence matters.

I am not a child.

Don't baby me.

I am perfectly capable of doing this myself.

But is it only because we have put too much store on 'independence' already?

We tell her she is a 'big girl' because she can now do this or that task for herself, without our help.

And of course, this is necessary to some extent—just as cultivating dependency can be another form of power game (more driven by the need to be needed than by the needs of the other).

And yet, what if our emphatic association of maturation and independence denigrates dependency; teaching children to avoid asking for and receiving help. Would high degrees of dependency be so fraught with questions of dignity and respect if we had grown up understanding and valuing ourselves as interdependent from the start?

I want to say
Not Pianists, this pianist
But it was because you lived your generality,
maybe even loved your generality
that you took your leave so gracefully.

C, C#, D
special and not special
general in being special
special in being general
my dissonant cluster

This is not an aquarium.

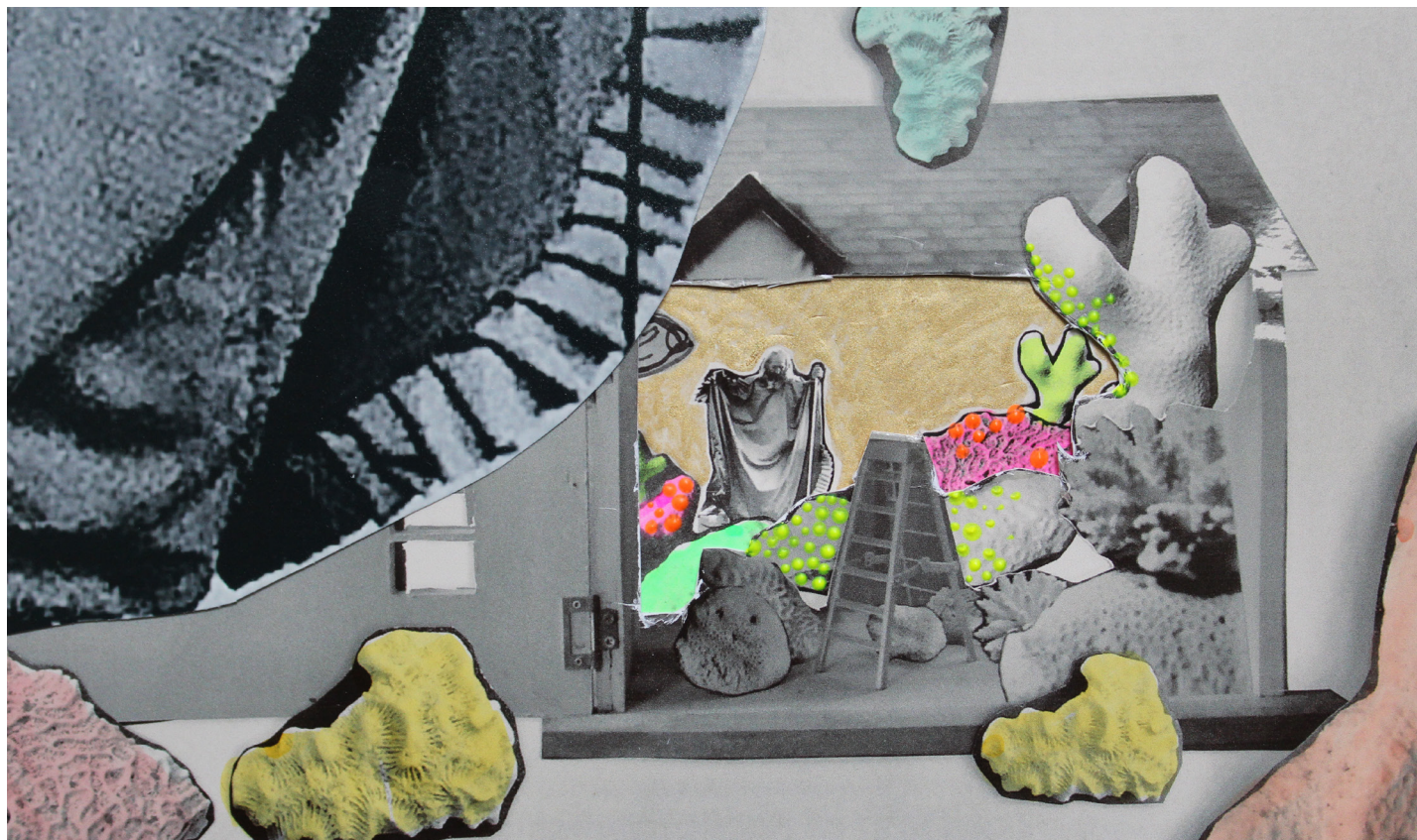
What once appeared to be a tank is laid bare in all its
exposure: unvalled to the expanse of the ocean.

You are the boulder for my longing attachments:
to the handkerchief with your initials embroidered on it
to your soft green jumper
to your mother's ring.

I reach out
and try to hang on until the storm ends.

(The Pianist exits)

Done Dying: Thinking Alongside
Every house has a door



PROLOGUE:
BEGIN FROM BEWILDERMENT

What kind of beginning might we choose?

In performance, she says, the beginning is the moment after the audience grow quiet in anticipation...

She counts three kinds of beginnings:

- 1 Those that begin with an introduction, telling you something about the performance or how to view it before it began, like a pre-show announcement (that threatens to go on forever);
- 2 Those that begin with a more ritualized, nonverbal activity using time or duration as a means to gather the audience's scattered energy into a more directed focus; and
- 3 Those that begin *in medias res*, a beginning that drops the audience into the middle of something, into the disoriented feeling that the performance began before they arrived.¹

But, for her, performance also begins from bewilderment:

Bewilderment resonates with how I would describe the beginning of making a performance. It is important to me that I do not know how to control what I am initiating or that I do not understand where I am going. I need to feel

that the material is more than or larger than what I think I can handle. I am in search of a performance that exceeds, defies, and punctuates what I know. Bewilderment guarantees that I need others to find my way.²

The director, Lin Hixson is thinking about the poet, Fanny Howe who has been thinking about, lately, 'bewilderment as a way of entering the day as much as the work. Bewilderment as a poetics and an ethics... There is a Muslim prayer that says, "Lord, increase my bewilderment," and this prayer is also mine'³ In the Dictionary, Howe tells us, 'to bewilder is "to cause to lose one's sense of where one is."' Bewilderment is a disorientation but one that opens out into the possibility of re orientation, the kind of not-knowing that might make space for new ways of knowing.

The wilderness as metaphor is in this case not evocative enough because causing a complete failure in the magnet, the compass, the scale, the stars and the movement of the rivers is more than getting lost in the woods. Bewilderment is an enchantment that follows a complete collapse of reference and reconcilability.⁴

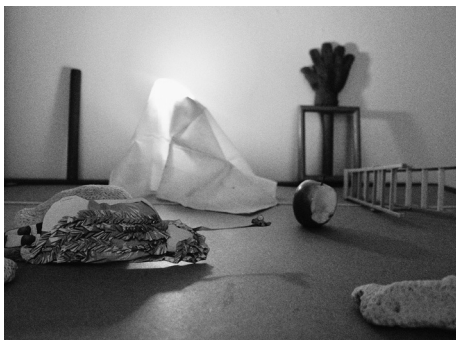
And what if philosophy begins with bewilderment? Simple enough, we might say, for those who encounter the work of the contemporary French thinker François Laruelle!

