

## BETRAYAL

I have tossed and turned over this question: is an explanation warranted? Should works of art be spelled out for everyone to see, for others to peruse through their inner workings? Handing over questions and thoughts that belong to the process of making, is personally not an easy feat. As I explain the artworks to you, I have a sense of reducing and thus betraying the work. As it is, betrayal already plays such a role in my life, in my work, as I (like so many others) have experienced trauma and have dealt with it (as many do) by betrayal, mostly of the self.

It seems betrayal, as such, is inherent in the way we live, it cannot be different if we abide by the rules. It is my belief that as we take part in this society that was built for those in power, we are bound to lose something of ourselves, both physically and mentally, and I squirm as I write these two terms as separate when I know they cannot be, when I offer up a dualistic approach. Already a small betrayal, already so many small ones.

So how to approach our daily life with the knowledge of being a betrayer? Personally, I make art, and try not to betray myself there, but I do, and when I do it shows, and it hurts. The pain of betraying oneself is diffuse and everywhere and simultaneously very focused and seems to stick to the insides of what is considered my body and that's the best I can do in explaining it, relaying its stickiness and glue-like quality.

To expand, I could say that both lies and truth wrestle each other in my art practice, it's not *all* bad, and as I am their maker I believe there is something pure about them as well, even though purity is another problematic term having caused so much suffering. Nevertheless, my life's repeated questions and pain is part of the making, mine are reflective works, pondering works, a way of thinking though existence and philosophizing through matter, and as such, they are not joyful works. They are works of pain for the most part, mine, others, I am not sure if I can separate pain or have it located. There is a quote by Charles Dicken in his novel *Hard Times* that exemplifies this (in the description of Mrs Gradgrind's death):

“Have you pain, mother?”

“There's a pain somewhere in the room, but I cannot be certain that I have got it.”

Personally, I am certain that we have got it (pain), but I share this sense of pain transcending the body, or actually the pain of “the wound”, as in French philosopher Gilles Deleuze<sup>1</sup>'s wound, exceeding the body. In his use of the term, the wound is never just an actual part of anyone or anything else, but is always a shared wound, leading a singular existence in itself, and realizing itself in different ways upon the different surfaces that we live.

Either way, I pick it up, the pain, and I relay it as best as I can, if I can.

---

---

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze was a French philosopher who, from the early 1950s until his death in 1995, wrote on philosophy, literature, film, and fine art. His most popular works were the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, both co-written with psychoanalyst Félix Guattari.

My project description mentions terms like feminist new materialism, the notion of touch, the body, the aforementioned Deleuze's wound, epigenetics and autoimmunity, and I will explain my connection to these terms as we go along, but first:

To me, writing a project description was an act of putting on a stranger's clothing and the pretence of another life, the life of an academic. I have a deep appreciation for academic studies and libraries and the lives of those who try to figure it out through structuring words a specific way. Most of the time, it is not for me, even though I really tried all those years at the University of Oslo, delving into subjects such as philosophy, psychology, art history, and microbiology, and giving it my utmost best. Throughout, I kept looking at the other student's faces, wondering if they knew I was an imposter academic and an artist and that my restlessness would take me out of there, that I was just trying to hold on for dear life. It felt like waiting for a tidal wave whilst smelling the salt water in the air, feeling the air pressure build, but holding on, holding on, until finally being catapulted out of there and admitting defeat. I wanted their life, the imagined and idealised life of an academic, all about finding new knowledge through other's footnotes and living a quiet existence where books were all that mattered, really (although yes, my sister is an academic and her life is a tug of war with power and money and far from what I imagined a university existence to be). A shielded, secluded life always appealed to me, although I knew I was supposed to try to figure it out, being with other people, and that the well of colours and emotions and constant narratives building in my head as a constant pressure creating immense restlessness needed to be released somehow. To find a form of release was another task, a huge one and it took years, but it is one that at least I am past, now. I have a method of release through art making and through the fellowship I have tried to look for the truth in many ways, also through reading science research and studies and finding new knowledge in different academic fields. I even took a leave of absence to take a laboratory course in microbiology and I followed the Department of Biosciences' lecture series as far as I could, which unfortunately wasn't that far, I had to give in once the quantum mechanical effects called vibronic mixing used by photosynthetic bacteria was shown through calculations. Rows of them on the black board, and that was it, the end of Ane. Later on, the professor teaching the lab course asked me—as I spent a long time adjusting the microscope during a laboratory session—do you see anything? And I was embarrassed but also impressed, the question kept ringing in my head. Do I see anything? Not sure. Not sure what to find except the obvious existence of the bacteria colonies growing in our Petri dishes, which may be what he asked about, but what these colonies are—in actuality—and what can be seen by observing them, is almost too large a question and one to spend one's life on.

---

Feminist new materialism is one of those main terms I used—and use—as I like a long term, something to keep me thinking and to arm myself with, if necessary. As arms, it functions especially well with those not schooled in such terms, as it sounds important and can simultaneously mean so many things, and most of the people I meet would like to be feminist, so far, so good. And there is this little nugget by feminist scholar Elizabeth Grosz<sup>2</sup>, whose view I share, that can be relayed, both as arms and as something of a personal-

---

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth A. Grosz is an Australian philosopher, feminist theorist, and professor working in the U.S. She is Jean Fox O'Barr Women's Studies Professor at Duke University.

professional belief: The promise of feminist theory, is its ability to generate concepts that allow us “to surround ourselves with the possibilities for being otherwise.”<sup>3</sup>

And being otherwise was and is something important in my life, it just is. For a long time, I had concerns about how things were seen and taken at face value and kept separate through a metaphysics of separateness, and I felt that what I was offered through the standard education system was not enough, that it confirmed what I found to be an outdated metaphysics. It affected me deeply as I took it all personally even though it was no such thing. But there are so many ongoing crises, such as the big one, climate change, along with the co-current health crisis, and the need to think and act differently feels unavoidable, and how to proceed being me. The me whose talents do not propel one into a career of a scientist or environmentalist or doctor, I’m not of that kind. But there seemed to be thinking to be done, and visualisations of these thoughts, perhaps, and so the new materialist theories were a natural fit with the questions I was asking at the time, at any time, really, and the feminist approach seemed the most radical to me with their insistence on a “we” and relations throughout. My hope was that through an “experimental” sculptural practice, I could work with making visible some of these ideas, such as trying to dissolve the idea of an object’s, or far more pressing—a body’s—singular identity and perceived solidity by showing its many narratives of being or coming-into-existence. I mentioned the current health crisis, and as such, I’ve had my own, and I know grief and cellular changes, and all that comes with it, and as I went into this field of radical rethinking, I could not escape it, the body. Specifically, the human body, as it is what I inhabit and what I know and can communicate something about. Or at least try. The aim is to present the materiality of the human body “differently” in my practice, by making visible cultural contexts and histories, its changing material processes, or both, preferably in a poetic manner. My sculptures can generally be described as bodies hosting material encounters that change and create them.

As I offer up a few examples of this approach of communicating a material or body’s contexts and histories, please keep in mind that they are simplifications, and as such, difficult, but perhaps they can make my intention or method clearer: Something as simple as a bottle of laundry detergent can be taken as a starting point. Its ingredient list is long, and if looking into specific ingredients, a well of entangled components and narratives becomes apparent as well as their histories and cultural contexts. Choosing the ingredient of sodium carbonate, a salt with a strong alkaline taste used for a range of products, we have our beginning. Historically it was extracted from the ashes of plants or seaweed (soda ash), it was instrumental in the preparation of mummies in Egypt, in the production of soda-lime glass, in swimming pools to raise the pH, and it was also used in the production of German pretzel rolls etc. Sodium carbonate is both produced synthetically and also exists as a natural mineral in arid regions where seasonal lakes evaporate. Following this “basic” information, it is easy to understand how many tales and relations that can be made visible from a consumer object, and then become part of a sculptural work. Another way to go about this would be to pick a metal, such as aluminium, and show all the foods, medications, personal care products etc. that have aluminium as a part of their material composition and story. The way I utilize this information in the works, is a layered thing, and of course all the information is there, within the materials themselves, as part of their being, but I literally spell for it out through the artwork’s materials list (captions). Not everything of course, there is no way to include all the

---

<sup>3</sup> Grosz, E. (2012), “The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges?”, in H. Gunkel, C. Nigianni, and F. Soderback (eds), *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, 13–22, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

information an object holds, then my lists would be as long as books (I like that idea, actually), but the information in the materials lists are an important part of the artwork as they outline the works' media and most importantly, convey their contingent micro-universes of relationality, e.g. the sculpture *The Cardiovascular System*, 2020, its captions as follows: "Clear Paraffin Gel Jelly Wax (petroleum production derivative), Royal Raspberry flavour Jelly Made with Halal beef gelatine, MAC Glaze Lipstick in *All Fired Up*, Crest Complete Cinnamon Rush toothpaste, Cochineal Lake pigment (made from the dried, pulverised bodies of the cochineal female scale insects<sup>4</sup>, Kappa carrageenan (from red edible seaweed used in the food industry for its gelling properties), and PME pink edible lustre spray icing colouring."

The materials lists are supposed to function as poetic pointers to the interconnected reality we are living, and through our bodies, becoming. Some readers actually compare the materials lists to ingredient lists, as if I'm some sort of baker, and they are not too far off, really, as all the "ingredients" come together and change each other both materially and conceptually (at least that's the aim) and thus create (bake) a "new" material, or a new body, one that contains the entanglements of the natural, industrial and socio-historical journeys we are made through and with.

So, keeping with the feminist "we" and looking at relations throughout, and trying to dissolve the idea of an object or a body's singular identity and perceived solidity, the notion of touch plays an important part. What is touch within matter? And, to me, another pressing question: How are bodies materialised? How do we come to be who and what we are? As mentioned, the aim is to present materiality "differently" in my practice, including the materiality of the human body. I see the human body as some kind of meeting place, a place where different materials and histories-of-becoming meet, and I would like to show how such encounters both create and change us. My sculptures are such meeting places, they are created to show these entangled narratives and material meetings, both conceptually and materially.

"There are others here with me" is the whisper in my work, in a haunting offering up the fact that we are cumulative, our bodies unwitting, often unwilling, vessels for the viscous sediment of history. I view the body as material and embodied memory, the ultimate repository for the consequences of human agency, mutating to its own detriment as it registers and transmits palimpsests of past encounters. In my artworks I practice what feminist scholar Nancy Tuana<sup>5</sup> calls a viscous porosity of flesh: "the indiscriminate dance of agency between human and nonhuman agents...once molecular interaction occurs, there is no divide between nature/culture, natural/artificial."<sup>6</sup>

To return to the movement of "new materialism," it never did come with an easy single definition. It comes with different trajectories that, to simplify, we can say that all of which share at least a couple of theoretical commitments, of which one would be to problematise the constructivist orientations of most twentieth-century theory in a way that encourages closer attention to the sciences by the humanities, another to radically rethink the dualisms so

---

<sup>4</sup> The beetle was native to the New World, and used by the Aztecs for dyeing and painting, brought to Europe in the 16th century following the Spanish conquest (from Canary Islands, Spain).

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Tuana is an American philosopher who specializes in feminist philosophy. She holds the DuPont/Class of 1949 Professorship in Philosophy and Women's Studies at The Pennsylvania State University.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Tuana, "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina." In: *Material Feminisms*, 188–213, edited by Stacy Alaimo, Susan Hekman. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008.

central to Western thought, and third, paying attention to the constant transformations and interactions of matter. The latter came from a strong sense of matter, the vast stuff of the world and of ourselves, had been given a rather shabby theoretical and rhetorical treatment in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and was conveniently subdivided into manageable “bits” or flattened into a “blank slate” for human inscription.

Within this movement of diverging practices, feminist new materialism(s) can be said to be distinct from other theories in the field through their refusal to see the subject world divided into hierarchies and categories, through a more radical stance in their approach to matter’s performativity, and lastly, through their commitment to maintaining a “we” throughout.

As such, it is not all roses, there exists a recurring criticism against the field of feminist new materialism(s), for (a) exaggerating the extent of earlier feminist scholarship’s neglect of matter, (b) of how Marx and cultural materialism are rejected on mistaken grounds, (c) for uncritically embracing and conflating the scientific study of matter with matter itself (science envy), and (c) for overstating its alleged “newness.” Personally, I find there to be some truth in these criticisms, as I have found myself guilty of them all to some degree, especially the *fetish of newness* and the obvious *science envy*, so there’s that.

But more importantly, from my point of view, is that the body continues to be an important threshold concept for feminist new materialist theory, as there is a consensus that the body as a philosophical notion bears the marks of a dualistic approach upon it. It is important to my project, the idea of the body being affected, not only by what is normally known as physical matter, but also, that past and current discourse is an affecting factor along with the social and political. The feminist scholar Karen Barad<sup>7</sup> states that these together create complex entanglements in performative configurations or materializations of the world. Theorizing is about being in touch, and thought experiments are material matters: cue to human exceptionalism and the reigning ideas of discrete entities, and interactions as something happening between individuals that existed prior to the exchanges, and then the continued separation between oneself and “the other” of our time becomes even more clear, and as such, we have direct causality, a divided body of parts and a body that is separate from its surroundings. And there is no way a body like that doesn’t hurt. Disconnection always does.

