

LANDSCAPES OF THE HINGED TRUNK: WITH SEAMS OF GLASS AND BONE

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Abstract:

This thesis engages the construction of a particular kind of artwork, namely an artwork that functions as an occult device, capable of affecting the physical body of the viewer as well as the space the artwork occupies. The procedure described is a process of searching out and defining the formal, aesthetic, affective, and theoretical parameters inherent to the production of such a picture. The methods outlined reflect these defined elements, speaking to issues of materiality as they relate to the eventual dispatch of esoteric affects. The results described here and referred to in the text are a series of artworks that embody the tenets of the research carried out. These works are material, phenomenologically perceptible objects that elicit affect from physical bodies. The conclusion of these results is the definition of a model; it is the construction of a pictorial device capable of projecting immaterial transmissions.

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Auto-Biography of an Interior:

My hollowed out limbs would be a room. Chambers carved out of the heat and dryness of my surfaces, giving way to damp hallways, sunken in the watery red soil of my form. What are these puzzling tensions in my abdomen, these outlandish commands, mundane transfigurations of material? Inside, deep in the trunk, one seam opens to another, one organ bonds to the walls of its neighbour, spilling its contents throughout the already full and aching cavity—producing pressure and transformative breakages—wandering cycles of voiceless coercion. Tissues under duress, arteries sag under the impossible mantle of a directionless figuration.

These undulations, these demands—deliverance through decomposition—cause the whole of the structure to sag, deflating like a leather balloon. The long arcades of the hewn out legs begin to bend where before there were no joints, the seams are re-invented, the skin complies, bones decouple from their functions. Arms like strange tubers, transparent, like they have never borne the sun, fail to break the fall of the exhaling chest, folding into profound recumbency, merging with the weight of the torso, the surfaces of each grow inseparable. The belly, when has this ever been but a round and suggestive swelling? Something that threatens to burst, to bloom outwards, now delivering its debt, rupturing onto the grounds of what is outside these apartments, while flooding inward, spoiling the delirious functionality of the abdomen.

Listen to this monologue of linings, tissues, and gut. Feel them hover and shake, bristle under the suggestions of the words, amble toward the source of this soundless transmission. I will the organs to monochrome becoming, the arteries to the edges of mellow openings, the musculature toward a likeness unknown—and the bones—to all but disappear.

Introduction: Articulating a Model

After a period of consideration, I made it my intention to make a picture again. I felt compelled to find a way to readdress the body within a field, the body as it was within a ground. Prior to this I had devoted nearly all of my efforts to various manifestations of the ground. I was excavating interior space, attempting to bring it beyond representation through an examination of geometry and form, while simultaneously salvaging its recognizable qualities. These were my rooms, my altars to domestic architecture, their sole actors being shallow pools and amorous thoughts of water-beds. Following this, there came an interval where I began to survey the landscape. External, fathomless space seemed to be the ideal setting in which to finally enact a movement towards a pictorial abstraction through the ornate foyers of representation. I was searching for a way to approach abstraction, to collaborate with its plasticity and sense of the infinite, while maintaining a set of props. I have habitually refused to part with my bias toward the symbolic and am suspicious of an abstraction that claims to do so. Instead, my idyll was an endless middle, a kind of liminal sublime that sat on the borders of representation and abstraction, meeting at a vibratory and invisible periphery—superheating along this seam to form something like glass, a medium both liquid and set—equally unreachable and present. This middle, liminal space is the site where I posit affective power to be concentrated in an image. In a picture where the image is not fully digested, ease of categorization remains out of reach: as long as the intellect is busied with this fraught aesthetic assimilation, the picture itself is free to act on the body of the one who watches it. These pictures reward the organs—speaking to glands, stomachs, and bones over the potentially clarifying and defusing capacities of a calculating intellect.