But this is less to do with the fact that there are vast parts of Laruelle's writing that I do not understand—given that seeking 'understanding' may be the wrong way to read Laruelle. After all, if—as Jonathan Fardy suggests—the philo-fictions of non-philosophy are an invitation to encounter philosophy as a kind of writing or literature, or that “‘clones’ the style of creative writing’ then many other modes of response seem to open out (which images resonate; which turns of phrase stop you in your tracks; which expression draws you closer to the magnetic pole and sets the needle to drift?).⁵ Rather, to begin with bewilderment might be one way to reorient both standard philosophy and theatre away from their common tendency towards the gesture of transcendence and withdrawal that he calls 'decision'. As his book *Anti-Badiou* explicitly states, what Laruelle calls 'philosophy'—its decisional architecture—maps onto the position over and above the stage assumed by the figure of the authoritarian, transcendent director. From the god-like view, the director/philosopher reduces the whole to a part. The philosopher plays the part of the *deus ex machina*, or he hides himself 'in the wings... so as to pull the strings of matter and thought.'⁶ But, what happens if we take this director who chooses bewilderment and collaborates with others to find her way, as a new model for the philosopher? In non-philosophy, 'By definition, we do not entirely know what to expect of ourselves.'⁷

And what if we take bewilderment as the beginning of ecology, too—as the shared concern that unites the two figures of this essay: Laruelle and the performance company, *Every house has a door*? Perhaps bewilderment is the (non-) place from which we can start to reconcile what we know about environmental crisis and how we live. Perhaps bewilderment is the (non-place) from which new images can emerge, that will allow humans to comprehend the otherwise incomprehensible scale of their own destructiveness. Perhaps bewilderment is the (non-)place from which new worlds can come into view.⁸ He says: *Ecology can only grow into people's minds, if we make it fictional.*⁹

Ecological violations of such magnitude, what do we require to imagine them? Maybe the stories we tell have become part of the problem. What imagination revision can approach ecology of powers, can reverse a shadow? Picture an impossible climate a community of the extreme and endangered, swimming together visible and invisible. When I say aquarium now maybe I don't mean a tank but only a certain degree of pressure. We make our stage in that likeness

Let's take a moment for proper introductions.
Eyelash Seaweed (Elise enters)
Lesser Electric Ray (Bryan enters)
Red Pencil (Abhay enters)
Devils Hole Pupfish (Selma enters)¹⁰



PART I:
THINKING ALONGSIDE
EVERY HOUSE HAS A DOOR

I am thinking alongside *Every house has a door*—a Chicago-based performance company formed by Lin Hixson, director and Matthew Goulish, dramaturg in 2008.¹¹ In particular, I am thinking alongside the specific formation of inter-generational and cross-disciplinary individuals that comprise *Every house* for their new project, *Aquarium*—which includes Hixson and Goulish, but also the Finnish artist, Essi Kausalainen. To date, *Every house* has completed nine major performance works.

Embedded within the newest, large-scale project *The Carnival of the Animals*, *Aquarium* is one chapter of the 14 movement work engaging the titles from Camille Saint-Saëns's 1885 musical suite for children, but with a concentration on endangerment and extinction.¹²

I am thinking alongside *Every house has a door*. I am not writing about the performance that *Every house* is making; I am experimenting with the creation of a mode of art-thought that is determined by, but does not seek to be determining of the thinking that belongs to the performance itself. Non-philosophy as non-standard aesthetics aims to practice an

extension and democratisation of thought by thinking ‘alongside’ or ‘according to’ the thought of art itself; and this informed my approach. But when I first wrote to the company to propose this work, I did not foreground this Laruellian dimension so much as note the ways in which it also modelled the company’s own way of working with source materials:

Re-reading your introduction, Matthew, to *Three Matadors* when you performed it in Chicago, I wonder if part of what I might be hoping to do in this new phase of work is somewhat akin to the aim you described for that performance: to ‘occupy the same universe’ as Jay Wright’s poem and to explore how it might ‘reflect or amplify that material’s set of concerns’ as you understand them.

I wonder if ‘thinking alongside performance’ rather than ‘about’ it, thinking alongside *Every house has a door*, might be like this too. I would like to see what happens to my research and my writing—what form and structure it might take—if I aim to occupy the same universe as *Every house* and think of scholarship as a mode of amplification.¹³

I knew I did not want to write about *Every house has a door*. It still feels like a form of betrayal to seek to make an abstract work like *Aquarium* into something understandable, to translate it into discourse; to position myself as somehow capable of capturing what is still, and will remain, ‘in the making.’¹⁴ I wanted to somehow begin, too, with bewilderment: including my own bewilderment as I try to grasp what it is that Lin Hixson is doing when she is watching performance material in the rehearsal room; my own bewilderment as I try to impose some cause and effect logic on the directive that Lin has given and the seemingly unrelated dance that performer Bryan Saner has made in ‘creative response’.

I consider this work as an experiment in performance philosophy. As myself and others have discussed elsewhere, performance philosophy shares many common principles with non-philosophy and strands of the field have very much emerged in conversation with and informed by Laruellean thought. The shared dimensions include, firstly, an emphasis on a renewed attention to the form and style of philosophy and the inextricability of form and content. Secondly, performance philosophy has tended to align itself—though by no means exclusively—with considerations of immanence, taking particular inspiration from Nietzsche and Deleuze, though also from Artaud, to materialize thought and investigate how the material practices of arts themselves think.

The challenge that Laruelle presents of course is one of consistency: ‘how to think immanence immanently’¹⁵ rather than producing a philosophy of immanence that seems to performatively contradict its own fundamental principle. Thirdly, performance philosophy often frames itself as a pluralist and egalitarian enterprise with regards to knowledge production in a manner that resonates with Laruelle’s call for a democracy of thought. This is particularly important for performance philosophy with regards to the status of artistic research, relative to the standardised norms and criteria for research quality, but it also relates to intersecting interests in alternative wisdoms and ways of knowing that come from other contexts including mysticism, indigenous traditions, and spiritual practices.¹⁶

Tentatively, I am also coming to consider this work as an experiment in non philosophy or non-standard aesthetics. As commentators like John Ó Maoilearca and Anthony Paul Smith have emphasized from the start

Laruelle is not the “next big thing” in Continental Philosophy. His thought does not aim to correct, reduce, or supersede that of Derrida, or Deleuze, or Badiou. That “same old game” of importing European master-thinkers into Anglophone philosophy—each new figure superseding the previous model—is over.¹⁷

And yet, for many of us—perhaps particularly for artists and researchers in the arts outside philosophy—this habit is hard to shake off. Despite the increasing confidence of discourses around ‘practice as research’ and ‘artistic research’, we are so used to turning to Philosophy for theoretical legitimation, to deploying resources that come from outside of art to articulate and validate the knowledge that comes from it, that it may take a substantive effort of ‘unlearning’ to relate to Philosophy and to our own thinking differently. We might begin with bewilderment here too.