So, in my aim to disconnect the disconnection, I lean heavily on Barad’s ideas and concepts, especially her concept of “intra-action”. The difference between what is known as “interactions” and her concept of “intra-actions” is as that where “interactions” presumes that two things exist that then interact, “intra-actions” presume that the two things come into existence in the moment of their intra-actions, and do not precede that moment. So, to Barad, the body is a creation of intra-acting social, political and discursive and physical matters. Her claims are actually supported by epigenetic research, which suggests that an individual’s environment, both physical and social, manifests in biology at the molecular level—and that even before a particular individual can be said to exist, their genetic and environmental inheritances are already prepared to influence their developmental pathways: there is not first a biological body which is then worked in by a physical or social environment.

---

<sup>7</sup> American feminist theorist and quantum physicist, currently Professor of Feminist Studies, Philosophy, and History of Consciousness at the University of California at Santa Cruz, known for her development of agential realism as a conceptual framework of viewing the world: entities emerge from their interactions rather than pre-existing them. Barad’s Ph.D. is in theoretical particle physics and quantum field theory. Barad held a tenured appointment in a physics department before moving into more interdisciplinary spaces.

Perhaps a needless elaboration, but still good to state: within feminist new materialist theory the autonomous, independent, separated, individualized notion of the body is no longer adequate to how the world and its complex entanglements are conceptualized politically and ethically. The awareness of bodily permeability by thinkers on the field gives a different understanding of what bodies are and can be: embedded memory and vessels for the viscous sediment of history and thus the ultimate repository for the consequences of human agency. To continue, the “limits” of the human body are, according to Barad, to be followed all the way to the universe (no astrology involved, I promise): “We are of the universe – there is no inside, no outside. There is only intra-acting from within and as part of the world in its becoming.”<sup>8</sup>

Barad’s trajectory links us to physics, the überdomain of physical reality and governing laws. Through her background as a quantum physicist, she takes us through theoretical physics, particularly the proposals of quantum mechanics, which can be said to double as both a philosophy, and a science. In so doing, and if we take seriously the quantum mechanical view of the world, Barad tells us we need to rethink fundamental, classic categories of cause, agency, measuring, subjecthood, identity. Not only because of the harm that these categories have fostered, but as I understand it, also because they are actually empirically wrong. But pulling the Plutonian rug from under us raises many challenges. Barad’s challenges raise questions around how we think about ethics, politics, and justice. Our established adjudications of ethics and justice rely tacitly, at least, on classical mechanical understanding of bodies in motion.

Her view upon the notion of touch might be evident at this point, as the concept of “intra-action” pretty much sums it up. But to me, the question of what touch is, and does, is deeply embedded in what a body is, and does, and I would like to elaborate a bit further just to make my position clearer: Touch, for a physicist, is but an electromagnetic interaction, but what you are actually sensing, physicists tell us, is the electromagnetic repulsion between the electrons of the atoms that make up your fingers and what is being touched. The reason an object feels solid or soft, or that we can (even) hold one another’s hands, is an effect of electromagnetic repulsion. All we really ever feel is the electromagnetic force, that is the tale physics usually tells about touching. The quantum theory of touching is radically different from the classical explanation and quantum field theory allows for something radically new in the history of Western physics: the transience of matter’s existence. No longer suspended in eternity, matter is born, lives, and dies. But even more than that, there is a radical deconstruction of identity and of the equation of matter with essence in ways that transcend even the profound un/doings of quantum mechanics. Particles, fields, and the void are three separate elements in classical physics, whereas they are intra-related elements in quantum field theory.

Then there is the question of whether what is really at issue is not touching oneself per se but rather the possibility of touch touching itself. The issue arises in quantum field theory as a virtual exploration of every possibility. And this infinite set of possibilities, or infinite sum of histories, entails a particle touching itself, and then that touching touching itself, and so on, ad infinitum. Every level of touch, then, is itself touched by all possible others. Hence, “self-touching is an encounter with the infinite alterity of the self. Matter is an enfolding, an involution, it cannot help touching itself, and in this self-touching it comes in contact with the

---

<sup>8</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter*, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007, 396.

infinite alterity that it is.”<sup>9</sup> What is being called into question here is the very nature of the “self,” and in terms of not just being, but also time. That is, in an important sense, the self is dispersed/diffracted through time and being. All touching entails an infinite alterity, so that touching the other is touching all others, including the “self,” and touching the “self” entails touching the strangers within. Even the smallest bits of matter are an unfathomable multitude. Each “individual” always already includes all possible intra-actions with “itself” through all the virtual others, including those that are non-contemporaneous with “itself.” And as all material “entities” are entangled relations of becoming, there is also the fact that materiality “itself” is always already touched by and touching infinite configurations of other beings and other times.

Thus, an infinite number of past experiences, habits, and memories enact our particular present. By asking questions about what wider materialities are at play in any event, the assemblages of violence and negation, which are different every time, become visible. The ethical implications of such enfolding are that the living present introduces a responsibility to the past in the present “not as a specific demand from a particular past commitment, but rather as an awareness that the present cannot absolve itself selectively of the past.”<sup>10</sup> Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed<sup>11</sup> might call this the “stickiness of the past”, such that historical harms live not only in the body of the individual, but in the “intergenerational affectivity of whole communities.”<sup>12</sup>

Enter “the wound” and its adjoining theories. The term is explicitly temporal in Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy, who consistently refers to the aspect of time his work privileges as caesura, break, cut, and wound. The priority he accords this temporal wound does not follow from a common-sense understanding of temporal anteriority, such as the observation that scarification follows from, and is a direct causal consequence of, a prior wound. Rather, Deleuze advocates a distinctively new understanding of both time and the relation between cause and effect in *Logic of Sense*. There the event is explicitly understood as an effect rather than a cause. A step away from Barad, he still insists on a more “ghostly” causality obtaining on the level of the virtual/transcendental, which also haunts and at least partly produces the actual. When Deleuze treats the event as synonymous with the wound, the wound is both temporal and transcendental, rather than an empirical event that happens. For him, the event never actually happens or is present; it is always that which has already happened or is going to happen. As such, his manner of conceptualising the relation between wound and scar is not one of empirical antecedent or spatial succession, and, unlike Hegel, there is no healing or overcoming of this transcendental wound, i.e., the future that is perennially to come, the pure past that never was.

---

<sup>9</sup> Karen Barad, *On Touching the Stranger Within – The Alterity that therefore I Am*, a lecture for “Hold Me Now. Feel and Touch in an Unread World Symposium,” curated by Jack Halberstam, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, March 24, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> James Williams. *Gilles Deleuze’s Philosophy of Time: A Critical Introduction and Guide*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh.

<sup>11</sup> Sara Ahmed is a British-Australian writer and scholar whose area of study includes the intersection of feminist theory, lesbian feminism, queer theory, critical race theory and postcolonialism.

<sup>12</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 33–4.

The concept of the wound is, for many thinkers in the field including Deleuze, not necessarily a negative concept, as can be seen with Michel Serres<sup>13</sup>, Donna Haraway<sup>14</sup> and Rosi Braidotti<sup>15</sup>, and their more, in this case, affirmative philosophy. They see the crack or wound, when it comes to the philosophy of matter, as opportunities to re-develop life, to develop and make things better. They emphasise that it is not the Cartesian or modern perspective of an ideal world with a wound that destroys the aforementioned ideal world. Or, one may ask, ideal for whom? Donna Haraway, for example, focuses on Freud's description of the three great historical wounds to the primary narcissism of the self-centred subject, who tries to hold panic at bay by the fantasy of human exceptionalism: First comes the Copernican wound that removed Earth itself from the centre of the cosmos, the second being the Darwinian, putting the human firmly in the world of other animals and critters, and the third, which is the Freudian, which posited an unconscious that undid the primacy of conscious processes. As such, the human-centred ideal world has more in store with Haraway's suggestion of a fourth wound, "which infolds organic and technological flesh and so melds that Great Divide as well."<sup>16</sup>

As I use the concept of 'the wound' as a thinking tool in my project, my position is a slightly different one. I have not focused the wound's positive aspects, seeing it as cracks that disturb the religious, humanist, and capitalist realities of today, neither do I focus on our ability to "live the wound" and become the person of our misfortunes, such as in both Deleuze's<sup>17</sup> and scholar Rick Dolphijn<sup>18</sup>'s description of poet Joë Bousquet and his ability to live his wound "beautifully"<sup>19</sup>.

It probably is going too far just claiming Deleuze's concept for myself. It just gets a bit too "rich" for me, this idea of using pain as a positive, "living the wound" and thus becoming better version of ourselves (implying the consequences of pain as a personal responsibility and a matter for the industry of self-development), without having spent time—a thick, rich, slow time—on what the pain is and was and how it is imbued in material entanglements. I hereby offer a formal apology to Deleuze, whom I obviously have not read enough of, and whose texts I find kind of difficult, and I understand the need for a positive outlook (well...), but this idea of pain being part of a progressive narrative is troublesome to me. As mentioned, I comprehend the need to focus on the hope of a better world, maybe I'm just too jaded, and what is another betrayal at this point. Betraying Deleuze and the hope of a better future sounds dramatic, as if I hold some kind of power over both, but perhaps a betrayal in this instance is just as it should be, at least in my world of staying with *my* trouble<sup>20</sup>. Eventually,

---

<sup>13</sup> Michel Serres was a French philosopher, theorist and writer. His works explore themes of science, time and death, and later incorporated prose.

<sup>14</sup> Donna Haraway is an American Professor Emerita in the History of Consciousness Department and Feminist Studies Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, United States. She is a prominent scholar in the field of science and technology studies, described in the early 1990s as a "feminist and postmodernist".

<sup>15</sup> Rosi Braidotti is a contemporary continental philosopher and feminist theorist. She is currently Professor Emerita at Utrecht University, where she has taught since 1988.

<sup>16</sup> Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet: 03 (Posthumanities)*, 12. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press; Illustrated edition, 2008, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 1990, London/NY: Bloomsbury Revelations, 153.

<sup>18</sup> Rick Dolphijn is Associate Professor of Media and Cultural Studies at Utrecht University and is an Honorary Associate Professor at Hong Kong University. He has an interest in transdisciplinary research at large and has published books such as *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* with Iris van der Tuin, 2012, Michigan Publishing, and *The Philosophy of Matter: A Meditation*, 2021, Bloomsbury Publishing.

<sup>19</sup> Rick Dolphijn, *The Philosophy of Matter: A Meditation*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021, 63, 100.

<sup>20</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, 16.



perhaps I can get there and believe in a more affirmative philosophy, but let me spend time on what feels unjust and physical and open wound-like, first. First things first.

Hopefully I have not lost you completely by now. To continue, I have hedged my bet by labelling my use of Deleuze's wound as a "thinking tool" in the project, if that helps. And I will explain myself further: my position is more in line with seeing "the wound" as a neutral or even negative entity, its "woundedness" a manifestation of the touch of matter throughout the times, which I evidently believe is a negative, as the rivers of pain have run so deep, and we are in such crises. As this wound traverses all, there is no escape (way to stay positive) and it is an embodied accompaniment to a lived life. What I share with Dolphijn, through his reading of Deleuze and the author Haruki Murakami<sup>21</sup> (amongst others), is a view of the wound as cutting through all forms of life: organic, non-organic, and inorganic. There is also a shared sense of the wound constantly transforming, and a question of: How do we cope with the visible and invisible undercurrents (of the wound) that are exposed to us in our everyday lives? I am interested in the (its) material traces on bodies through the times, I regard it as an embodied co-existence to our lives as they take place. In Murakami's words: "Every heart is broken"<sup>22</sup>, and furthermore: "One heart is not connected to another through harmony alone. They are, instead, linked deeply through their wounds. Pain is linked to pain, fragility to fragility."<sup>23</sup> In Murakami's writing(s), the wound is not a humanist idea (often presupposed when one thinks of the wound), instead he furthers a posthuman claim. As the wound exists as its own entity, it cracks itself through a series of bodies, making it a shared wound that realises itself in different ways upon the surfaces of life. The economic, social, and political realities upon which everything occurs, but it is rather inside what occurs that the event itself, or the purely expressed, as Deleuze calls it, happens.

Both Dolphijn and Deleuze focus on the wound not existing in time, or rather, it not taking place *in* time. As such, it is always already here. The wound is the resonances that make up the present, and immanently acts through its virtual impact on the present. Realising the history and the future of the body, the wound happens with the times, and as such, it introduces the present to the contemporary. The living present re-imagines our reliance on linear, chronological time, offering instead a dynamic engagement with temporality, one where the past is continually re-imagined in its present invocations. The metaphysical implications of such a move lie in its recognition that a living present is always a live present: it is an enactment of the processes of growth, change, movement, and touch that characterizes our human bodies (and more). And similar to sickness and health, the future and the past cannot exclude each other. Each of these processes is temporal not in its adherence to an externally imposed timeline, but to its own making of time as the becoming of materiality. A past whose material effects continue to act as living, changing forces on the present and on the future.