However, as mentioned above, I was still searching for my model. Seeking out the schematic that would allow for this set of affects to commune with the viewer and initiate affective changes in both their somatic composition and the spaces they and the pictures

inhabit. This is where the body re-entered. Figuration, until now, was an abandoned mode for me—originally removed from my work with good intentions, for the sake of clarity and cleanliness. In spite of this, the body did not leave; instead, it was eerily patient, waiting just outside my field of vision until I was ready to accept its presence on the empty grounds I had strived so long to produce. My reaction to this reappearance of the body was shocking, in that it came as a relief, to find my way back to pictures. The re-introduction of the body, the figure, to my work at first seemed paradoxical, given my intentions to define a hovering liminal zone between abstract and representational images. Increasingly, however, I began to conclude that accessing abstract pictorial forms through the reduction and cutting away of the symbolic would not generate this liminal zone, but only reproduce abstract modes. In this way I was compelled to democratically define and include the principle elements of a representational image, in order to later modify those same components. Over time, I divided these elements into three distinct movements, which would increasingly correspond to my definition of a *picture*. In this case the definition is almost comical; when I say ‘picture’, I mean an image that contains these three elements that are key to rendering a satisfying and *convincing* depiction. The first two, which to some extent have already been introduced, are the body and the ground that supports this body. The third element that was added, and in a sense completed the raw schematic I had been looking for, is the text.

In the same way that the liminal figure-ground relationship, when established, would bypass the node of categorizable images and proceed with its affective potential directly to the viewing body, the text was a mode of language that would propel the image even deeper within the body of the observer through a linguistic incantation that denied readability through rudimentary systems of encryption. I have appropriated this text-image mechanism through the observation of others, already operative, that I perceive as holding power that is beyond the reach of the rational—or is at least not wholly within its province. These other models of text and

image relations are diverse; however, the most affective includes advertising and its primal counterparts found in the history of iconographic and ritual imagery. In a sense, the text is rendered out of a concept of duality that would seek to produce a hydra, an image that could act as both a Station of the Cross and an advertisement for exotic perfume.

In keeping with the importance I assign to this recurring device of body, ground, and text, the remainder of this paper will be structured likewise, with a section corresponding directly to one of these three key areas. Marking the borders of each of the three sections will be a segment of prose meant to act as a ligament and experiential opening onto the concepts of the whole. This text, *Auto-Biography of a Recliner*, is a second message overlaid upon the first as a textual transparency. I imagine it hovering above the paper as a "...white mist that rises from within a body opened presently after death, and which during our lifetime...clouds our brain when asleep and dreaming." (Sebald 9). This is a text of deeply liminal value marking the boundaries of the paper while leaking into all of them, it is a place of resonant virtuality—a space of empathetic reflection where the fantasy of occupying the images with one's own body can be played out in fullness.

Auto-Biography of a Recliner 1: Ground

Neck arching back, moving earth under its shifting crown, revealing a small dimple—a symptom of its weight. This movement is in accordance with, and somehow a direct cause of the ongoing distortion of my legs. They stretch out before my undulating and disfigured eyes, impossibly, my hips remain intact and discernible, they are ever-detectable, whereas my thighs have undergone a decay enacted through speed. The velocity is horror. Their content has been stretched too thin, their constitution is undone and haggard from the effort. I can no longer properly discern them; they are lost in frozen acceleration, they have heated to functionless enamel. My feet reach out beyond me, upsetting the ground that bears them.

We, me and my bones, are soundless here. The muteness exists as material, something gelatinous and invisible, a totality resisting presence. Its constant pressure forces me downward, drawing my composition ever closer to this odd stage. This absolute compression forms new and nonviable joints throughout my body, my shoulder-blades succumb to hideous flexibility, my calves form a perfect half-moon over the creases of the ground. These untried seams reveal their function as a simple, desperate directive from the trunk and the limbs, to reach toward the unattainable base of my reclined position.

The result, a disruption of my borders. The surfaces of my body achieving contact with the ground through these hysterical efforts either superheat or freeze towards fragility and brittleness. It is not important which, the heat or cold, they are the same, interchangeable in their affects and appearances. I am the hissing heat of the desert (here mute) or the wastes of snow. My bodily facades, these cosmetic and permeable surfaces shed relevance here, the setting ever more intrusive—present in the folds of muscles and making skin strange. My body is a fossil. I am the earth yet unworldly, a prism locked in dread hypnosis, made of glass.