Non-philosophy is a call to such an unlearning. However, we have to remain alert to the paradox embedded in this very idea. We cannot use Laruelle as the authority on how to dismantle philosophical authority in relation to the arts. We should not look to Laruelle for an ontology that answers how art relates to the real or tells us how to make art according to a sanctioned methodology. And indeed, for my own part, from my own experience of training and working as an artist, it was often a longing for some kind of certainty that brought me to Philosophy. The experience of art-making is so often one of not-knowing—an experience of not knowing what you are doing, or why, or if it matters (for which individuals have greater or lesser degrees of tolerance)—that it makes sense that we might look for sources of stability.

But it would be a contradiction in terms for artists to consider themselves adherents of Laruelle—to use Laruelle as a solid ground to which one might adhere an art practice—since it is also precisely this illusion of certainty that Laruelle critiques in his characterization of philosophical authority.

As Katerina Kolozova notes, adherence to a determinate theoretical horizon provides one with the comfort and safety of philosophical certainty. It is a twofaced certainty established by the hybridization of the transcendental (or thought) and the real: the comfortable sense of unshakability in one's philosophical knowledge and the safe sense of "knowing the reality."¹⁸

The function of non-philosophy is not to allow artists to transcend their practice—even in the case of making an immanent model of art a kind of comfortable knowledge in itself.¹⁹

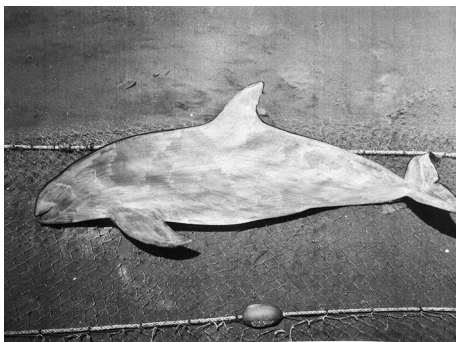


PART 2 TECHNIQUES OF NOT-KNOWING

Laruelle proposes a radical equality between all forms of thought. But what does it mean to say 'all thoughts are

equal?'²⁰ In the first instance, perhaps, it is to invite us to think in terms of an 'equality *in* thinking' rather than a thought of equality. The aim of non-philosophy is not to produce a philosophy *of* equality, including political equality—wherein philosophy might, once more, position itself as the particular mode of thought equipped to answer the question 'What is equality?' (really).²¹ Second: All thoughts are equal because they are all real, or to put it in Laruelle's language: because they are all determined in the last instance by the Real. Although we

cannot or should not seek to define the nature of that shared reality, since to say they are real because of some quality—for instance, of being equally virtual, material, neurological, Being—is once more to create a philosophical hierarchy relative to what is actual, immaterial, 'brainless', merely ontic (vs. ontological) and so forth. However, this does not mean



that we are without an ethics of thought; or rather, without the possibility of practicing an ethics *in* thought as distinct from a representational account of thought's ethics. That is, it is not that we need to value all thoughts equally: totalitarian, intolerant or exclusionary thinking as much as pluralist and open forms. Rather, within this ontological leveling of thought (or the radical extension of thought to the Real *per se*), the thought to be valued is the one that does more to perform a democratizing or equalizing gesture within a particular context.

There is much of value for performance philosophy about the provocation: *all thoughts are equal*. Not least—perhaps—because of the way in which our immediate reaction to this statement might be to note all the ways in which different ways of thinking are currently treated unequally and/or unequally recognized as being forms of thought at all. Visual thinking—conducting and expressing thinking through images, in and as visual form, for instance—continues to be de-prioritised relative to the thought which takes place in and as the written word in the context of Western academic publishing. Those who are highly adept at thinking through the body, may well be rewarded for their skills—economically, culturally—but perhaps are still less likely to have those practices recognized as forms of ‘intelligence’. Creative arts subjects are differentiated from and seen as less vital to

secondary education than the so-called ‘core’ academic subjects in UK schools. Whilst ‘practice as research’ continues to make significant advances in UK Higher Education contexts, its outputs are still often treated as less valuable than those that take more conventional scholarly forms. Forms of thought that deviate from patriarchal and Eurocentric norms—in style, content, mode of expression, subject matter, etc.—are not equally celebrated and can struggle to access to, exist within, thrive and actively mutate the institutions that claim to support the production of new knowledge. In the ongoing construction of a canon of ‘great thinkers’—including contemporary listings of global ‘thought leaders’—there is still a much greater emphasis on scientists and philosophers, than on practitioners in fields like the arts.²²

So, how does performance think? Performance ideas can take as many forms as there are practices and materials with which those practices engage. They are ideas to do something with an image, movement or sound. They are ideas to do something with human and nonhuman bodies, with colour and shape. In a particular configuration of space and time. At a given speed or tempo. In the foreground or background relative to some other thing; above or below; before, during, after—and crucially, according to timescales that this grammar of ‘before’ and ‘after’ cannot allow. And this ‘before’ and ‘after’ does not correspond to how performance thinks

either. Artists do not have ideas (first), which they (then) illustrate or express in their material practices. The ideas do not take some independent form that precedes the doing (or, if they do, it is often a problem).

But perhaps a better question—to avoid essentialisation—might be: what is *this* thinking that I am thinking alongside? What ways of knowing do *Every house* and *Aquarium* offer—particularly in relation to nonhuman life? And yet, once again, the answers that come back are more a matter of techniques of not-knowing (or bewilderment) than of ‘methods’. For example, in a recent interview, both Hixson and collaborator, Essi Kausalainen emphasise the importance of play as a quality of performance’s ways of knowing. Hixson, for her part, points to the importance of playfulness in creating an ‘atmosphere of (...) discovery’ and of extending human perception in relation to the incomprehensible or ‘untranslatable’ aspects of animal and plant life.²³ In turn, Kausalainen—who has a long history of making solo work in relation to plants prior to her collaborations with *Every house*—talks about how her playful experiments with her own sensory intelligence (which might be seen as ‘silly’ by some) are also to be taken seriously as ‘a form of knowledge’. For Kausalainen, interspecies performance practice offers a means of coming to know not only this strange ‘[plant] thinking without a brain,’ but ‘to understand the plant in me, the animal in me...

to understand the whole scale of the sensitivities and intelligences within me.²⁴

Such practices do not begin with a pre-determined idea of what the human is (unlike some circular philosophies); rather, this not-knowing is precisely what allows them to performatively extend the human as part of an ongoing experimentation with what it might be and become beyond both humanism and anthropocentrism. Not knowing is not a 'negative' capability or lack, in this instance, so much as an embodied posture that takes some skill to inhabit.²⁵ Along with bewilderment, play can allow for the discovery of the human in the supposedly non-human realms of the plant and the aquarium. But we must continually (re-)learn how to play and to keep the very image of performance itself in play too. To give another example, as part of a recent phase of the company's creative process, Lin Hixson offered performers a set of directives as a prompt for image making (since Covid prevented us from rehearsing in the usual way). The directive invited us to 'Create three black and white images of actions or events, that you perform, for an unknown future.' Performers could use their respective creatures as source material, but we were also provided with a series of blurry photographs of performances made in the 1960s and 70s to inspire us. Hixson added the reminder: 'Consider that these documents were made in a time when the future

of performance was undefined'. What kind of images do we make if we imagine ourselves in a world where the category of performance as yet to be decided upon? This was an invitation to make performance under the conditions of indefiniteness; a principle also concisely invoked by the unofficial motto of Hixson and Goulish's previous company, Goat Island: 'We discovered [a] performance by making it.'²⁶

The abstract nature of poetry, sound, movement and costume seems to offer a potential to stage the bewilderment of experience without the sense of betrayal or domestication that comes with its translation into signifying language. Thinking alongside Fanny Howe once more, she considers how the 'language problem' of standard writing prevents the expression of non-linear temporal experience and of simultaneity.