So where did this wound I am describing begin? It, of course, cannot have a starting point in time, as it exists *with* the times. But in describing injustices and calling for a new ethics and reworking of Western thought, and in their reflections with the body and its (dualist) markings, the feminist materialist field have (largely) used Cartesianism as their point of departure. Dualism as such (mind-body dualism in particular) is rethought anew in (feminist)

---

<sup>21</sup> Haruki Murakami is a Japanese writer. His novels, essays, and short stories have received numerous awards and his work has been translated into 50 languages.

<sup>22</sup> Dolphijn, *The Philosophy of Matter: A Meditation*, 92.

<sup>23</sup> Haruki Murakami, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, 2015, New York: Vintage Books, 259.

new materialisms through its political and ethical implications. This is by now so well embedded in discourse as well as all kinds of cultural expressions (told you I was a bit late to the table), but there is no avoiding French philosopher René Descartes<sup>24</sup> in this project. He is to be the main villain of feminist materialist theory, and even though this approach might be a tad simplistic, as much of Judaic-Christian thought also places the human atop a hierarchy, and, to continue, there was a rich history of thought in the West for him to build on. But he will do as the villain, he can be it, at least it is someone to push against in addition to those individuals of the top 1% elite that are currently causing pain for their own power and economic gains.

In writing about Descartes, the terms “Cartesian,” “mechanistic,” and “reductionist” are used interchangeably. All three terms refer to the scientific paradigm formulated by him in the seventeenth century, in which the material universe is seen as a machine and nothing but a machine. In his mechanistic conception of the world, all of nature works according to mechanical laws, and everything in the material world can be explained in terms of the arrangement and movements of its parts. This implies that one should be able to understand all aspects of complex structures—plants, animals, or the human body—by reducing them to their smallest constituent parts. This philosophical position is known as Cartesian reductionism.

Descartes was a substance dualist. Famously reported having three successive dreams during the night of November 10, 1619, that provided him with his mission in life, Descartes aimed to reform all knowledge, beginning with philosophy. According to himself, he set out to create something completely new, by rejecting the previous work of the Greeks and the Medieval ages and starting at what he saw as the absolute beginning. He asked the question “Of what can I be certain?” His answer was that he was certain that he was thinking, but uncertain if his body existed and thought there could be a demon creating the illusion for him. To continue, he believed that there were two kinds of substance: matter (such as the body), of which the essential property is that it is spatially extended; and mind, of which the essential property is that it thinks. Humans (but not all humans) were thinking things, Nature was full of extended things. Descartes is, as such, attributed to have helped codify a key idea for capitalism: separation between Society and Nature. The era’s ruling classes saw most human beings—women, peoples of colour, Indigenous Peoples—as extended, not thinking, beings. This means that Descartes’s philosophical abstractions could be used as practical instruments of domination.

Personally, I have wondered how it all began, how his body came to potentially be “an illusion.” This is the foundation that the rest of his philosophy rests upon. How did it come about, this feeling of the body as secondary? If he suffered shame, pain, and/or illness, it would make perfect sense for him to think about the body as a demon-created illusion, but in my experience these bodily states also bring a real feeling of being *in* the body, of being reminded, through pain and resistance, of actually inhabiting it. There is a heaviness present that brings certainty. So, from the get-go, these thoughts could be the thoughts of a young

---

<sup>24</sup> René Descartes (1596–1650) was a French philosopher, mathematician, scientist and lay Catholic. Cartesianism is the philosophical and scientific traditions derived from his writings. Metaphysically and epistemologically, Cartesianism is a species of rationalism, because Cartesians hold that knowledge—indeed, certain knowledge—can be derived through reason from innate ideas.

man whose body has not yet turned against. Or his yearning could be exactly the opposite, that the wish for the body to separate itself from the mind was motivated by a yearning to get some control and/or relief. Pondering this and examining what I could find of his health history, all I could find were episodes of “exploding head syndrome”, and as a migraine-sufferer, I think I know what it means, but apparently his was a kind of benign and relatively common parasomnia. And as such, it seems said parasomnia was what contributed to the “divine event” of the successive dreams that provided him with his mission and his philosophy.

As to his more direct motivation to separate body and mind, what is mentioned in academia is a religious one: in his Letter to the Sorbonne published at the beginning of his seminal work, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes states that his purpose in showing that the human mind or soul is distinct from the body is to refute “irreligious people.” Descartes goes on to explain how, because of this, these people will not pursue mortal virtue without the prospect of an afterlife with rewards for virtue and punishments for vice. It is clear that the advances of Copernicus, Galilei and Francis Bacon posed a serious problem for Christian dogma and its dominion over the natural world, and Descartes’ dualism of matter and mind was a solution to the problem this created. In one swoop, God’s substance-divinity was protected, while empirical science was given reign over nature-as-mechanism—something ungodly and therefore free game. Nature was thereby “drained” of her inner life, and humankind was faced with a world of inanimate, meaningless matter, upon which it could project its ideas.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault<sup>25</sup> in *The Order of Things* (1966) termed it a shift in ‘episteme’ (roughly, a system of knowledge). The Western psyche, Foucault argued, had once been typified by “resemblance and similitude.” In this episteme, knowledge of the world was derived from participation and analogy (the “prose of the world”, as he called it), and the psyche was essentially extroverted and world-involved. But after the bifurcation of mind and nature, an episteme structured around “identity and difference” came to possess the Western psyche. The episteme that now prevailed, was solely concerned with “truth as correspondence” and “knowledge as accuracy of representations.”

---

And now of course the term “new materialism” is out of fashion, anyway, and yes, I have always been slow that way, and, to continue, the use of the term “the wound” may be completely *out there*, and being a white, Scandinavian woman dealing with colonialism (see, e.g., the artwork *The Goblets* [*Chronic Fatigue, Dementia, Major Depressive Disorder, Inflammation-Induced Anorexia, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder & Generalised Anxiety Disorder*], and *Patches of Standing Water*], both 2022) is of course off base, in lack of a better expression. But I could not avoid referring to colonial times if I were to relay the entangled narratives of pain, so there it is, part of it all, as all things are in their interactions. I try my utmost best to be respectful, but of course that’s not enough really, *trying* to be respectful is such a contradiction in itself, and who knows how it lands as we continue on. Although most of the time my art is not seen by that many, anyway, so it seems more of a theoretical problem, offending others, causing violence. Even at venues seen by massive amounts of people, such as the Venice Biennale, I was not presented with

---

<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault was a French philosopher, historian of ideas, writer, political activist, and literary critic. Foucault’s theories primarily address the relationship between power and knowledge, and how they are used as a form of social control through societal institutions.

any kind of discussion or reading of my work in which it was deemed offensive, even though I presented artworks where named commercial brands were presented as having caused pain and inflammation and what more, epigenetic changes. There was no controversy, not one brand offended, or newspaper interested in this subject, really, no audience questions or conversations. There was just a surprising rush of collector interest, the cliché of weapon dealers and assistants and suitcases of cash and it made me nauseous even though I had a baby and could potentially live from the sale for a long time, and that mattered too. It would mean I could give my daughter the best nutrition and that always counts for something.

Of course, food bought by weapon dealer's money carries that, whatever it is of negative amplifications and entanglements, at least it offers up a mother's affected nervous system and possibly stress-induced inflammation, resulting in a less satisfactory meal all around. I know nothing is simple, and all is betrayal somewhere somehow. What health is, is another important issue when it comes to the issue of the human body, because what creates health or illness is such a complex and interwoven environmental and multigenerational thing, its accomplices the concepts of "intra-action" and "the wound," amongst others.

---

The first artworks made during the fellowship were large scale textile works, *Electron Sea* and *Density Absorbing Photons* (both 2016). Textiles have been an important part of my production as they bridged the gap between drawings and sculpture. And through dyeing with plant material, nuts, metals, and minerals, I learned so much about touching and affecting and what kind of traces we can leave behind and how the result of a touch is a different one each time. My hands were part of the process and beet-stained hands counted for something, I was part, and not just describing a surface, as I did with the drawings of my previous existence. With stained hands I could experiment differently with touch and traces, I could think and write differently. Somewhere in the process of making I wrapped textiles around air filled bottles and submerged them in the boiling dyes, catching traces of the air in the shape of pale bubble markings as the air fought its way up and up. It was for sure a start, as it created curiosity towards the movement and restlessness of materials and why electrons seem so excitable and why and what materials had the most excitable electrons. Eventually copper became a favourite material, as it is so malleable and impressionable for touch and temperature and moist and whatever comes its way, it gets affected by life in ways relatable. *Electron Sea* and *Density Absorbing Photon* were made dyeing various textiles with copper in various forms: powdered, cut in pieces, stitched onto the fabric, in baths with different vinegar solutions etc. Working with copper this way also was a way of being with a material in different phases/stages and seeing its transformation stain. Copper is also part of the body and is a creator of both health and illness. As all things are, but still. Simply put, as a mineral it helps the body make red blood cells and keeps nerve cells and the immune system healthy and helps form collagen, a key part of bones and connective tissue. Both too much and too little copper can affect the body, and especially how the brain works. Impairments have been linked to Menkes, Wilson's and Alzheimer's disease, amongst others.

At this time, the feminist scholar Karen Barad's<sup>26</sup> writings became part of my reading material as well as the more general knowledge from the field of quantum mechanics

---

<sup>26</sup> American feminist theorist and quantum physicist, currently Professor of Feminist Studies, Philosophy, and History of Consciousness at the University of California at Santa Cruz, known for her development of agential realism as a conceptual framework of viewing the world: entities emerge from their interactions rather than pre-

(beginner's level), and as I was thinking about electrons and the atoms inner parts and the more I delved into it, the more of a boy's club this field of knowledge really seemed to be, Barad apart. She didn't seem to be a respected representative in the physics department at the university here, or in the physics discussion groups I would enter online, students and lecturers alike seemed to think she was more of an odd bird who might have an actual degree, but had not published any *real* papers within the field, which seems the crucial bit, and belonged to the department of feminist studies, which held a very suspicious group of people with wishy-washy ideas and extra time on their hands. Just like artists, really. And up against that kind of resistance, I retracted and did what I do, I made a textile work where the electron was also a body and skin and grief and very different from the 80s-inspired electric blue computer animated 3D drawings to be found online. I imagined a group of "boys" discussing their visuals and deciding to create them as disco as they could without knowing what disco was, not that I do either. But to create the electron as foreign and separate and high tech, alienates so many of us, it just does. To think of and to describe the brain as a computer and DNA as bringing forth the explanation of our lives (hello 1990s), does too. In my view, these are the theories of people more familiar with numbers and machines than relations and yes it is a very biased and prejudiced assumption, but I still happen to believe it to hold *some* truth with its entangled untruths. There being no real reflection upon what images can do, and what kind of message they hold (outside of the art departments and schools), is a continuous problem, and it stresses me out even though I should be enthusiastic to enter those kinds of discussions. But I'm not, I am shy with all kinds of dark undercurrents, and I am sorry to say that the actual discussion is for someone else. The artwork I can create, although those with whom I disagree may never see it—but it is a defence I can muster, the only one, to bring in reflections of bodies and touch and entanglements and darkness and relations and grief and to make an actual physical presence that is a sculpture and even though it may not actually *do* anything, especially in this regard, it is still there, in the material world, as a physicality.

And as this was part of the motivation of creating these works, I still shudder with betrayal and fear when I write this, because the work is not this, and should never be seen so reduced and I don't know how to explain it, the artwork, instead I give you this childish rant when what I want is to relay something about malleability and touch, and metals being the softest of all materials, somehow, and my process with it, and how bodies are full of metals and copper and disease and the poetry of being immersed in an existence of mutual touches. These artworks are the size of my body, they are literally as high and as broad as I can reach, they are hand dyed and stitched and tactile and matte and silky and shiny and they stood in my studio a long time, a peach and pink and brown presence that was a physicality that counted for something.