Rumination on the Floors of the Earth: The Ground

The ground, the landscape, is always the initial movement. These spaces come to form the metronome of my pictorial impulses. Collecting the appropriate ground, selecting the base of the image is always the first action towards a picture. The search is specific; I walk through the stacks of libraries, knowing that I am looking for a setting already permeated with emptiness. I imagine these spaces as perfectly silent. If I were to inhabit them, as the forms in these pictures do, the only possibility for auditory experience would be the contortions of the body in space. I conceive of a tinnitus that is not limited to the drums and passages of the ear, but instead is capable of resonating throughout the trunk and the limbs as they stretch and cave inward under the muted compression of this profoundly transformative expanse.

I search for photographs where this silence and an atmosphere of pressure—a transformative force I term *compression*—is already apparent in the setting, where “Everywhere there is a presence acting directly on the nervous system, which makes representation, whether in place or at a distance, impossible.” (Deleuze 44). I posit that there exists photographic spaces already imbued with these capacities prior to the manipulations and interventions inherent in my work. Compression is, then, a kind of vibratory photographic readymade. These photographs are processed and amalgamated, becoming the grounds of the image, the setting and the material earth that is inhabited while it simultaneously inhabits those that rest and act upon and within it. These bare, open spaces contain the critical powers of transformation and compression, a catalyst that I assert as being intimately related to Gilles Deleuze's conception of deformation:

Deformation is always bodily, and it is static, it happens at one place; it subordinates movement to force, but it also subordinates the abstract to the Figure. When a force is exerted on a scrubbed part, it does not give birth to an abstract form, nor does it

combine sensible forms dynamically: on the contrary, it turns this zone into a zone of indiscernibility that is common to several forms... (Deleuze 50)

Deleuze's one place, these grounds, esoteric floors of the earth, can also be approached and alluded to through the lens provided by Jane Bennett and her writings on material agency and the latent capacities lining the contours of subjectivity and materiality. I recognize the qualities of the grounds echoed, and reflect on the generative plasticity of the ground's role in these pictures when I read: "...my goal is to theorize a materiality that is as much force as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension." (Bennett 20). These grounds exist here as manifestations of materiality as well as agents capable of exacting transformations upon their various pictorial occupants. The ground in the case of these pictures is both stage and actor.

Given that I have asserted that these spaces, imbued with these exceptional powers of transformation, exist in a prior state to my finding them and later utilizing them within the work, the question arises as to where and when these images occur. What could these photographs depict in their initial, found condition that would charge them with the vitality inherent in forces of compression? I can answer this question in so far as I can detect and observe repetitions in source material, places and spaces I return to over and over again as in dreams that differ in content but invariably occur in a setting that remains impossibly consistent. Following this analogy, the reiterating dreamscapes that provide the grounds are largely found in spaces of violent conflict, specifically in images that capture the aftermath of bombardments. These photographs depict settings that leave their actors to sink into, and merge with the earth. There is a force, a state of compression, a transformative energy that is consistent and unrelenting in the spaces I choose for the images. There are few photographs that are inherently more forceful than those of bombardment and the wreckage rendered through this particular mode of violence. The ground in these photographs is always intensely muted but energetically taut.

The evidence of compression in this particular genre of image is uncharacteristically visual; the lines described by the explosions rend their way through the image and its dismembered objects, allowing the active and operative abstraction that is compression to register both physically and graphically in recorded space. I find that this play of forces, that remain nonrepresentational yet make themselves known through material points of detection, are intimately related to Deleuze's writings on sensation, especially in reference to Francis Bacon: "The body is completely living, and yet nonorganic. Likewise sensation, when it acquires a body through the organism, takes on an excessive and spasmodic appearance, exceeding the bounds of organic activity." (Deleuze 40). These grounds can be understood as receptive bodies that hold and are held in place by forces of compression; however, I depart from Deleuze's concept of sensation slightly in that I posit in these images that compression, instead of acting as a play of flows that can potentially vary in velocity and potency, remains ambient and constant. Compression is quiet. In fact, it is dead silence. However, it remains relentless.