If I, for instance, want to tell you that a man I loved, who died, said he loved me on a curbstone in the snow, but this occurred in time after he died, and before he died, and will occur again in the future, I can't say it grammatically. You would think I was talking about a ghost, or a hallucination, or a dream, when in fact, I was trying to convey the experience of a certain event as scattered, and non-sequential. I can keep UN-saying what I said, and amending it, but I can't escape the given logic of the original

proposition, the sentence which insists on
tenses and words like “later” and “before.”²⁷

The temporality of *Aquarium* is both one of simultaneity and of the layering of multiple scales of lived time, according to the complex durations of the underwater world itself; where the flash of red as the pencilfish darts behind the seaweed meets the deep, disorienting time of geology.

Limestone is usually formed of the compressed bodies of marine organisms—crinoids and coccolithophores, ammonites, belemnites and foraminifera—that died in waters of ancient seas and then settled in their trillions on those sea-beds. These creatures once built their skeletons and shells out of calcium carbonate, metabolizing the mineral content of the water in which they lived to create intricate architectures. In this way limestone can be seen as merely one phase in a dynamic earth cycle, whereby mineral becomes animal becomes rock; rock that will in time—in deep time—eventually supply the calcium carbonate out of which new organisms will build their bodies, thereby re-nourishing the same cycle into being again.²⁸

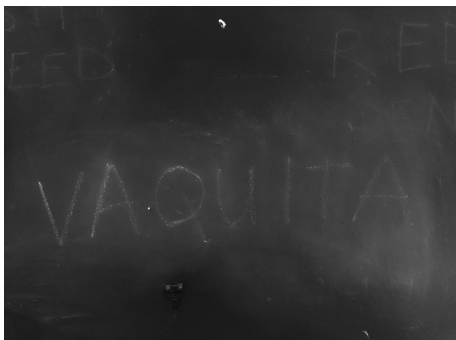
Essi brought this passage about how the temporality in limestone is created into rehearsal. Lin imagines that when

the opera singers sing as limestone, their singing is limestone remembering its past lives as sea creatures. Co-----cco-
-----li-----tho-----pho-----
-----res. When the parts come together, this song will have operated at a different time signature from a preceding dance performed by children, who slowly count out the steps of a fractal choreography, mutating differently shoed feet into units of mathematical measurement to model how coral builds itself.

Multiple ways of knowing collide in an *Every house* performance. The company does not stay the same as itself—aside for the continuity of Hixson and Goulish—but forms and reforms itself anew with different projects.²⁹ In *Aquarium*, but also in other projects, *Every house* works with a kind of modular approach that offers a practical strategy for creating performance with groups of people with diverse specialisations (in the case of *Aquarium*: experimental musicians, dancers, filmmakers, visual artists, opera singers, children). Performances are often structured as a series of modules, and specialist invited in to contribute to the creation of a specific part of the larger work. As Goulish explains, implicitly contrasting the modular approach of *Every house* to the ensemble approach of Goat Island:

It allows for us to invite people who are
really specialists to do some module of the

performance that can be rehearsed independently. It's a very practical thing. It's not an ensemble where everybody undergoes the same kind of learning curve in making the piece. It's really a different sort of community of difference.³⁰



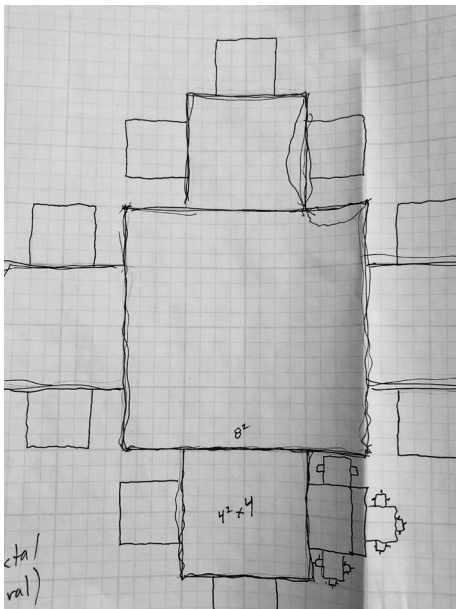
And indeed, it is a 'practical thing': it makes things work. But what it makes work is not just the schedule, but also what we might call a kind of 'epistemological repair'. In his pre-performance announcement for *Three Matadores* (that threatened to go on forever), Matthew invited the audience to consider 'performance as a form of creativity that might provide a forum' for the reconciliation of diverse knowledges: 'aggregates of facts and feelings' that have been fragmented through disciplinarity.³¹ This is not to say that *Every house* considers performance as a place where we can finally picture the whole as all the parts are brought together. No less than philosophy perhaps, art too has dreamt itself as sufficient in itself to capture the One; the artist falls into a spontaneous miming of the philosopher when she projects herself into 'the fantasy of a full representation.'³² Non-philosophy 'refuses the notion that philosophy should be a relatively formal, empty and sterile activity of the encyclopedic ordering and mastering of knowledges acquired from elsewhere outside of philosophy'³³ But there is a reparation here too: insofar as non-philosophy is an attempt to unify or conjugate different fields—philosophy, art, science, religion—but where that conjugation is structured on the basis of their 'radical equality and finitude' with respect to the Real³⁴).

PART 3
EXTINCTION IS MISSING



Every house has a door describe themselves as ‘drawn to historically or critically neglected subjects’—in the case of *Three Matadores* (2017), for instance: to a one-act play by the under-recognised American poet, Jay Wright. However, in the case of *Carnival of the Animals*—including *Aquarium*—it is perhaps less a matter of the status of Saint-Saëns’s suite that is at stake (though the company note how the notoreity of one part, “The Swan,” tends to shadow knowledge of the whole). Rather, this attraction to the neglected speaks to the ubiquity of the *subject* of climate crisis and the simultaneous failure of those with the most power to actually *live* it. From one point of view, ecological catastrophe appears as an imaginary future; but evidently it is already (and has long since been) the past and present of incalculable human and nonhuman others. To consider ecology as among the critically neglected speaks to the ways in which over-exposure can impede attention, but also to the invisibility of species extinction.

Who would have thought the end of the world would be so dull, that the death of species would go so unnoticed? ...the struggles of others pass without being seen. Whether what is lived be human, animal, or plant, they all



pass into the rushing flux of a generalized death, a generalized extinction, a shared fate that we may call ecological.³⁵

As per their self-description, the company make performances in which ‘the subject remains largely absent from the finished work.’³⁶ All that remains of the Saint-Saëns as a source for *Carnival* are the titles of the movements, which Goulish saw as affording ‘A way of thinking about the animal outside of the categories that are normally engaged.’³⁷

Swift Animals.

Characters with Long Ears.

The Cuckoo in the Depth of the Woods.