---

Not being done by a long shot, and as inner images of hands sinking through (a variety of matter) kept coming up, I created the series *Mineral Breath, Metal Mouth* (1–5), 2016. Created from a range of materials such as clay and copper and salts and silks and rust, many of whom were part of the human body but also to be found outside of it, everything in the piece touched by everything else throughout the production process, and at the time, this was an important step in the thinking through of what bodies are and can be, a train of thought that I cannot escape and continuously spend my time on. And I found quartz to be a somehow

---

existing them. Barad's Ph.D. is in theoretical particle physics and quantum field theory. Barad held a tenured appointment in a physics department before moving into more interdisciplinary spaces.

skin already, as it is abundant on the surface (skin) of the earth, and I chose rose quartz more specifically as it already has a mixed content of metals that could mean it could be classified differently (if one wanted, and I did), as previously mentioned classification is something I'm into, and silk as a material belongs to skins, second skins for sure, and the iron of shale and the patina of copper shows up as their surface skin and protection, and the materials chosen all stained each other and some sunk through each other, as they should, and I wrote something about the hand and all these touches at the time, and I will reference it here (just to have given something over):

*...Skin upon skin, the materials flow like liquid through each other's surface, and leave part of their own being, their rhythm, their structure, their charge. Copper, salts, plants, and acids integrate with the textile threads, graze them, grow around and within them, leave residue, stay residue or continue on towards integration...*

*...When two meet, there is a material hunger, a craving for equilibrium, for a neutral charge, that allows its core to extend, to spread in the sea as waves from a stone throw. The diffraction patterns have their own colours, their own music, and their own identities. And they are, as we are, a multitude. An open and fluctuating presence...*

To continue with some specifics, in *Mineral Breath, Metal Mouth (4)*, a piece of clothing, a silk shirt dyed with plant material, was soaked with copper over a six-month period. The visible result is that the silk, already changed by plant materials, in my view, "took on" the temporary identity of copper with its ingrained blue copper salts. Furthermore, in *Mineral Breath, Metal Mouth (1)*, another silk top, dyed with different materials such as metal rust (iron), avocado skins, salts, and crushed clay, is sinking into beeswax mixed with rust and clay pigments.

*Mineral Breath, Metal Mouth (2)* included a small electron, a reworked visual of one, again. Looking further, I had found additional information that confirmed (not that Barad's theories needs to be confirmed by others for me to concur, but still) my choice to think and create a depiction of the electron anew. The astrophysicist Adam Frank<sup>27</sup> writes in his text *Minding Matter*: "When I was a young physics student I once asked a professor: 'What's an electron?' ... 'An electron,' the professor said, 'is that to which we attribute the properties of the electron.'"<sup>28</sup> This time around I used small pieces of wood found on the river bed, as I wanted to make a depiction that was organic in its growth, and to use a material that had already been reworked by another (the wood by the water), and then again reworked by me as it was cast as a copper alloy. Along the process I read different theories of water, starting with feminist scholar Astrida Neimanis<sup>29</sup> hydrofeminism, whereas the idea of a radical connectivity was emphasized: "...To rethink embodiment as watery stirs up considerable trouble for dominant Western and humanist understandings of embodiment, where bodies are

---

<sup>27</sup> Adam Frank is an American physicist, astronomer, and writer. His scientific research has focused on computational astrophysics with an emphasis on star formation and late stages of stellar evolution. His work includes studies of exoplanet atmospheres and astrobiology.

<sup>28</sup> Adam Frank, *Minding Matter*, aeon.co, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Astrida Neimanis is author of *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (2017) and known for developing the concept of hydrofeminism. She is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies as well as Key Researcher with the Sydney Environment Institute, both at the University of Sydney, on Gadigal Land, in Australia. Her research interests include posthuman feminisms, experimental writing methods, nature/culture, water, weather and climate change, environmental humanities, environmental justice and anti-colonial solidarity, embodiment, and feminist STS, and is particularly interested in the common and queer intersections of these things.

figured as discrete and coherent individual subjects, and as fundamentally autonomous... As bodies of water we leak and seethe, our borders always vulnerable to rupture and renegotiation... The flow and flush of water sustain our own bodies, but also connect them to other bodies, to other worlds beyond our human selves<sup>30</sup>....”.

---

*Mattering Waves*, a sculptural series produced in 2017, was another work dealing with the notion of touch and the materialisation of the human body. Here, each sculpture again went through a combination of reactive material processes, aiming to shift (or add to) the previously found material identity. As these works came along, I was learning the ropes, and I wanted to follow each material process as far as I could, and to be part as much as possible. I ended up including human DNA in the work, and as such, I took part in more ways than one (the DNA used was extracted from my mouth):

In *Mattering Waves (3)*, human DNA extracted from cells in the mouth was added to a mixture of liquid polymer, soil, and dust in a glass vessel. After a while the liquid mixture started to react and “boil”, i.e., grow/expand, inside the glass. Throughout this process the different materials used became suffused and took on a different form, structure, and identity, and once the process seemingly came to a halt, presented itself as “one” material with a new surface, weight, and density. Being part of the material process, I sought to explore growth as a coming-into-existence through complex connectivity and touch, and this was a deep touch, the deepest, my mouth immersed in polymer plastic and shiny mica and soil and dust and the tales of its growth and expansion.

Why the mouth? The mouth, like a port, is an opening and a place of first contact with the outside. We are still being taught that the digestive system is a tube from mouth to anus with food passing through, although more information of microbes and permeability has been added to the mix as of late, so let’s hope for its growth and expansion (the mix). And it is about time we add more, heaps more, of connections and relations and entanglements and such, while the stomach works through the substance offered, prepping it to be radically transformed. The stomach is the place where what we ingest becomes part of our bodies: substances are slowly transformed by muscular mechanics and chemistry and integrated in what we are (of continuously shaped material becomings).

---

Another work with more focused processes of touch, more experimentation and real-life handling of glass, metals, plastics etc., came about right after. I called it *What Oscillates*, 2017, and thought about electric waves and streams and touch and violence as oscillation. This work is also a sort of shameful work, as I ended up losing myself in the task I was given. The curators asked if I could focus on the material side of the virtual and the digital technologies and I accepted, trying to see it as an inspirational framework for focusing on a “hidden” materiality and all its connected narratives. I wanted to support the curators in their push against an immaterial understanding of the virtual, and they seemed glamorous and worldly, and the exhibition would travel. Later on, I had a studio visit with the director of Rhizome, an art organization dedicated to born-digital art and culture, and when I showed

---

<sup>30</sup> Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, London/NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017, 2.

him this work he could not withhold his boredom as he had seen so many of these for such a long time. Why he was doing a studio visit with me was after all a mystery, as I had never made a born-digital artwork in my life, and could not if my life depended on it, but someone had spoken to someone and connected us anyhow the way such things work.

The sculpture that finally came about as *What Oscillates*, was one of effort and actual love and I strove to create a work that spoke about the nature of touch and material phases and connections more than the materiality of the virtual. It was all about showing the complexity of the material used, opening up for the poetry and intricacy that unfold. Displaying materiality as an active and interactive force, the materials were shown in different phases and relationships. I experimented with each material as to understand its limitations and “aspirations” (what does a material want?).

Nevertheless, the curator statement<sup>31</sup> ended up like this:

Materiality and how it relates to touch is at the core of Ane Graff's work. In her hanging sculpture, *What Oscillates* (2017), Graff examines the material properties of the virtual by drawing our attention to the raw materials that make our technologies possible. Through a poetic fusion of the natural and synthetic, she blurs how we define the distinction between the analogue and the digital, pushing against an immaterial understanding of the virtual. Displaying materiality as an active and interactive force, the materials are shown in different phases and relationships. For example, copper, the ancient chemical element now ubiquitous in communications infrastructure, appears in the shape of salt growths and shimmering crystal formations. The sculptures call attention to the alchemical forces at play in our daily lives, where objects are transformed by the deep time of geology and the present-day touch of the human hand. For, behind every glossy screen is the reality not only of its basic physical components, but of a complex, interrelated material reality leading us either towards a new understanding of matter, or towards a continued radicalization of the materiality of our bodies and in nature- in short: towards ecological disaster.

This is what I wrote myself:

*What oscillates in me is the body of another.*

---

There was also a text, *The Bodily Life*, 2017, that came about around this time, entering a landscape of autoimmunity and the body being an enemy, simply put. Autoimmunity was a step away from what I was working with at the time, but not too far, the idea of the body attacking itself belonged to the questions of what a body is or does, and what the self is and does, and, to continue, it was something I was living at the time. Illness narratives usually have startling beginnings—the fall at the supermarket, the doctor’s call etc. Not here. I became ill the way Hemingway says you go broke: “gradually and then suddenly<sup>32</sup>.” My “gradually” had perhaps lasted my whole life, who is to say, especially as the symptoms waxed and waned, and I had gotten used to carrying a resisting body around, anyway, so heavy. The concept of medical diagnosis felt awkward and arbitrary to me, after all they change with the knowledge system(s) they are part of. Not that I didn’t take it seriously, I did, and I took my pills, but there is the fact that a diagnosis begins in the middle, with a symptom, and there are chunks (of life) missing, as well as the social and environmental structures surrounding the human body through its lifespan. And furthermore, the binary of

---

<sup>31</sup> Mounted on the wall next to the work, but also printed in the catalogue *Myths of the Marble*, edited by Alex Klein and Milena Hoegsberg, Sternberg Press, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, Book II, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 136.



health-illness seems insufficient in describing an individual's "bodily life" as the one—in terms of being binary—excludes the other. Scholar Rick Dolphijn's<sup>33</sup> words seem a better fit in this instance: "... sickness does not exclude health and vice versa. There are always a thousand tiny sicknesses and a thousand tiny healths at work. Sometimes health takes over, other times sickness. But neither one disappears."<sup>34</sup> And this is how we are, aren't we, filled to the brim with everything in-between the absolutes, or simultaneously inhabiting both. Our bodies well and aching, our minds content and broken-hearted all at once.

Either way, the issue of autoimmune disease could be found to provoke a category "crisis"—or category "crisis". At least if one really wanted to, and I did. It seemed to me that autoimmunity could be seen as an issue of identity, as the notion of the body's self-attack somehow implied a new and changed understanding of "the self", and a changed distinction between "self" and "non-self". The body had gotten its "self" mixed up and in so doing had violated the categorical imperative not only of immunology but of most Western epistemology: self is self, and not-self is not-self. Self versus other is what we have been taught, and furthermore, that the primary function of the immune system is to protect the host (the self) from invasion by foreign organisms (the non-self). It was scientist Elie Metchnikoff's<sup>35</sup> discovery in 1881 that labelled immunity as a form of biological self-defence against intruders. From a conjunction of a starfish larvae, a thorn, and a microscope, he deduced an entirely new way to perceive how organisms coexist and thereby ushers biological "immunity" into the world as an organismic form of "defence." Over the last hundred years or so, the idea of immunity has passed from his lab into our self-understanding, so that today we take for granted many assumptions on which this understanding leans. We accept the idea that our immune system ought to defend us against illnesses. And while few of us have any deep understanding of our complexities, we generally presume that the immune system represents the front line in our incessant battle with the hostile forces of disease. However, immunity is not a natural choice of images for our ability to live as organisms among other organisms of various sizes and scales—neither is defence. Instead, both terms derive from the ways that Western legal and political thinking accounts for the complex, difficult, and at times violent manner that humans live among other humans. It seems modern presumptions about personhood and collectivity saturate both immunity and defence.

Underlying this formulation, the autonomy of the individual as the self-possessor of its "own" cellular property grounds both the theory and the politics of immune function as it has emerged over the last century or so. It is a significant one, since it ensconces a foundational assumption of Western political rationality—that is, to be a person means to have a body—in and as "human nature". Part of biological immunity's success, both as a medical concept and a cultural explanation, derives then from its function as a "hybrid" that naturalises the social relations of property ownership as a physiological imperative. Conversely, autoimmunity becomes anathema not just because it wreaks havoc in human bodies but also because it confounds the political ontology that underlies our entire way of life. Perhaps that is also why

---

<sup>33</sup> Rick Dolphijn is Associate Professor of Media and Cultural Studies at Utrecht University and is an Honorary Associate Professor at Hong Kong University. He has an interest in transdisciplinary research at large and has published books such as *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies* with Iris van der Tuin, 2012, Michigan Publishing, and *The Philosophy of Matter: A Meditation*, 2021, Bloomsbury Publishing.

<sup>34</sup> Rick Dolphijn, *The Philosophy of Matter: A Meditation*, 2021, London/NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 92-93.

<sup>35</sup> Elie Metchnikoff was a Russian and French zoologist best known for his pioneering research in immunology. He and Paul Ehrlich were jointly awarded the 1908 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine "in recognition of their work on immunity".

the concept of autoimmunity continues to provoke if not horror at least misunderstanding, despite all efforts to the contrary.

As to why autoimmunity occurs, and why it has become so prevalent in our time (I am not the only one afflicted, autoimmune disease is now being diagnosed so frequently that some medical experts are calling it an epidemic), there is almost universal agreement among scientists and physicians that the environmental toxins and chemicals to which we are increasingly exposed are interfering with the immune system (and its ability to distinguish self from non-self). We are experiencing an epidemic of autoimmune and neurodegenerative diseases that can be called "environmental diseases" if one so wishes, as the dramatic changes in our environment are causing changes in our bodies (the latter part I mention so much it has become a cliché in my practice, but it still holds truth).

In a workshop report titled “Autoimmune Disease – Modern Diseases” from 2017, the European Parliament’s Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) summarised the presentations and discussions held, siting that the aim of the workshop was to provide background, technical information, and advice to their members of the on the latest findings and trends in the field of autoimmune diseases. This report was an interesting but uncomfortable read, as it fluctuated between emotional outpourings (of Lupus patients), a general sense of alarm in terms of future costs, an expert—the gastroenterologist professor Lerner’s<sup>36</sup>—focus on intercellular tight junctions, and lastly closing remarks stressing the importance of “health in all policies” with no commitment to anything of the kind.

