



On bodies: of water, work, and mine. (and on casting things off)

In the right light I can see every grain of dust and every smear of oil on the surface of my laptop. I forget to clean it before I take it to meetings and it shines with the goo and scale of my body, flecked like glitter over liquid crystal and brushed aluminium. I hear that if I rub aluminium into my armpits in particle form its toxicity will destroy my memory. I choose to believe in a stick of crystal instead. I apologise for my dirty laptop because I'm one of those people who is sorry all the time, even when someone walks straight into me. My apologies make the dirt shine brighter.

On my screen now is a collection of hairs in violation of length and thickness protocols for feminine hair that I've removed from my chin. I've recently noticed myself plucking them with fingernails used like tweezers and placing them afterwards on bright screens for the satisfaction of seeing their shape. I often notice this mid-way through doing it or worse, afterwards, the action absent from consciousness but evidenced in tiny backlit curls.

Through these hairs I look at photos Jess in Melbourne has dropboxed me, in Perth, of WIP for *double helix*. Pics from Kimberley come to me like this too, from Jess, even though Kimberley is also in Perth, triangulated over three thousand ks through future space junk. *collab1.jpg* shows a peachy corona of tentacles fuzzed out beneath a shiny shroud that reveals itself in *jt1.jpg* to be metallic organza. In this wider view the fabric covers other objects, with more placed on top. A vessel woven from acrylic hair, a matcha green wad. It looks like a crime scene.

From the photos I often can't tell whose works is whose, although I have suspicions. It seems right not to ask. At the core of *double helix* is a feedback loop of influence and porosity and call and response. The brief Jess and Kimberley respond to blends their individual ideas on materiality into one big pulp. Some works will be started by one artist and finished by another, some will be responses to the others' WIP. Some will reject entanglement entirely and make a break for autonomy, only to slump back into the inevitability of dialogue once placed in space.

In a different browser tab it is being insinuated that Damien Hirst's recent sculptures are too similar to Jason deCaires Taylor's for it to be simple coincidence. Both are exhibiting at the same Venice Biennale, and both are presenting recognizably human figures encrusted with barnacles and other sea life. deCaires' are human sized and Hirst's are monumental, but the effect is the sameⁱ. Perhaps what they should both be accused of though, rather than plagiarism, is an overinvestment in the symbolic order. Only representation could keep its shape so long in the sea: a beautiful bronze face wearing a coral mask is sleight of hand, a celebration of immortality disguised as a lamentation for vulnerabilityⁱⁱ. After a while my bones might carry crustaceans too, but the wet sack of my body would first cast them loose, and what statuary would commemorate that dissolution?

Wetness is an abject feel. If wetness has substance, something between solid or liquid, it's even better. Julia Kristeva had different different semiotic registers for abject bodily wetness - tears and sperm are 'non-pollutants' while menstrual blood and shit signal danger to the identity from within and without - but what really did her in was the skin forming on old milkⁱⁱⁱ. Jess wants to put a jelly in her hair baskets made of vegan gelatin and glycerine. It's soap: a cleansing wetness in a tender petrochemical weave. Vodka stops the mould. On Instagram Kimberley is sewing big round sequins, crab-orange with a green sheen, onto soft finger-like wads that protrude from a mottled

fabric bunch, stitched by Jess. I think of mermaids, and of rubbing cream into my mum's psoriasis.

Things without touchy feels can be abject too: images, the thought of certain crimes. Data can be abject. Lately I've become paranoid about accidentally posting a Story from the toilet. The thought of flushing uncurated content into the public drain brings a cold pang of fear, but maybe I would secretly love it. Freedom from self-styling, finally. The smartphone is apparently the dirtiest object in the world, dirtier than my laptop, dirtier even than money. I guess we don't look often look at money while we shit.

I think about emailing Jess this text and that too makes me shiver. There's too much of 'me' in it. Maybe a truly abject exhibition text would something properly 'cast off' from the self, unrecognisable as belonging to any one person. A soupy mass of malicious syllables that must be passed through before entering a recognisable symbolic order. It's late, I have overnight and two hour's difference in the morning as a buffer for the fear. Who *can* "display the abject without confusing himself for it?"^{iv} Not me, I guess, I'm only human.

Gemma Weston, 2017.

ⁱ Davis, B. 2017, *An 'Unbelievable' Coincidence? Damien Hirst's Venice Show Looks Almost Exactly Like the Grenada Pavilion*, artnet May 16th 2017.

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/damien-hirsts-unbelievable-coincidence-with-the-granada-pavilion-962066>

ⁱⁱ See Shakespeare, from *The Tempest: Full fathom five thy father lies; Of his bones are coral made; Those are pearls that were his eyes: Nothing of him that doth fade, But doth suffer a sea-change, Into something rich and strange.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Kristeva, J. 1982. *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection* (L.S Roudiez, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press:

<http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/touchyfeelingsmaliciousobjects/Kristevapowersofhorrorabjecti on.pdf>

^{iv} *ibid.*