Likewise, if ‘endangerment and extinction’ are the ‘subject’ of *Aquarium*, they are by no means directly represented or approached ‘head on’. Rather, as the company describe:

We try to distill and separate presentational elements into distinct modes—recitation, movement, music—to grant each its own space and time, and to allow them to encircle the missing subject, inviting the viewer to assemble the parts in duration, after the fact of the performance.³⁸

A far cry from the totalizing aims of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or even some essentialist approaches to performance art, this approach gathers together experts in thinking with/in



movement, sound, not in order to make up a more complete picture, but to invite audiences into performance as a necessarily partial, incomplete and processual form of collective knowledge-making.

Here, we are forming a circle around water as a site of endangerment and extinction. This time, beginning means the dramaturg appearing to introduce us to the creatures who inhabit the aquarium: Elise as Eyelash Seaweed; Bryan as Lesser Electric Ray; Abhay as Red Pencil; Selma as Devil's Hole Pupfish; and later, a group of children as Polyps, and opera singers as Limestone. *Aquarium* de-centres the human, or recruits the human as the supporting cast that allow a series of endangered aquatic species to appear. Whilst using human materials, performance nevertheless enables us to imagine a space without humans. In *Aquarium*, Hixson describes

The performance inhabits the imaginary space of water filled with endangered aquatic animals. Performers perform these animals, their endangerment, and water. To do so they compose in imitation. They look at videos of the specific creatures they embody and they look at water flowing. They imitate gestures, rhythms, actions, and motions.³⁹

And yet, this personification does not amount to performance (philosophically) speaking for the animal.

According to the man who serves as the animal's measure...⁴⁰

It is one of the longest misunderstandings in history: the animal as the dejected image of man.

How can we rectify this hierarchy of images, this scale of downward specularity?

Imitation not as mirroring but as the qualitative extension of the human into the animal.

An animalizing of dance.

A fractal choreography that thinks our continuity with coral.

The logic of the performance establishes the idea of the aquarium as an enclosed space—though not so much a tank, as zone of pressure into which outside forces occasionally penetrate. It is an impossible space—insofar as the creatures who occupy it could never be together in ‘the real world’.

Performers enter into processes of building and unbuilding habitats for themselves and others; costumes both conceal and draw attention to body parts; sticks are introduced and creatures become aggregates. They enlist the assistance of sticks of different lengths; becoming *encounters in motion*, a woman-and-seaweed-and-sticks⁴¹. Lone performers need help to stand, to move, to change. They are precarious in the

sense that Anna Tsing gives that term: ‘Precarity is a state of acknowledgment of our vulnerability to others. In order to survive, we need help, and help is always the service of another, with or without intent.’⁴² We may be bewildered, but this bewilderment leads to a knowledge of precarity.

This is not a theatre that claims to picture the world, but a performative construction of the images the company and its audiences need now: fictioning hybrid entities negotiating co-dependence (rather than fantasizing autonomy); imaging care—but a care from below, or, a self-care from within, not according to the supposed benevolence of some distant guardian. In contrast, as Laruelle suggests:

Philosophy is content to cast a severe and compassionate glance, a look of domination and a glimpse over the earth that it struggles to again descend to... The philosopher, when he cares for the living or takes care of concrete life, does so in a distant style of theological origin, a priestly style, and in the macroscopic concern for large groups, he claims to be a doctor for large bodies, of the State, of the soul, of civilization, sometimes of sick or wounded bodies.⁴³

And of course, philosophers too have fantasised themselves as animals. He says: *My stomach—is surely an eagle's stomach? For it preferreth lamb's flesh. Certainly it is a bird's stomach...*⁴⁴



They say: *We are a wolfing*.⁴⁵ And yet, they do not imagine themselves as the bleaching coral, or the vaquita trapped in the gillnet gasping for breath.⁴⁶

Every house do not make grand claims for the world-changing capacities of their performance-making. There has always been a radical modesty in their stance; a tendency to show solidarity with, but nevertheless assert the discrete expertise of activism;⁴⁷ but, at the same time, a quiet belief in the micro-political powers of redirecting attention towards the unnoticed, ordinary and under-valued. In the case of *Aquarium*, who would have thought it would feel radical to simply notice those underwater species on the threshold of extinction? The vaquita—of course, thanks to Leonardo da Caprio—has become something of a celebrity. But the eyelash seaweed? *Aquarium* notices and invites us to notice the extinction of the vaquita and the eyelash seaweed equally—where the very act of looking, searching for remaining specimens, is the only gesture left to us to try and prevent the species from dying out.^{48 49}

PART 4
THE LAST HUMANITY

Laruelle's recent book *The Last Humanity: The New Ecological Science* (2015/2021) is work of eco-fiction rather than a philosophy of ecology. 'This work carries us along as if we were in a tempestuous river, the banks of knowledge, all the landscapes of knowledge, stream past without pausing' (Schmid and Mambrini Doudet 2016/2020). The aim of the book, according to Laruelle, 'is not to establish a new ontic theory of life, something we are incapable of, but a theory concerning the knowledge of life.'⁵⁰ Refusing the 'straight-jacket of ontology',⁵¹ this thought experiment has its own dynamics: one that seeks to reorient 'the damage to/harassment of the environment done by philosophical thought'.⁵² In its poetic unfolding, the book does important work to remind us that 'there is no necessary connection between justice and ecology and we must be on watch for a rising eco-fascism or appropriation of ecological frameworks by those Laruelle has elsewhere termed the "authorities."'⁵³ And yet, *The Last Humanity* is no more an attempt to directly intervene in public debate on environmental crisis and mass extinction than *Aquarium*. They have in common an unapologetic abstraction and poetics. As Smith puts it:

The Last Humanity, even though it emerges out of the conditions for thought given by the climate crisis and so represents his most direct engagement with a live political and social problem, continues this practice of focusing on the work of abstraction, of thinking.⁵⁴

A significant recurring theme of *The Last Humanity* is the nature of the relations between human and nonhuman forms of life—specifically the conception of the relations within what Laruelle calls the 'MAP system (Man, Animal, Plant)'. And yet, others note that 'ecosystems, sustainability of the environment are not really the topic of the book'.⁵⁵ In this 'last (?) phase' of Laruelle's work, the book is more concerned to 'give an account of what the Human "is" finally, in non-philosophy'.⁵⁶ Is this anthropocentrism once again? Are the animal and the vegetal only of interest, relationally, insofar as they tell us something about the human? Certainly the effort to move against the tide of anthropocentrism is there: 'the continuum of animality vegetality-humanity'⁵⁷ is offered as a way to understand the radical equality or 'togetherness' of diverse forms of life.⁵⁸ For John Ó Maoilearca, thinking in terms of the *togetherness* or *belonging* of human, animal and plant is preferable to the philosophical vocabularies of identity and difference—so long as this is understood as 'belonging equally to the Real, but without any determination as to



what the Real is, nor even what belonging to it means (as “participation,” set-membership, expression, being-with etc.).⁷⁵⁹