Professor Lerner’s work on intercellular tight junctions continues to be interesting in the sense of the body being leaky and porous and not at all what we were taught. To explain, intercellular tight junctions is a complex mechanism between two cells whose membranes join, stopping toxins from entering the body. Several environmental factors from pathogens to nutrients to lifestyle factors can either breach the tight junction integrity or increase intestinal permeability. The term “intestinal permeability” describes the control of material passing from inside the gastrointestinal tract through the cells lining the gut wall, into the rest of the body. The intestine normally exhibits *some* permeability, as otherwise nutrients would not be able to pass through the gut, all the while a barrier function is maintained to keep potentially harmful substances (such as antigens) from leaving the intestine and migrating to the body more widely. But the issue at hand is something other than the “normal” permeability, it is an increased intestinal permeability or hyperpermeability, meaning that the gut lets more than water and nutrients through—it “leaks.”

Leaky gut syndrome is a theory that intestinal permeability is not only a symptom of gastrointestinal disease but an underlying cause that develops independently. If your intestinal barrier is impaired, it may be letting toxins into your bloodstream. These toxins may trigger an inflammatory response that then again can manifest as various diseases. In studies, it has been found that a lot of “nutrients” can impact the tight junction integrity, leading to leaky gut. Prof. Lerner turned to the possible environmental factors leading to the development of an autoimmune disease, noting that the microbiome can be affected by many different factors such as diet and food additives to mode of delivery (C-section vs natural delivery) to hygiene to age, all affecting intestinal permeability. He also referred to seven

---

<sup>36</sup> Prof. Aaron LERNER, trained gastroenterologist, nutritionist and senior Scientist, B. Rappaport School of Medicine, Technion-Israel Institute of Technology and Aesku-KIPP Institute, Wendelsheim, Germany.

food additives responsible for increasing numbers of autoimmune diseases, noting that, for example, nanotechnology can result in a significant increase in such diseases as well. He then expanded further on gluten and presented an overview of how gluten affects gut events, and the microbiome. Lerner noted that there were a lot of immune effects, including stimulation of well-known pathways for autoimmunity. He also noted that wheat eaten in previous times, was only 10% of gliadin proteins, compared to the gluten consumed today which is 80%, making it much more immunogenic.

During his presentation, he also explained the role of horizontal gene transfer, which can be a cause for concern when humans consume foods with bacteria which then transfers genetic material that can trigger an autoimmune disease (for humans, genetic transfer is vertical, but for bacteria, genes can be transferred horizontally). If bacteria survive in a difficult situation and produce certain proteins, this genetic material can be transferred to other bacteria, resulting in large populations creating these proteins. This becomes an issue given the extensive use of probiotics used by the food industry. This means there are virulent genes, such as antibiotic resistance, in the probiotics, which are transferred to our microbiome. He noted that this has only been happening for the last 20–40 years, but there are various ways this can happen, from genetically manipulated bacteria/viruses to synthetic biology/“living pills”, and the result is chronic modern human diseases. The connection between bacteria and human health/unhealth is something I will discuss further in other projects, such as in the work *Untitled (Dysbiosis)*, 2018).

In the end I decided to perform my text, *The Bodily Life*, myself, although I had no experience in performing previously, and I did so at the Norwegian Sculpture Biennale of 2017, at the Vigeland Museum in Oslo. Afterwards, it felt to me as though I had communicated something original and also that there were actual (singsong) melodies running in the text worth listening to, but the ensuing review was horrifying and viewing the documentation of the performance made me realise that what I felt inside was not coming through, and that the text was perhaps too complicated to be performed, that at least it should have been done by someone professional. At the time I felt that I had to represent, myself, that it had to be my body, my face with the bags of autoimmunity underneath my eyes and these sort of lame sad gothic clothes that were there, representing. That the position of a sick woman could matter in the macho Vigeland Museum with its, in my opinion, semi-fascist nudes (most of the controversies surrounding Gustav Vigeland, the sculptor whose work the museum was created for, relates to his supposed Nazi, or at least fascist, sympathies<sup>37</sup>). And perhaps it could have worked, but the biennale was full of artists who were glamorously doing well and who generated a different kind of buzz than the introvert tale of autoimmunity could. It is interesting to me, though, that my voice didn't come through, as this is a side effect of a low functioning thyroid (and autoimmune thyroid disease), and as such, the piece may actually have fulfilled its purpose, to relay the autoimmune body in a state of being under attack.

After all, it might have been an actual success.

---

---

<sup>37</sup> His work has been compared to that of Arno Beker, whose sculptures of the idealized human form emphasized physical perfection and lacked any individuality and were intended to exalt Nazi doctrine and showcase the “superiority” of Aryan peoples.

Mixing furniture with urea pollution, the chair sculpture *Red Tide*, 2017, is my most Xmas decoration-looking sculpture to date. Afterwards (and along the way), I somehow got known for my crystallisation of objects, and entered a space of “mixed messages” with Xmas decoration-looking work and sculptures of diseases no one had heard of. It was a weird space to inhabit, still is. At some point someone asked me to create an artwork for the Norwegian queen, but they didn’t want to offend her by bringing in a work referencing a disease, and this was the first I’d heard about the «darkness» of my work being offensive, really. The «lightness» of my work and the “glossy” aesthetics of it all was criticised more often, mostly by peers. These different lanes seemed to attract very different people and consequences, and I am still living them, the consequences, as one does. The question of if I have more crystallised objects for sale, is one of true discomfort, but also being seen as the disease-obsessed artist whose work is borderline private, has been disquieting. These questions extend from the artworks as much as they linger within, and point to the intertwined undercurrents of both people-pleasing behaviours and a deep need for authenticity, and how the two play out through one another.

Back to the actual sculpture at hand, the crystallised and disease-themed *Red Tide*, and how and if it bridges the gap. For a long time, I had carried this inner image of an apartment or interior also being a body, or how the two could fuse. It may have been elicited by the artist Heidi Bucher’s comment in a 1981 documentary: “Rooms are shells; rooms are skin.”<sup>38</sup> It seemed pressing to create artworks from this mindset, perhaps it was caused by what seemed her ability to change something, perceptions, ideas, you name it.

There was also a serious question in there, namely what happens to the notion of “home” in a time where everything we know is changing (due to ecological changes): our bodies as well as our immediate and distant surroundings are being shaped anew (as in the case of autoimmune diseases), if we welcome the change or not. That said, I have to backtrack: the information I offer up is not the work, it informs the work, but is clearly not it. So the use of the term “ecological changes” is difficult, as it is almost used up—the term—at this time, in this culture, while still holding truth, and using these kinds of words, without giving off some kind of feeling of being a research-reading parrot (no offense to parrots), is a challenge.

To continue, and simply put, I was thinking about what we would be “sitting in,” and thus I made a chair. I chose the material of urea as I was interested in researching monoculture and nutrition and urea pollution as a part of a complex web of what agriculture looks like in our time. And idea of creating urea crystals intrigued me, I was looking forward to working with salt structures that grew and moved and would turn either light and white or yellow and droopy depending on the humidity levels in the space.

As I take you back to the subject informing the work, having had my rant already, it is clear that the use of artificial fertilizers ends up making the soil passive and dependent, as it is fed on what acts like sugar (energy-rich, easily accessible, but short-lived). These fertilizers create rapid growth but doesn’t necessarily allow the plant itself to be as micronutrient-dense. It so follows that although we eat twice as many vegetables as we did in the 1970s, we take in less and less vitamins, minerals and trace elements. Since micronutrients are part of so many functions in the cells, it’s difficult to gauge what the deficiency actually results in, no direct causality there: it could be expressed through/result in any kind of illness.

---

<sup>38</sup> Also in: Amy Sherlock, *Heidi Bucher*, Frieze Reviews, 05 March 2014

Chemical fertilizers equally constitute a threat to our health as the nutrients end up in oceans, lakes, and other waterways. Compounds that are actually dangerous, like phosphorus-based fertilizers, become part of the food we eat. The leaks of urea nitrogen fertilizers create what is called “red tides” (hence the title of the work), which are outbreaks of Domoic acid-producing red algae in the oceans. Domoic acid is a neurotoxin that in large amounts can cause poisoning and death. It is taken in by organisms that live or feed on algae like shellfish, sardines, and anchovies. Because these compounds aren't digested, they accumulate within the animals that ingest them, and become more and more concentrated as they pass along the food chain. Top predators will have the highest concentrations of the toxin because they have eaten the most prey that has been contaminated. It causes problems with the brain and memory for birds, mammals, and, humans, and can possibly also lead to seizures and death.

The environmental theme continued with the sculpture *Bedrock Imagery*, 2017, another chair covered with a mix of materials, prevalently foodstuffs. Reflecting upon our time's ambivalent relationship to food and health, the chair is covered with a mixture of artificial food products considered to be hazardous to health (but at the same time quite common (e.g., cake decorations full of E-numbers), and health food products that are considered to promote health, leaving them to “react” to each other and to compose new structures. *Bedrock Imagery* reflects upon how we “fertilize” and change the composition of the soil in our time by supplying new and different kinds of consumer products and foods into the biogeochemical cycles. It also contains metals and plastics and other materials we handle on a regular basis. Altogether, this mix of materials embody the waste materials of our time, piled together and “fertilizing” the soil in what seems to be a continuous material experiment including our bodies.

---

The performance *The Fall*, 2017, titled after a written text produced the same year, went from a planned “solo” performance to a collective reading somewhere in the production process. The truth is I simply did not dare to insert myself in the performance the same way as in *The Bodily Life* at the Vigeland Museum and decided to include the audience in the reading of the text. Throughout the evening of the event, a group of fifteen participants were admitted to a darkened theatre hall every half hour. Once inside they sat down in a circle of chairs and were given a handout of the text along with a small stone or mineral. The stones or minerals were from my studio, they were one of a kind and had been heated in a ceramic oven to bring out stronger shades and colours, revealing their individual content of metals such as iron and copper. The text was read aloud sentence by sentence, one participant at a time, in a circular movement. The timbre of all the different voices told the tale of a group of people hovering above ground, reflecting upon the nature of matter and their bodies. The hands of the readers were holding the stones, their heaviness a supposed grounding and connecting factor to the text with its description of a clay-scape.

Some readers took the stones with them, and although this was unintended, it was a reassuring turn of events. For such a long time, the image of hands displaying, hands that in a persisting movement holds the objects out for the world to see, has been another one of those inner images that have followed me around. It takes me back to what is considered the “first” collectors in the fifteenth century, those existing before museums, and their intension to understand and reorganise the material world in ways that made sense to them, especially at a time where categorical boundaries were yet to be defined. I relate to the need to think through objects, and, furthermore, I relate to the magical thinking of organising all whites with whites

or reds in order of nuance to see if it actually could change something. If the god of the time would listen or if it would matter in other ways, change their life somehow. Or if not, offer some kind of purpose.

And—before you intersect—yes, these were the ones eventually robbing the colonies of their extravagances and exotic objects, and as such, their collecting and reorganising was a highly problematic one and not one to relate to, even though I hopelessly do (to the latter).

---

2018 was the year of an unsuccessful work that in retrospect meant a lot, *Untitled (Dysbiosis)*, although how it was shown horrified me. The thinking process had to do with microbiology and disease and identity, and somehow I was entering something of a truth, for me. But at the time I dared not take the plunge with a sculptural work, and what was displayed became painful in the wrong way, and in the end I literally threw mud on the sculpture to create some kind of discord, and this work haunts me still. But the thinking around it and what grew inside throughout the process was and is important, to me, and these days I can somehow breathe whilst thinking through the work's individual components. It could have been a violent work in the right kind of way, a complex questioning of the self, of brain functioning and blood brain barriers, of memory, health and unhealth, and what we are and could be if not touched. But I dared not, courage can be such a finite commodity.

The production process began with the creation of Winogradsky columns in the form of glass bottles. Such columns are made from sediment and water added to a clear container together with sources of carbon and sulphur. Naturally occurring microbes then begin to establish geochemical gradients in the form of coloured bands of red, purple, and black inside the column based on their metabolic strategies (nutritional needs and environmental tolerances). The columns are a device for culturing a large diversity of microorganisms, such as different species of bacteria, cyanobacteria, and algae. Adding individual materials to the mix always affects the columns' environment and thus microbial growth, composition, and diversity, and is easily observed as the colour and width of the bacterial segments change. So once the columns were made, I added such common pollutants such as copper, fluoride, chromium, aluminium, and antibiotics to each individual glass bottle (column). The last one remained the "control," and was used as a point of comparison against which the others were measured.