In *The Last Humanity*, ecology names ‘both a science of knowledge (for Laruelle specifically a knowledge about life) and a discourse about the ways in which human beings should live among each other and in the wider environment.’⁷⁶⁰ For Laruelle, ecology has the ‘all-encompassing and determining character of philosophy.’⁷⁶¹ It is philosophical in its effort to determine ‘the Real’: to position itself as capable of making decisive distinctions between the human, animal and plant and to project the nature of the whole in which they participate. As Anne-Francoise Schmid notes, such discourses often expose where racism and speciesism intersect—when ecology authorizes itself to determine who is included and who is excluded from the community of the ‘human’ according to an “animalization” or “dehumanization” as a political procedure.⁷⁶² Non-philosophy suggests that Man, Animal, and Plant ‘should no longer be treated as metaphysical unities that can be separated, leading to Aristotelian definitions like man = rational animal. These macroscopic and metaphysical definitions give rise, as we know, to racism and speciesism, since the animal is what is deprived of human characteristics.’⁷⁶³ Or again, as Smith suggests ‘Ecology, like other biological sciences that arise out of a colonial episteme, has played its role in the construction of race as a place of decision between human and non-human.’⁷⁶⁴

In contrast, non-philosophy does not define the human, but refers to ‘the in-the-last-humanity’—echoing the form of ‘the in-itself’—and in order to disarm those discourses that police what counts as humanity per se. The in-the-last-humanity ‘signals the impossible relation of humanity to the authorities that try to regulate it, to manage it, to place it within a world where this person is more human than that person.’⁶⁵

They die driving their cars.
They die playing outside.
They die babysitting.
They die eating ice cream.
They die sleeping in their own beds.
They die and die and die...
Even then, they are not done dying.
They die giving birth.
They die trying to breathe.
And they are done dying.⁶⁶

PART 5 A FRACTAL CHOREOGRAPHY

‘Fractality is not only in the World, it is just as much in your head and your eye.’⁶⁷

Matthew has brought in a scientific article on ‘Fractal patterning of coral communities’ which he suggests we use as a prompt for choreography.⁶⁸ He is interested in its content but also the practice of flattening or equalizing diverse knowledges: to create a dance as a creative response to ‘this article that I really don’t understand.’⁶⁹ We talk about the classic examples of fractals in nature: snowflakes, coastlines. Matthew reads a passage of the article aloud, which defines the fundamental features of fractality: ‘Fractals have two intrinsic properties, scale invariance and self-similarity. Scale-invariance means that an object looks the same on all scales and self-similarity, that any part of the system, appropriately enlarged, looks like the whole.’⁷⁰ But what new concepts of fractality might come from performance? What is a fractal experience of performance? Matthew has drawn an idea for a fractal choreography to be performed by the children the company are working with. The children occupy the aquarium as a polyp colony: the microscopic creatures who build up the coral reef. In this repetitive, task-based action, they model how coral builds itself.

Coral reefs are built by polyps. Most structures we call ‘coral’ are, in fact, made up of colonies of thousands of polyps. Each tiny, soft-bodied polyp secretes a hard outer skeleton of limestone that attaches either to rock or to the dead skeletons of other polyps. These polyp aggregates endlessly repeat a cycle of growth, death, and regeneration, slowly building the calcium carbonate foundations for the reefs. Scientific studies of coral demand an extension of our concepts of how bodies operate in space at time. For example, the article Matthew introduces us to includes the following passage (which might be taken as further prompts for (non-) human choreographies): ‘Coral reef landscapes are spatially and temporally non-linear, exhibiting instability at metre to decimetre levels on timescales of months to years, but complex meta-stability at scales of tens of kilometres for decades, centuries and even millennia.’⁷¹ Even from the scientific point of view then, clearly Lin’s idea of the opera singers’ song as limestone remembering its past lives is not at all ‘silly’.

We walk Matthew’s diagram: each starting at a different corner of the largest square, and walking down through the self-similar pattern from large to small: 8×8 , to 4×4 , to 2×2 , until our human scale limitations prevent us from going any smaller. We are stand-ins for the children who will perform this fractal choreography: each one uniquely engaged in the simple act of walking, but one that enacts a sense of

how simplicity can scale up into an endless complexity.⁷² For Goulish, in this particular choreographic instance, ‘the walking is also measuring, moving slowly and counting steps, to achieve the proportions at work in the relational patterns.’⁷³ Each child is both the whole diagram and a part of the diagram. Or to put it more accurately, it is not that each child’s action is a ‘part’ in the sense of being ‘a fragment of a closed whole’, but a fractal of a diagram that remains in process.⁷⁴ *(Incidentally, those who know him, know that Matthew has tiny handwriting. But even his delicate hand comes up against limits of scale).*

From another point of view, we stop seeing the children—as the microscopic polyp—and start seeing what they are building together. The act somehow puts the scale of the performance itself into question and draws attention to how scale shapes perception. What appears simple at one scale becomes complex at another. The performance is an electron microscope: zooming in to show how the complexity of coral runs all the way down. The performance is operating at a scale of about the thickness of a human hair. But can we also imagine ourselves zooming out, looking at the performance from 2500km away, from outer space? Seen from space: the coral reef becomes a coastline, but remains—fractally—the same as itself, an endlessly repeating pattern. Looking at these images of coral we can lose all sense of scale. Is this

the reef from space, from the side of a boat, from up-close, from under a microscope?⁷⁵

The figure of the fractal appears through Laruelle's work. Responding to the fractal paintings of New York based artist Edward Berko, and his writings in *Sur Le Mur* (On the Wall) (1994), Laruelle suggests that 'To the most well-known fractal objects—the sea, its waves, its storms, its turbulence, its "Brittany coasts," we must now add walls: in their ruined, cracked, shabby, angular aspect—new mural and lapidary possibilities, a "genetic" grain.'⁷⁶ Referencing Berko's work, Laruelle invokes the fractalization of experience, including of the viewer, wherein we cease to 'read' or interpret images but produce new visions of them through a 'qualitative change'

of scale. As he puts it, through certain works of art like Berko's: 'we are called upon to change scale or style of vision and, at the limit, to hallucinate fractally such objects.'⁷⁷

But the fractal is also a means by which he expresses non-philosophy's mode of plurality and self-similarity. Laruelle suggests that non-philosophy operates as a fractal thought.⁷⁸ Non-philosophy takes many forms, but it is marked by 'epistemic insufficiency' as its 'structural invariant.'⁷⁹ The fractal invites reconsideration of the relationship between parts and whole. With non-philosophy, 'what Laruelle offers us is a new vision of philosophy as a whole that is neither the right nor wrong representation of reality, but is a material

part of the Real.'⁸⁰ But this geometrical figure is perhaps as far as Laruelle might go to outline the nature of the Real: the 'under-determined, blankly infinite complexity'⁸¹ that constitutes the conditions for both (non-)philosophy and performance, and of which they form a part.

This is the dizzying extension of fractality without limit, which renders all ontological effort both farcical ('silly?') and fractally immanent to the complexity it seeks to describe unilaterally. And indeed, even this definition of the Real must remain somehow 'empty' or 'missing' to avoid operating as the very form of philosophical decision that Laruelle critiques. Laruelle 'is not deciding (for) the Real in any contentful way—not because it can or cannot be known, but because all decisions are immanent to it, are a part of it already.'⁸² Akin to how *Every house* make performances from which their subjects tend to remain absent, Laruelle seeks to craft non-philosophy as a thought from the Real, but not about it as subject. As Smith suggests: 'Philosophy is itself rooted in absolute contingency... Absolute contingency is as close as Laruelle comes to a positive description of the One, which often appears to take the form of a kind of apophaticism or "unsaying," but the One is not the object of his analysis.'⁸³ No wonder then that he turns increasingly to poetics to enact this un saying and, like Howe, escape the linear logic of more standard grammars.

PART 6
HOW IT ENDS [THE HOUSE OF
PHILOSOPHY IS IN RUINS]

The House of Philosophy is in ruins.

The Cave is in ruins.

The Watchtower is in ruins.

More than ever you seem to be walking through an endless corridor. But you keep going up. It is the ruin of the staircase as if it falls endlessly into itself, without leading to any 'big room' that you recognize—the dining room, the bedroom, the playroom.

The House of Philosophy is becoming uninhabitable, Its half-closed, half-opened rooms seem to be made for bodies of a different scale, perhaps giant Lilliputians.⁸⁴

Laruelle's non-philosophy is commonly mistaken for yet one more project heralding the end of philosophy.⁸⁵ But as Laruelle explains, 'The problem is no longer that of the death or the end of philosophy... the problem is of that of its global mutation, of the loss of its sufficiency' and of producing an explanation of these 'phenomena.'⁸⁶ As such Laruelle figures non-philosophy not as the end of philosophy, but as 'a weapon of last defence [*défense ultime*]' against the violence that authoritarian discourses exert both upon the lived and the Real. And yet, if it is a weapon, then it is a strange one: concerned to disarm and disempower philosophy understood

as ‘the supreme form of thought control, or... a device for controlling what counts as thought.’ And if it is a *last* defence, because we have run out of places to hide: ‘The entire problem for me is about finding the limit, the wall that we turn our backs against. We have our backs against the wall! We can no longer get back to somewhere else.’

But even if the theory of Philosophical Decision is not ‘akin to a moral condemnation of philosophy or a declaration of the end of philosophy,’ thought does certainly seem deflated in this new position: as that which is determined by but does not determine the Real. What does thought do, if anything, if the Real remains foreclosed and indifferent to it? At this point, Smith’s emphasis on the distinction between ‘the Real’ and the ‘world’ in Laruelle offers some way to reorient a sense of thought’s purpose (our collaborative compass).

Importantly, the world is a construction according to Laruelle, and there is a strict separation of the One and the world. But, nonetheless, even though the world is relative, it has real effects upon human beings as subjects. Entering into the world that is formed by thought—philosophy in particular—may also produce real but relative effects.⁸⁷

Real effects on humans, but also animals and plants (and, and...) through the performative extension of the human. This leaves plenty for the last humanity (the last of humanity, the last humans) to do: not alone, but beginning with bewilderment to lead us into interspecies collaborations that qualitatively extend the human across new scales of space and time.

It may already be the end of the world. But as Smith reminds us, it is important to ask which world is at stake in this evocation of endings. After all, the end of the world of Philosophical Decision is hardly to be lamented.

The very world that is ending is the world founded upon decision; founded upon the antiblack racism and misogyny of the overrepresentation of the human; the slaughter and suffering of non human animals; and the reduction of the biosphere to economic use; and the continued reproduction of that world through this very same suffering and violence. The task facing the last humanity, the last of our humanity, is to call forth another end of the world. Not its reform, not its descent into greater barbarism, but an end of world as such in favor of a more open universe that includes a fragile and real earth.⁸⁸

CODA

He wants to know if the Kraken is real.

He wants to know where tornados happen, tsunamis,
earthquakes. He wants to know if people die.

As I start to name countries, he says: I am never going
there. I am never going there.

What temperature are our nightmares?
The burning flames or the chill of *the abysmal sea*⁸⁹
Now, perhaps, they are neither hot nor cold, but the very
heating of the water.

The dark remains dark
The night stays obediently on her side; the day on his
Until the latter fire shall heat the deep.⁹⁰

The last Small St Helena Petrel
The last New Zealand grayling
The last Labrador duck
The last great auk
The last eelgrass limpet
The last Caribbean monk seal
The last carnivorous sea mink
The last Stellar's sea cow

Eyelash Seaweed (Elise enters)
dione arcuata.

You will have been on the brink of extinction.

This is how it can happen
It is not dramatic;
It is a mounting fatigue.
This is how it can happen for me, too.
Not at all suddenly
But as a gradual extinction
Towards the embers
Fading glow
Until

Take me on your dolphin skin!

I shall be absent soon!

Saving the tallow with capable hands

Seizing with the loyal closed eyes of foliage

*Puff*⁹¹

Pianists

- I Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt (2015) *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press)

Done Dying: Thinking
Alongside
Every house has a door

- I This is adapted from a section of writing by Lin Hixson: Will Daddario, Matthew Goulish, and Hixson, Lin, "In the making: an incomplete consideration of the first decade of *Every house has a door* 2008-2018 as performance philosophy," in *The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*, ed. Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca and Alice Lagaay (Routledge: London and New York, 2020). For more on the matter of how performance begins, see the *Every house* project, 9 *Beginnings*. In the iteration manifested in Bristol, UK in 2012, the project restaged the beginnings of nine historical performances by nine different practitioners found in the archive, and reimaged them as a new composition: *Every House has a Door*. "9 *Beginnings*." accessed December 4, 2020, <http://www.everyhousehasadoor.org/9-beginnings>.

- 2 Hixson in: Daddario, Goulish, and Hixson, "In the making," 426.
3 Fanny Howe, "Bewilderment," published in 1998, accessed December 4, 2020, https://www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_1_1999/fhbewild.html.
4 Howe, "Bewilderment."
5 Jonathan Fardy, *Laruelle and Art: The Aesthetics of Non-Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 35.
6 François Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou: The Introduction of Maoism into Philosophy*, trans. Robin Mackay (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 210.
7 François Laruelle, *The Last Humanity: The New Ecological Science*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 61.
8 When I interviewed *Every house* dramaturg, Matthew Goulish in 2018, he addressed the importance of creating new stories to re-shape our imaginations in line with extant ecological knowledge: 'There is knowledge that we have about...ecological disasters on a magnitude that's...unimaginable. But the reason it's unimaginable is because the stories that we have told before, that we think are helping, aren't helping anymore. They're maybe part of the problem. The way we narrate or

the way we construct an image or the way we think about the body or the self or society or just the planet, our modes of thought don't match the world we know anymore' (unpublished interview).

- 9 This is adapted from: Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, 15.
10 This text is an excerpt from the Introduction to *Aquarium*, written and performed by Matthew Goulish at the beginning of the performance (unpublished text, 2020).
11 Hixson & Goulish are founder members of Goat Island (1987-2009)—the influential performance company producing collaborative, devised work which has been theorized under the heading of "postdramatic" theatre.
12 *Aquarium* (unpublished text).
13 With thanks to *Every house* producer Sarah Skaggs for this articulation of the relationship between the book and the performance.
14 'In the making' is part of the title of: Daddario, Goulish, and Hixson, "In the making," 424.
15 Fardy, *Laruelle and Art*, 38.
16 See various contributions to *The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy* for further demonstration of how alternative wisdoms inform the field.