The title, *Untitled (Dysbiosis)*, was intentionally vague, as I dared not, and dysbiosis was a term connecting some dots (it referred both to a gut dysbiosis and a dysbiosis of the soil and hinted towards a disruption). A while in, I started to think of the Winogradsky-columns (the bottles) as individual "bodies" and "minds" and was contemplating having the work tell the stories of six women and one man with chronic diseases, the soil taken from where they lived or grew up. The title would be "Woman (47), Man, (83), Woman (34)" etc., or perhaps the names of disease states, I'm still not sure, but either way I didn't dare at the time and that happens, too. I had ordered a Plexiglas desk for the bottles to stand on, together with an aquatic growth light supplying the needed light waves for certain of the bacterial colonies to develop. But when I placed the bottles atop the desk, the desk itself was too large and stiff and ghastly, and with the bottles and lamp atop, the shape suddenly morphed into something of a candled Plexiglas birthday cake. Horror.

In the heat of the moment, I then hurriedly began to create sculptures out of a few objects I had brought along (such as a shoe crystallised with aluminium salts) together with powders of

soil/sand/dried clay and the pollutants used in the bottles, to be placed inside floor-based drawers from the desk. The museum surprisingly allowed me to display them this way, completely open and without a security guard in the room, and nothing happen during the time the work was on view, but I would not leave a work with dried and powdered toothpaste and coppers, amongst other materials, open and accessible to children on the floor again, never again. Besides, it was a scary process for me personally to work with these pollutants in a powdered form, even though I was wearing a mask, there's no way I wasn't touched and affected. Dust on my clothes, in the air, on my hands, in my hair and I was so busy creating a proposal for the Nordic Pavilion in Venice at the time, my mind elsewhere, feeling the pressure. As in some kind of deserved twist, in layering these powders, I layered them in myself, and have since been taking a controversial remedy, the biomass of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) that can be consumed by humans, namely Spirulina, and as such, am constantly reminded of the creation of the aforementioned work and its lost opportunities.

And then there was of course another ethical issue, the manipulation of the microbial ecology, of other's environment and life, and how come and why I believed I had the right, and what more, I have continuously and repeatedly carried out such manipulations, and it reeks of villainous human exceptionalism and the more sad people pleasing (this was to be shown during a science week), and as such, it of course comes with additional costs. There is so much to say about this, the cost others pay, although a good overall microbial revenge is both gut dysbiosis and the microbes inheriting the Earth, as they will come tomorrow, and the philosophy of microbiology and book with the same name<sup>39</sup> offers interesting insights. I will not elaborate more just now, simply point to Maureen A. O'Malley<sup>40</sup>, a philosopher of microbiology, and the insight that it of course costs inside to do such a thing. What I paid, is everywhere and nowhere at the same time, it's consequences now part of my being. The ghastly large Plexiglas structure is in a storage somewhere, and I really should send it back to the Plexiglas producer to be reused if such a thing is possible, or maybe I actually deserve to drag these kinds of objects around, after all they are of my making.

---

The first goblet-project, *The Goblets (Alzheimer's Disease, Parkinson's Disease, Lupus, Multiple Sclerosis, Ulcerative Colitis & Rheumatoid Arthritis)*, 2019, was the first sculpture dealing with disease in a more direct manner, and as previously described, it was an uncomfortable step to take. Causing pain through these works is a continuous worry, as I speak about actual diseases being lived by actual bodies, and some of them come to view my work.

This was the first work in a series that focuses on the material aspect of a number of widespread (and steadily rising) diseases of our time, such as, in this case, e.g., Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, MS, Crohn's disease etc. These autoimmune diseases have been linked to environmental factors such as toxic chemicals and dietary factors in one way or another. With my recurrent thinking about how bodies and how they are materialized, I had gone through a lot of studies and discussions and documents and podcasts and documentaries and what not about the issue, as I wanted to understand what material components came in to play. And

---

<sup>39</sup> Maureen A. O'Malley, *Philosophy of Microbiology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Maureen A. O'Malley is a philosopher of microbiology, biology, and science in general, known for her sustained defence of microbial life as pivotal to all of the processes that humans care about.

more specifically, I wanted to understand how a body affected by autoimmunity is materialised differently and why.

Thus, for the creation of *The Goblets (Alzheimer's disease)*, I followed the research found on Alzheimer's disease and filled a glass (goblet) with common materials linked to the disease, namely "pollutants"; substances that cause reactions in the body that can be found to be correlated. I used substances taken from materials that are included in food or with which we otherwise surround us (see material list). I powdered most of the materials and layered them in the glasses with crushed glass on top and sealed them with epoxy on to create some kind of cocktail feel. Kitschy, but still dark objects referring to the act of ingesting. The use of the word goblet was another choice of being slightly corny—a sort of fairy-tale move, but also being earnest, as the etymology leads to the Old French gobellet, diminutive of gobel, from or related to the verb gober ("to ingest"). The materials we ingest. It was that simple, again, the hand presenting, holding it up for everyone to see: This is what we are ingesting, and it affects us deeply, we are not, and will not be, the same.

The aim was also for the materials to potentially interact and create a synergy inside the glass, something that happened in quite a few, and in a few of them the glass itself broke from the internal pressure and the mix seeped out in black- and silver-coloured droplets. Furthermore, the face of each individual pedestal was painted in a colour associated with the disease and which disease organisations use to raise awareness/fundraise in a strange attempt to connect disease with colour. The individual goblets were then placed on tables from different time periods, referring to the "entangled" narratives and times that had created the materials and products used. And, last but not least, there was also the everpresent urge to create an interior that was a body, a living room of bodies on tables.

Staying with the corniness, the poisoned cup in Shakespeare's Hamlet seems a good fit thematics-wise. The poisoned cup was made and served by the perpetrator to Hamlet but ended up poisoning the perpetrator and others he cared about. This idea of sending out toxic goods and thinking that it is possible to separate the cup from the maker (and the human from its immediate and extended surroundings) is well described by feminist scholar and anthropologist Anna Tsing<sup>41</sup> in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. She writes about how a single-minded focus on short term gains and human mastery have contributed to the current ecological disaster. Although investors didn't necessarily aim to poison (as in Hamlet), the idea that there is separation between parts and that we are separate from nature, creates the illusion of toxic waste affecting "others."

Bringing another thinker to the mix, the Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman<sup>42</sup>. In the mid-to-late 1990s, Bauman began to explore postmodernity and consumerism. He posited that a shift had taken place in modern society in the latter half of the 20th century, and it had changed from a society of producers into a society of consumers. According to Bauman, this change reversed Freud's "modern" trade-off—i.e., security was given up in exchange for more freedom, freedom to purchase and consume. Since the turn of

---

<sup>41</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing is an American anthropologist. She is a professor in the Anthropology Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

<sup>42</sup> Zygmunt Bauman was a Polish sociologist and philosopher. He was a social theorist, writing on issues as diverse as modernity and the Holocaust, postmodern consumerism and liquid modernity.



the millennium, his books have tried to avoid the confusion surrounding the term "postmodernity" by using the metaphors of "liquid" and "solid" modernity. His description of how failure is seen as a personal shortcoming, and how public space is filled with private concerns that never become public issues, is for me linked to how we deal with concerns of health and illness. If illness occurs, it is often turned into a private issue (especially when it comes to noncontagious diseases), and solutions offered to personal worries typically come in the form of individual examples and not as structural changes within society.

---

Venice came around and I wanted to create bodies, again, bodies that were touched by inflammation this time, a subject I keep returning to, inflamed bodies. The title was *States of Inflammation*, 2019, and the artwork made was a sculptural installation comprising three large scale glass structures (bodies) containing smaller sculptures inside. These structures looked like cabinets at a first glance, and to me they always doubled as bodies-cabinets, the same way previous works were created as part interiors, part bodies. The concept of "inflamed bodies" was what I was working on, or the proposal for these works, when I was in Trondheim and made *Untitled (Dysbiosis)*. Which might seem odd, given the fact that I was scared to really make *Untitled (Dysbiosis)* the work I both at the time and retrospectively think it should have been. But the proposal for *States of Inflammation* was very different than what eventually was produced, the journey in between a long one including the production of *The Goblets (Alzheimer's Disease, Parkinson's Disease, Lupus, Multiple Sclerosis, Ulcerative Colitis & Rheumatoid Arthritis)*, and at the end of it I was pregnant in Venice with my feet hurting from walking across the stone floor in the freezing Nordic pavilion. I was a body in pain and I couldn't hold it anymore— inflammation, pain, betrayal—so the works became what they should be. Or, so it felt, even though the production process was one of feeling the pressure. Throughout, I had such a hard time making decisions, final decisions, that so much about the works were kept so open for such a long time that we barely made it, barely. But finished, in the soft yellowish light of Sverre Fehn's<sup>43</sup> pavilion, they felt strange and sort of magical and personal. Like jewels of pain, however cheesy that sounds. I had actually fundraised to make possible the large glass structures, as always the budgets given for art production were not enough, so I had been doing awkward lectures during science weeks and all kinds of other things I didn't know how to do, such as asking for a sizeable fee. Because as I was creating these works of intertwined inflamed pain, I needed them to show, to literally show and show up, as what they are and were, tales of the body holding some kind of truth. I needed inflamed bodies, affected and wounded bodies to show up, and they did.

Writing about them is harder, to explain bodies as containers, what they hold and release and what remains, it is such a hard thing to spell out and I do it begrudgingly whilst still trying, trying. Full of corals and their history and issues with the vagus nerve and the brain as a mixture of stories as they came to be, I included wheat and autoimmune diseases on necklaces, and limestone, and anxiety and depression and their entangled materials and soil and melting glass. Originally, the Finnish curators invitation was one of telling the tale of the future (the title of the exhibition being *Weather Report: Forecasting the Future*, as it seems the field of contemporary art just cannot escape having to predict), and I brought along stories of ill health and inflammation and of being ill at ease, and the pain, the pain that is constantly

---

<sup>43</sup> The Nordic Pavilion in Venice was drawn by architect Sverre Fehn and built for the Venice Biennale in 1962. It was made as a cooperation between Sweden, Finland, and Norway, and is a permanent structure used for showcasing Nordic art and culture.

caused and I just can't look away, this is what I think about and what I make and it feels weird and serious and personal, and what's more, this is what I continue to make and it seems I can't get off the bus, not at all.

All the way back when I proposed the idea, it had much more of a positive spin, as I knew they were looking for a positive outlook and I tried, even though my main reference was a study that explained the intertwined realities of chronic inflammation. I think they fell for the proposed shine of the coloured glass structures—and for my crystallisation skills—more than the concept of inflammation, or perhaps something got lost in translation somewhere. I hid a lot during the production period, though, to protect the “non-pleasantness” of the works, and thus, was a pretty “non-pleasant” artist to handle, finally and thankfully, although it did not (necessarily) last.

The aforementioned study referred to the concept of inflammation and how it usually relates to a physiological condition but can also apply, at least metaphorically, to external (ecological), as well as internal (biological) environments. As a good student, but also as myself (not such a good student), I wanted to show the connections and relationships between climate change and global warming, the economic model of growth and energy spending that drives Western society, the extinction of immune-modulating microbes in the gut, and the development of diseases driven by inflammation. I wanted to hand out responsibility.

“Predicting the future” was something I actually could tap into given that our time presents new and unprecedented material meetings, and that I believe that all material bodies can be found to take part in this enormous, ongoing material experiment of our time. Through industrial production and pollution, new substances are being added to the mix, some of them pro-inflammatory “inducers”, causing an entangled web of changes. In human bodies, the rise of chronic inflammation and chronic disease is entangled and as previously mentioned, there is a rise of autoimmune diseases, cancers, cardiovascular diseases, etc. Part of this picture is changes in our gut microbiomes in the Western countries, with less diversity. Our guts are the interface to the external world, what happens inside will always mirror the conditions outside. The pro-inflammatory “inducers” causing the changes are new, arising as a result of the industrial revolution of the late nineteenth century. The rising temperatures caused by climate change and global warming can be seen as symptoms of an “inflammation of the earth”, and the two can be linked, with energy being the common factor. The global risk of climate change is a kind of compulsive, collective memory—in the sense that past decisions and mistakes are contained in what we find ourselves exposed to. Climate change as memory and embodiment—indeed, as the material, embodied memory—of past decisions of a whole epoch of ongoing industrialization.

The aim was to show the entanglements of the social, political, and physical matters in materialization of the human body through the smaller sculptures inside, with the large melting glass “bodies” being the “containers” or “framework” that would hold them. The extensive list of materials covered substances from coral and soil to food preservatives, cosmetics, and pollutants—common goods with which human bodies are in contact on a daily basis. They were sourced from sites such as current industrial production sites, e.g. bauxite from the Norwegian company Hydro's Brazil Paragominas mine; others are sourced from historic sites, such as iron oxides from the quicksilver extraction site New Almaden (CA); some are part of new and sustainable production processes, such as vivianite sourced from industrial waste production by Taiwanese researchers; still others are bacterial pigments such

as violacein; or foodstuffs and cosmetics such as “meat glue”, synthetic vitamins and hair dye.

The Fuchsia coloured glass structure contained smaller sculptures in the shape of a crystallised book (on top) and two strings of hanging vagus nerves in clay with corals attached. The “book” on top was created from a mix of two different books: *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution* by Lynn Margulis (1998), and Charles Darwin’s *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs* (1842). The book pages were torn out and combined and then left in baths of aluminium salts, with added hair dye, makeup, metals, and synthetic vitamins until their structure became a changeable one (see captions list for more information). Darwin’s *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs* was chosen as an example of the intimate connection between scientific investigations and the realms of politics and economics. Darwin collected the coral specimens described during his voyage on the HMS Beagle between 1831–36, where he also gathered evidence for his later theory of evolution by natural selection. His research was government-funded and tied to naval interest in an era of colonial expansion by Britain, as many British ships were wrecked on unexpected coral reefs. Darwin’s ideas of natural selection and notions of competitiveness later often appeared in justifications of Britain’s imperial ambitions. In the book *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution*, Lynn Margulis presents the idea that evolutionary theory doesn’t need to emphasize competition. Through emphasizing the importance of microorganisms of bacteria and infections, she stresses the role of collaboration and co-evolution. Her book was my «hopeful» element, I strove to present something of a “positive” element (aka my former people pleasing), but also genuinely liked the idea of these two books together the fermenting process that can be said to be our brains.

The lavender-coloured glass structure contained sculptures of wheat plants made in different plastic-metal composites. The light grey grains were then covered with a pigment mix containing goethite from Kursk Magnetic Anomaly, road and tunnel dust, industrial waste vivianite, glacial grey ochre, charcoal from Western steel mill (WA), ash, salt, and melted liquorice wheels. The base for the plant sculptures was Limestone, a sedimentary carbonate rock that is often composed of the skeletal fragments of marine organisms such as coral, foraminifera, and molluscs. Awareness necklaces in silver from different autoimmune diseases (autism, Alzheimer’s disease, MS, Hashimoto’s disease, and brain disorders) were hung on the wheat. I chose wheat as it can be seen as both a civilisation builder (the first domesticated food crop was wheat), but also as a potential collapsing agent (environmental impact in the form of anthropogenic emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> through soil tilling, etc.). To continue, it is a food surrounded by controversy, as new production methods are said to cause changes in our bodies in the form of reactive processes and inflammation in the gut. Gluten and wheat proteins are said to be an environmental risk factor in autoimmune disease.

The clear glass structure had two inside shelves made from soil and pigments. On each of them, a drinking glass was placed, titled *The Goblets (Generalized Anxiety Disorder)* and *The Goblets (Memory Disorders)*. For each “goblet,” I followed the available scientific research of either “anxiety” or “memory loss” and filled the glasses with common materials linked to these states of mind. They have both been linked to environmental factors such as toxic chemicals and dietary factors (see *The Goblets (Alzheimer’s Disease, Parkinson’s Disease, Lupus, Multiple Sclerosis, Ulcerative Colitis & Rheumatoid Arthritis)*, 2019).

---

The exhibition *There Are Others Here With Me*, with the individual works *The Nerves*, *The Gut-Brain Axis*, *The Spleen*, *The Cardiovascular System*, *Mouth Wide Open* and *The Body*, all 2020.

Spelled out in the title was this ambition and yet-again hope that the artworks would reveal it— *there are others here with me*—and that this revelation would function like a haunting throughout. The long lists of elements and their entangled histories and material touches were the company to keep (at that moment), composing the community of others in the show's title. The haunting being that we are of course cumulative, and how we turn out is all around a surprise, isn't it, a cumulative, embodied surprise for the days ahead.

Closest to the entrance, *The Body* was created as a sculptural homage to Louise Bourgeois's *Fears* from 1992, and implied a direct equivalence between fear and the body. It is rare that I create a work that to such degree build on another's, but the creating of a material incarnation of Bourgeois's anxieties, seemed part of what I was already doing, and in addition, something to try in this sort of brokenhearted quest to communicate. Anxiety is embedded in the body, it is *of* the body, and the body produces anxiety through its physiological states and firing of neural circuits and microbial byproducts (the way all mental states are effectuated even when brought on from the "outside"). To continue, there is even more to this tale, as I find there to exist an inherent anxiety of sorts (in the body), a shared one apart from our personal worries and fears, as an expressed undercurrent that lives within us as an actual nervousness about *being* material, and what that entails, to actually take part in a vast materiality we have no control over, and have to give in to it in the end. What more, the feeling that 'others' (e.g. microbes etc) both take part and 'trespass' on one's body, could be as old as dust (not literally). And as such, the body cannot be escaped, much less unlinked from its mental states.

The anatomy of the exhibition were one where "the body" was seemingly organised into vital constituent parts: *Gut-Brain Axis* and *The Cardiovascular System* in the front; *The Spleen* was suspended and *The Nerves* stood towards the back, beyond which lied *Mouth Wide Open* (all 2020). Refusing their roles as parts a dividable and solid body, these artworks did their best in attesting to the fallacy of perceiving it as such, and instead enacted their endless porosity. Everywhere, matter simultaneously dissolved and congealed in fleshy gradients of pink, lavender, brown and burgundy, each work in one supposed state of a metamorphic cycle.

Drawing on the language used to describe physical conditions, this time I also sort-of humorously embraced the literalness that only the body can match in sensations of pain or ill-being: The large glass structure that—as per usual—doubled as a body/cabinet held a nervous system actually in-flamed: a spinal cord hung inside *The Nerves*, its outgoing arms each holding a lit candle burning essential oils against inflammation and diffusing anti-bacterial properties. As such, it was a disagreeable object: an inflamed vagus nerve, after all, is a symptom of a disagreeable system. The candles felt sort-of votive too, their flames supposedly evoking pleas for improved health, and their scent recalled practices of #selfcare, often claimed by the same profit-driven industries that sow the seeds of depletion to begin with. As with much of my practice however, their melting were first and foremost the quotidian transformation of matter enacted before our eyes, and breathed in by our bodies: we too are altered.

There were multiple glass structures in the exhibition that incorporated material stages and processes, left to unfold of their own accord. The choice of containers made artworks—such as bottles, goblets, vessels, and recesses—were all membranes on, or through which matter flows - poured, emptied, imbibed, fixed, lying stagnant, contained. E.g., *The Cardiovascular System*, sought to bring into relief the extent to which veins and bodies are vessels: at once containers and circuits for the flux and transmission of liquids, air, signals, synapses, hormones, toxins, and cells. *Mouth Open Wide* was even a mouth open with *The Goblets (Memory Loss)* perched inside in lingual lipase, a melted memory loss succumbing to the fluidity of new (bodily) states.

The captions outlining the works' media were (as always) aimed to function as endlessly contingent micro-universes of relationality, like ingredient lists that chart unimaginable entanglements of natural, industrial and socio-historical journeys - 'asphalt dust collected by the Opera tunnel in Oslo' (*Gut-Brain Axis*), 'Royal Raspberry flavour Jelly Made with Halal beef gelatine' (*The Cardiovascular System*), 'Mica pigment powder, glacial grey ochre (glacial till clay deposits made from the wasting ice sheet floating on ponded brackish water from ca. 19,000 years ago (coastal Washington))' [*The Nerves*], '...lead, cobalt, glycol ethers (from air pollution)' [*Mouth Wide Open*], 'Cochineal Lake pigment (made from the dried, pulverised bodies of the cochineal female scale insects)' [*The Cardiovascular System*].

---

I have previously described the strange studio visit with the former Rhizome director, where he and I would awkwardly look through my studio and portfolio of very non-digital works. I was long at a loss for why such a visit would take place, as I couldn't make a digital artwork to save my life, but in 2020 there was an invitation for "7x7 Stavanger", a Rhizome/Kunsthall Stavanger/New museum collaborative project pairing artists with technologists/scientists and asking them to make "something new". I was paired with the synthetic biologist Tal Danino, associate professor in biochemical engineering at Columbia University, NY. Our collaboration resulted in an online artist talk<sup>44</sup> and the sketched artwork *The Goblets (P. Mirabilis)*, 2020. Although having to make "something new" together with a technologist/scientist is related to contemporary artists being asked to "predict the future", and as such, belongs to the question of what art is and how and why it is constantly instrumentalised, all in all the dialogue with Tal was an easy one. Tal is a soft spoken person who always wanted to be an artist as his mother was quite artistic, and he wished to resemble her. Surprisingly, he wanted my advice on how to get a career in arts, and defined himself as an interdisciplinary or bio-artist. Having previously collaborated with artist Anicka Yi<sup>45</sup>, he had also been exposed to a more—how to say this—feminist materialist way of thinking— and was quite open to a different point of view. Tal's research explores the emerging field of synthetic biology, where he focuses on engineering bacteria gene circuits to create novel behaviors that have biomedical applications.

What started as a kind of awkward conversation on both parts, quickly went into the direction of the complexity of the human-microbe relationship, and how microbes can drive both health and disease. We discussed the history of microbiology and its adjoining theory, and

---

<sup>44</sup> Link here: <https://7x7.no/en/watch/#ane-graff-x-tal-danino>

<sup>45</sup> Anicka Yi is a conceptual artist whose work lies at the intersection of fragrance, cuisine, and science. She is known for installations that engage the senses, especially the sense of smell, and for her collaborations with biologists and chemists.

how viewing microbes as bad or good is an oversimplification. The sketched artwork that in the end came to be our “result”, *The Goblets (P. Mirabilis)*, has the visuals of one of my “goblet”-works, and I have to admit, perhaps more of my contribution concept-wise than we both had hoped. Creating “something new” always seems to come with the hope of artists and their collaborators “curing cancer”, and I sorely wish I could done something of the kind, but it’s a lot to put on someone known for their crystallization abilities and emotive capabilities.

*The Goblets (P. Mirabilis)* will contain a bacterium Tal uses in his lab, and whom he has engineered a number of times. Most often he changes the environment (heat, humidity, air flow) to change the way the bacterium moves and expresses, as *P. Mirabilis* is known for its swarming abilities and growing in concentric circles from a drop placed on a Petri dish, creates the striking visual of a bullseye. For the production of this artwork (which will be done in 2023 for an exhibition at Kunsthall Stavanger), the artwork will include agar sheets containing *P. Mirabilis* grown at his laboratory. He sent me many samples in the mail to experiment with, and experiment I did, including soaking agar sheets with soil bacteria in water and being thoroughly surprised by their instant foul odor (...the state of my brain remains an open question that will be answered in the years to come).

The drinking glass will be hand-blown to produce the veins running in the glass (the veins are part of the glass, see sketch). The glass will be filled with a skin-coloured substance, one we imagine is created in my studio from a mixture of materials referring to the human-microbe relationship throughout the times (such as probiotics, antibiotics, and minerals, metals and foodstuffs created by microbes, etc.), and on top there’s a polymer part with the agar sheet. It seemed important to create something open ended, that alluded to the body (and I wanted to include glass veins, referring both to connection and fragility) and its relationship with bacteria, both in the far past and in the future. Quite a lot has been written about human microbiome research and how it changes older ideas about human autonomy, individuality and identity. There is an anxiety around the issue of microbes that interests me and that he pushes against whilst teaching, it comes with a nervousness about being a body and therefore material, and having the feeling that 'others' (microbes) both take part and 'trespass' on one's body.

Writing about this, although all real, what stayed important is mainly the idea of glass veins and learning more from Tal about microbial pathways in the body. Otherwise, I am nowhere near “solving” this task for myself, the task of creating together, in all honesty I never was a good collaborator when it came to art, I get lost in others and it takes a lot of alone time to re-center which makes “something new/curing cancer” a sort of insurmountable task, and it is more of his job, anyway (his newest endeavor is programming bacteria to improve cancer immunotherapy<sup>46</sup>).

---

### *The Goblets (Soil Edition), 2021*

The dark damp soil was a tempting place to position something, to put it temporarily to rest, especially in the midst of production with all its pulling out of objects and pieces of things to try out. And there it came to be, I found the goblet in the soil to be a tulip flowering or a

---

<sup>46</sup> Arthur N. Brodksy, *Engineering Bacteria to Improve Cancer Immunotherapy with CRI Lloyd Old STAR Tal Danino*, Cancer Research Institute (online), Jan 2022

growth of the same similitude, its bowl opening towards the dark soil. This transpired during the Venice production and was also used there (but in a different capacity); I rested a goblet in soil and saw what can be described as its bowl or body holding the histories connecting to the matter holding its grip, and it made sense. The goblets being growths of some sort was what I was trying for all along, the “intra-action” of its inner materials creating it all anew, and as such the flowery faces radiated the intertwined pain and allure of such material transgressions. To continue, our bodies are such growths, they hold the stories of the surfaces we live, the soil that grows through and with us.