- 17 John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 1.
- 18 John Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts are Equal: Laruelle and Nonhuman Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 6.
- 19 Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts are Equal*, 7.
- 20 Ibid., 4.
- 21 This relates to questions of 'epistemic justice' under consideration in other fields—where individuals or groups engage in a struggle to be recognized specifically in their capacity as knowers.
- 22 Unpublished interview to Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca, 2018.
- 23 Unpublished interview to Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca, 2018.
- 24 John Ó Maoilearca, "Non-human Philosophy," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Lynn Turner, Undine Sellbach and Ron Broglio (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 367.
- 25 The original phrase used by the company was "We discovered a performance by making it". See: Goat Island, "Goat Island Company Website," accessed December 4, 2020, <http://www.goatislandperformance.org/goatisland.htm>. This was since adapted into "We discovered the performance by making it" as the title for the recent Goat Island archive exhibition in Chicago. I have created my own adaptation here.
- 26 Howe, "Bewildement."
- 27 Robert Macfarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019), 32.
- 28 Unpublished interview to Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca, 2018.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Daddario, Goulish, and Hixson, "In the making," 429.
- 31 Anthony Paul Smith, Laruelle: *A Stranger Thought* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 92.
- 32 Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou*, 36.
- 33 Smith, *Laruelle*, 49.
- 34 Introduction by Smith in: Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, vii.
- 35 Lin Hixson, and Goulish Matthew, "Artist Statement," published in 2013, accessed December 4, 2020, <https://www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org/recipients/matthew-goulish-and-lin-hixson>.
- 36 Unpublished interview to Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca, 2018.
- 37 Hixson, and Goulish, "Artist Statement."
- 38 Lin Hixson's unpublished text on Aquarium, 2019.
- 39 This is adapted from Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, 32: 'Man serves as a classical model for the animal that is still deficient, because philosophy continues to speak for the animal according to the man who serves as the animal's measure despite all his good will and repentance. It is one of the longest misunderstandings in history, if not a misinterpretation. If man was received as the image of God in the mirror of the world instead of in the mirror of the Universe, then how could the animal not have been taken as the dejected image of man even further distanced from the Universe? How can we rectify this hierarchy of images, this scale of downward specularity?'
- 40 This is adapted from Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 29: 'When I sprain my ankle, a stout stick may help me walk, and I enlist its assistance. I am now an encounter in motion, a woman-and-stick.'
- 41 Tsing, *Mushroom*, 29.
- 42 Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, 66.
- 43 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Thomas Common. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1998/1998-h/1998-h.htm>.
- 44 Adapted from: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 239.
- 45 These remarks are informed by aspects of my conversation with Anthony Paul Smith (along with Katerina Kolozova and John Ó Maoilearca) about *The Last Humanity*: Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca, Katerina Kolozova, Anthony Paul Smith, and John Ó Maoilearca, "Thinking alongside The Last Humanity: Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca in Conversation with Katerina Kolozova, Anthony Paul Smith and John Ó Maoilearca," *Oraxiom: A Journal of Non-Philosophy* 1, no. 1 The End Times (2020): 178.
- 46 In our 2018 interview, Goulish talked about some recent events the company had been involved in premised on the idea of facilitating conversations amongst artists, philosophers and activists. In these gatherings, there was an emphasis on 'keeping the differences in play', so the aim was not—he explains—"for the art to become activism or the activism to become art", but to take seriously the need for different practices to be in conversation with and learn from each other on an equal basis.
- 47 Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, 131.

- 48 Ibid, 9.
- 49 Cull Ó Maoilearca, Kolozova, Smith, and Ó Maoilearca, "Thinking alongside," 170.
- 50 Smith in Ibid, 171.
- 51 Introduction by Smith in: Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, viii.
- 52 Kolozova in: Cull Ó Maoilearca, Kolozova, Smith, and Ó Maoilearca, "Thinking alongside," 170.
- 53 Ó Maoilearca in: Cull Ó Maoilearca, Kolozova, Smith, and Ó Maoilearca, "Thinking alongside," 170.
- 54 Kolozova in: Cull Ó Maoilearca, Kolozova, Smith, and Ó Maoilearca, "Thinking alongside," 171.
- 55 Ó Maoilearca in: Cull Ó Maoilearca, Kolozova, Smith, and Ó Maoilearca, "Thinking alongside," 171.
- 56 Ibid, 171.
- 57 Introduction by Smith in: Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, xii.
- 58 François Laruelle, "Non-Philosophy, Weapon of Last Defence: An Interview with François Laruelle," in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, ed. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 242.
- 59 Kolozova in: Cull Ó Maoilearca, Kolozova, Smith, and Ó Maoilearca, "Thinking alongside," 172.
- 60 Muriel Mambrini, and Anne-Françoise Schmid, "Compte rendu de François Laruelle, En dernière Humanité," *Actu Philosophia* (2016), <http://www.actu-philosophia.com/francois-laruelle-en-derniere-humanite>, unpublished translation by Anthony Paul Smith.
- 61 Introduction by Smith in: Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, xiv.
- 62 Introduction by Smith in: Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, xv.
- 63 Adapted from: Derrick Johnson, "In America, Black deaths are not a flaw in the system. They are the system," *The Guardian*, June 3, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/03/america-black-deaths-racism>.
- 64 François Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. Robin MacKay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011), 131.
- 65 The specific article that Goulish brought to rehearsal was: Samuel J. Purkis, Bernhard Riegl, and Richard E. Dodge, "Fractal Patterns of Coral Communities: Evidence from Remote Sensing (Arabian Gulf, Dubai, U.A.E.)," in *Marine & Environmental Sciences Faculty Proceedings*, Presentations, Speeches, Lectures, (Florida: NSU Florida, 2006), 1753-62.
- 66 I am quoting Goulish from memory of rehearsal here.
- 67 Purkis, Riegl, and Dodge, "Fractal Patterns," 1753.
- 68 Ibid, 1760.
- 69 David Bremner, "Non-Standard Stainless: Laruelle, Inconsistency and Sense-impressions," *Labyrinth* 20, no. 1 (Summer 2018): 90.
- 70 Matthew Goulish, "Birds and birds at night: On care and caring," essay (Text and Audio) commissioned by the *New Alphabet School* project of Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt, accessed December 4, 2020, <https://newalphabetschool.hkw.de/birds-and-birds-at-night/>.
- 71 John Mullarkey, "1 + 1 = 1: The Non-Consistency of Non-Philosophical Practice (Photo: Quantum: Fractal)," in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, ed. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 166n.
- 72 Laruelle, *Non-Photography*, 126.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Mullarkey, "1 + 1 = 1," 146.
- 75 Fardy, *Laruelle and Art*, 108.
- 76 Mullarkey and Smith, *Laruelle*, 1.
- 77 Bremner, "Non-Standard," 106.
- 78 Mullarkey and Smith, *Laruelle*, 8.
- 79 Smith, *Laruelle*, 16.
- 80 Adapted from: Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, 63.
- 81 Smith, *Laruelle*, 175, n2.
- 82 Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou*, 212.
- 83 Laruelle, "Interview," 241.
- 84 Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts are Equal*, 1.
- 85 Laruelle, "Interview," 241.
- 86 Smith, *Laruelle*, 24.
- 87 Ibid, 48.
- 88 Introduction by Smith in: Laruelle, *Last Humanity*, xv.
- 89 Charlotte Runcie, *Salt On Your Tongue: Women and the Sea* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2019), 64.
- 90 Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Kraken," published in 1830, accessed December 4, 2020, <https://poets.org/poem/kraken>.
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