This is the only goblet-series I have made that does not deal with diseases or disorders, except for *The Goblets (P. Mirabilis)*. Again, this series hold the stories of the surfaces we live, the soil that grows through and with us. Within each «goblet» is a mixture of cosmetics, medications, foodstuffs, minerals, metals, sea shells, salts, fertilisers, historical pigments, consumer goods and everyday objects, all referenced back to the soil they were standing in through the footnotes in the materials list (captions). Through my collaboration with synthetic biologist Tal Danino, I was able to add bacterial cultures to some as well—the dried agar sheets with bacterial cultures are made from soil bacteria. Within them exists—for example—the 150-year old Washington charcoal that still smells like deep smoke with its entwined stories of mining, woodlands, and black lungs, oscillating together with the logwood extract from a spiny tree largely found in Mexico and exported by the Spanish in the 16th century, with its rich purple tones and stories of soils and colonialization, and the Iranian Hormuz red ochre with its specter of brown-to-bright-red and seawater with pink foam and stories of food colouring and ingestion.

---

The sculptural installation *The Goblets (Chronic Fatigue, Brain Fog, Depression, Memory Loss & Generalised Anxiety Disorder)*, 2021, was my first goblet-project about mental health and one that remains meaningful to me. It came about during the pandemic, which saw a soaring of mental struggles, and I felt it was time to do the work, the actual work of examining the environmental risk factors that influence these mental states, and the socioeconomic and physical environments shaping this kind of mental distress. It was time to go through as many studies as I could find to see what I could find, and to connect dots where I could, if I could. The reds were (as almost always) the reds of inflammation, but also easily associated with urgency and pain, and although the latter is most likely self-evident, and maybe repeatedly saying so deflates the work, I still would like to say it: there’s pain, so much pain inhabiting actual bodies and the way we think and believe and act around mental disorders seems to cause more.

And if we actually believe that someone’s mental struggles are (mainly) caused by genetics without looking at epigenetic processes and environmental risk factors, along with the actual physical effects of socio-economic conditions, and we actually believe that a mental disorder such as depression belongs to the “mind” (the cogito) and not to the body as a whole, and to its surroundings as a whole, then we cause pain. We just do. So as an artist I try to carry this torch, and to say something, although being taken seriously isn’t necessarily something that occurs regularly, but damnit, I try.

There’s of course feminist materialist theory connected with this, an overall effort to overcome the mind-body dualism that has dominated our thinking for so long, and to reveal how aspects once separated are in fact entangled. This effort is visible in the notion of

corporeality coined by feminist scholar Elizabeth Grosz<sup>47</sup> where the body and mind are thought of as smoothly transforming into one another. This transformation is illustrated with the model of the Möbius strip, where the “outside” and the “inside” become one another and are topologically “unorientable”. The entangled nature of body and mind is also present in texts by another feminist scholar, namely Rosi Braidotti, where she stresses the need “to acknowledge the embodiment of the brain and the embrainment of the body<sup>48</sup>,” thus seeing both as not only interconnected and inseparable, but intra-connected, and impossible to detach from one another prior to their relation. And thankfully, there are more scholars working on overcoming mind-body dualism along with other dualisms, and I won’t mention them all here, but I am thankful and as such, not alone.

---

The exhibition *The Wound In Its Entanglements* with the individual works *The Goblets (Chronic Fatigue, Dementia, Major Depressive Disorder, Inflammation-Induced Anorexia, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder & Generalised Anxiety Disorder)*, *Patches of Standing Water*, and *The Brain-Cardiovascular System (Heart Brain Pain)*, 2022.

*Patches of Standing Water*, 2021, is part of the exhibition *The Wound in Its Entanglements* at Kunstinstituut Melly, but was originally made and shown together with *The Goblets (Soil Edition)* at Kistefos Museum during the exhibition *Liquid Life*. The exhibition took place in the museum’s new building, one built over the river like a bridge. Inside, all surfaces were white, with large glass panels facing the water and extending a view towards the pines of the surrounding terrain. In creating the piece, I for once did not head towards the red and pink hues of a body inflamed, but towards the sea green of a body melting and fading into its surroundings as they, in turn, melted and faded into it.

This work was at the time of its production one of my most directly political work, through its captions. Or, the intent was to make it such. And as it was, the directness I was going for felt tricky, altogether painful, as if I was trespassing, even though I been quite direct in previous works, such as *States of Inflammation* (2019). It just felt different this time around, as the cabinet-body itself was a sort of waterway, and the messaging, at least within me, was so clear. As part of completing a process, there was this sense of it having to be done, I had to go all out and directly reference colonial times in the main bulk of materials used (such as sugar cane from Madeira, Muntok white pepper, and the “Colonial White” granite pebbles) at least that once, and I was reading the book “Inflamed”<sup>49</sup> by Rupa Marya and Raj Patel at the time, which was a revelation and a disappointment at the same time, with chapters such as “As the World Burns,” “The Immunes Strike Back” and “Reproducing Colonization: Witches and Healers on the Frontline,” published in 2021.

Admiring their clear messaging, I had found kin, but although my work is *surely* political, no doubt about it in all its entangled intents and purposes, directness in my own work still makes me struggle, as it is not my language, I am not of that kind. That said, I have continued this path in more recent works, as I seek to find the balance between poetry with all its room for subtle contradictions and a more clear messaging. It so happens that I am criticized for this

---

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, 1994, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 22 (but discussed throughout the book).

<sup>48</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism*, *Anthropocene Feminism journal*, 2017, 33.

<sup>49</sup> Rupa Marya and Raj Patel, *Inflamed*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021.



lack of balance, but mostly the other way around, as some critics focus on not being able to “see” the artwork’s thematic in the actual visual and I don’t know yet how to make it different.

In creating *Patches of Standing Water*, I yearned to say something about the time, that villainous time, and now this has officially turned into somewhat of a rant, because I think the body *is there* (in its melted cabinet shape), it is as it should be, but its narrative through its captions went too direct somehow. The yearning to do good, to tell the story, to convey what I find to be true, I swear sometimes it is eating me alive. When pieces don’t fit together, it has a devouring effect. “Already a small betrayal, already so many small ones.”, I wrote in the introductory part of this (long-winded) essay, and as such, I have stayed true. I still love it, though, *Patches of Standing Water*, as it exists to me as a melted essence, a growth of intertwined times and places, the ones that brought it here, and sifted through my being, it’s physical presence is a dark body of maroon veins and a “cardiovascular” bottle of endless salt-induced transformations.

### ***The Brain-Cardiovascular Axis (The Heart Brain Pain):***

This work belongs to the family of works that were shown at the exhibition *There Are Others Here With Me: The Cardiovascular System*, and, maybe especially, *The Gut-Brain Axis*, all 2020. Needless to say, both works portray bodily axis’, and I don’t mean axis or planes of movement, but axis of bidirectional communication within the body, and as such, these works share a clear resemblance, but where *The Gut-Brain Axis* was headed towards a humorous darkness with its cupcakes and *Blackout* eyeshadow, *The Brain-Cardiovascular Axis (The Heart Brain Pain)* is a work in pain.

One element of this work, is the complexity of the body and how things we thought were separate, are in fact entangled. Body systems do not operate independently. As such, a complex interaction exists between the nervous and cardiovascular systems (the brain-cardiovascular axis), and a dysfunction in one system leads to a dysfunction in the other. The heart even has its own intrinsic nervous system, “a brain.” “Heart Brain Pain” is actually used as a term, as methods targeting the heart modulate pain regions in the brain, involved in the cognitive and emotional factors of pain. Thus, the statement of “broken hearts” holds truth as the heart seems a key moderator of pain, as pain is not just produced in the brain but is part of a more complex system. My point (hitting you over the head with it again) is that pain is material, pain leaves traces and inscriptions on bodies. That to every sort of introspectable change over time in pains, or variation among pains at a time, there corresponds in fact a sort of simultaneous neural change over time. Pain is a constant reminder that you are not alone in your body, but am affected by the materiality of the world as the body writes and rewrites itself.

I have worked with the book-shape as a sort of visualisation of the brain in different sculptures, such as in *States of Inflammation*, 2019, and in *The Gut-Brain Axis*, 2020. So for me, the melted cabinet is a sort-of take on the brain—my take—and the broken glass veins were actually sourced from *The Cardiovascular System* (I did not discard this previous work, but had leftover glass from its production and could not help thinking of broken capillaries) and they are here what they were, namely veins or capillaries, and they harbour growths inside, consisting of materials that can potentially induce pain, or have in the past; heart brain pain.

---

***The Goblets (Chronic Fatigue, Dementia, Major Depressive Disorder, Inflammation-Induced Anorexia, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder & Generalised Anxiety Disorder)***

Again, here comes the mental states, I wasn't done through the creation of *The Goblets (Chronic Fatigue, Brain Fog, Depression, Memory Loss & Generalised Anxiety Disorder)*, the whole process went too quick, the pain and the blooming inflamed reds of the goblets and all the research, I had to do it again to really feel it and to be there. These works are my heart's blood, they just are, there is no way around it. I had long felt the need to push back on this idea of illness as the individual's responsibility (see Zygmunt Bauman, p.24), on involuntary medical treatment and side effects and thus stuffed livers, on mental struggles being cut off from the rest of the body as part of the mind-body divide, as well as the environment and structures it grew in. I don't even know how to really communicate this with you, it is too large, too infuriating. It is structural violence<sup>50</sup> and I know that's probably not the exact way anthropologists such as Paul Farmer or sociologist Johan Galtung use the term, but I do not know if I care. Something is so off with our systems, and it is just really about time that "intra-action" becomes more than an "exotic" word from an "exotic" person titled "they/them etc<sup>51</sup>", and the prejudices that come with. The loneliness of "madness", the paranoia associated with Big Pharma, the bodily suffering caused by decisions of meds or no meds, and it is too much, all of it, and it continuously blooms inside of all of us, if we have an awareness of it or not.

This time I wrote texts about each goblet (and mental state) as a way of communicating *more*, of making text a tool that could work for me and extend and grow what my hands struggle to say. These texts exist as handouts in the hallway between the exhibition spaces (and as part of the second part of the reflection text), but should get a more prominent role next time, if there is one. Now that this piece and the fellowship at large is done, I am tired and worn and I don't know that I can continue to pour all that I am into artworks indefinitely, there is this sense of not really being heard, and also, not really making a difference, and perhaps it is time to regroup and not giving it *all* away in the same manner.

To continue, and to repeat my statement in a different wording, this final presentation sees what I consider as my main work, the goblet-series of mental states. Created as a continuation of *The Goblets (Chronic Fatigue, Dementia, Major Depressive Disorder, Inflammation-Induced Anorexia, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder & Generalised Anxiety Disorder)*, this series contains materials picked from our surroundings that can be correlated to these mental states (disorders) through inflammation in the body. Some materials have a clear epigenetic connection, others are connected to an event in the

---

<sup>50</sup> "Structural violence" refers to the multiple ways in which social, economic, and political systems expose particular populations to risks and vulnerabilities leading to increased morbidity and mortality. Those systems include income inequality, racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, sexism, ableism, and other means of social exclusion leading to vulnerabilities, such as poverty, stress, trauma, crime, incarceration, lack of access to care, healthy food, and physical activity. The term was coined by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, who introduced it in his 1969 article "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research". The same term is used by medical anthropologist Paul Farmer to explain "the massive accumulation of wealth in one part of the world and the abject misery in another", showing how both exist in relation to each other, within the same political and economic system.

<sup>51</sup> Feminist theorist and quantum physicist Karen Barad's pronouns are: they, them, their, theirs, themselves.

recent past (trauma), others again propose a more direct causality. Important is their “intra-action,” namely how the materials grow and change through each other.

Each goblet is placed on an epoxy cast of a British colonial table. Again, this is difficult, but I will try to write a little something, even though it makes me shudder to be this straightforward: As a shadow of the colonial past, it seems colonialism continues to haunt people and societies, continuously affecting bodies. Even though this is barely noticeable at times, visual reminders are present, e.g., in colonial furniture, in the colonial style featured in interior architecture or architecture, and in pre-existing colonial monuments, etc. I use the tables in the goblet-series about mental disorders as ghostly reminders of a time period much categorised by hierarchical thinking and dualism, and a time period whose material entanglements are with us here today, still affecting bodies. Because colonialism is a large-scale process that has shaped human settlement across the planet, it has an intimate relationship to matter. In fact, the very idea of “matter”—physical objects making up the universe and its constitutive systems and elements—has developed in tandem with the spread of colonial forms of knowledge and settlement over the past five centuries. Modern colonialism involves the development of sciences that describe the material form of the universe as well as the biology of human, animal, and plant life. These sciences, along with capitalist industries that deploy them, have historically helped spread colonial worldviews that separate inanimate matter, the living biological body, human culture, and the spiritual domain into distinct spheres. And today we are still dealing with the repercussions, as mental disorders are seen as either genetic determinism, the individual's responsibility, and especially: separate from the rest of the body. Mental disorders seem to exist as disorders of the thinking soul instead of body-systemic diseases much induced by inflammation and inflammation-inducing materials. And this is my "message", if there is one: This view upon mental disorders is costing us in so many ways, when the connections between materials in the environment, or stressful events caused by the systems we live under, epigenetics, etc, aren't considered part of the picture and causative of disease, then we lose, we lose people, connections and relationships.