The ground is the principle initiator of action in the images. With respect to material process, this is exceptionally relevant as the ground not only defines the nature of the energy that it brings to the picture in regard to seen and unseen forces inherent to the original photograph, but actually defines the filmic quality that will be carried consistently through the rest of the images, including the body. For instance, if I select as a ground a photograph of a section of scorched earth from the North African theatre of the Second World War, the film that initially captured it will be of a particular quality, a filmic sensibility dating to the late 1930s or early 1940s. From this point on then, the rest of the photographic content I select for the image must also be a product of 1940s film stock, for this creates a cohesion and *believability* vital to the functions of the finished image. These material sensibilities are sensitive and highly variable, their particular aspects can relate or engage with almost any feeling or sensation, they can invoke heat or cold. The early digital images of the 1990s for instance are ice-like, and

somehow charged with bizarre and optimistic eroticism, while the film stock in use during the 1970s is glowing and luscious, warm, as if, even as those pictures were being captured, they had already drifted far away: not into the distance, but towards some balmy pool. To combine these two stocks would be too much, they would turn on each other immediately, revealing themselves and diffusing one another. In order to retain a clarity of surface, these filmic sensibilities must remain homogenous within a given image, thereby presenting a cohesion of photographic surfaces that when combined are capable of producing illusion. This space, once invoked graphically, is then paradoxically able to transcend the boundaries of pictorial illusion and render a new state of the real relevant to the world established within the image. For these reasons, the selection of photographs that form the ground are of singular importance. It is the ground that imposes and exerts its capacities for compression upon the body that occupies it, while the body retains its liminal value as an object that participates and collaborates in its own decay and destruction, merging with the ground as well as acting as the border that defines it.

The grounds of compression are ambient in their nature in that they saturate and bound every aspect of the image; however, there exists an element that I define as a secondary ground that operates with an equal and parallel ambience. This is the overlaid ground formed by colour; in the case of this particular set of images— red. I conceive colour as an environmental actor and as a structuring force with its own set of occult capabilities. The red has something to do with heat, dryness, and my thoughts on blood. The colour, and specifically its monochromatic usage, enables me to distil these considerations and then to inject them democratically into the environment of the picture. These aspects can thereby surpass their wordless and esoteric status and begin to affect both the space created by the work and the body of the one who gazes.

I think of the works of Samuel Beckett when I consider colour. Specifically I return to the setting of one of his short prose works *The Lost Ones*, where, characteristically for Beckett, he

approaches the setting of his story with an obsessive attention to space and its potential for affect, addressing this space repeatedly through an insistence upon ambient colour: “What first impresses in this gloom is the sensation of yellow it imparts...Then how it throbs with constant unchanging beat and fast but not so fast that the pulse is no longer felt. And finally much later that ever and anon there comes a momentary lull.” (Beckett 213). And later again, perhaps with even more relevance and potency: “Once the first shocks of surprise are finally past this light is further unusual in that far from evincing one or more visible or hidden sources it appears to emanate from all sides and to permeate the entire space as though this were uniformly luminous down to its least particle of ambient air.” (Beckett 214-215).

Colour in the case presented by Beckett’s story as well as in my pictures is hovering and immaterial, yet thoroughly, and even horrifically capable of enhancing, destroying, or modifying space and its occupants through physical means: “And were it possible to follow over a long enough period eyes blue for preference as being the most perishable they would be seen to redden more and more in an ever widening glare and their pupils little by little to dilate till the whole orb was devoured.” (Beckett 214). A world built upon the faculty of vision therefore threatens itself with its own self destruction, mirroring the other quality I see in the red, which is its latent ability to void itself as a perceived colour. Red is capable of existing as a contour, a simple boundary, as well being able to act as and render the qualities of form and light. Red, in my perception of it, shares these abilities with its monochromatic sibling, black. Both can produce similar contrasts while somehow releasing their hold on the space of the picture as a set colour. Neither demand the specificity and *personality* that another colour would require. Red vanishes from the spectrum leaving only this heat, the total lack of moisture, and the taste of a loose tooth in the mouth.

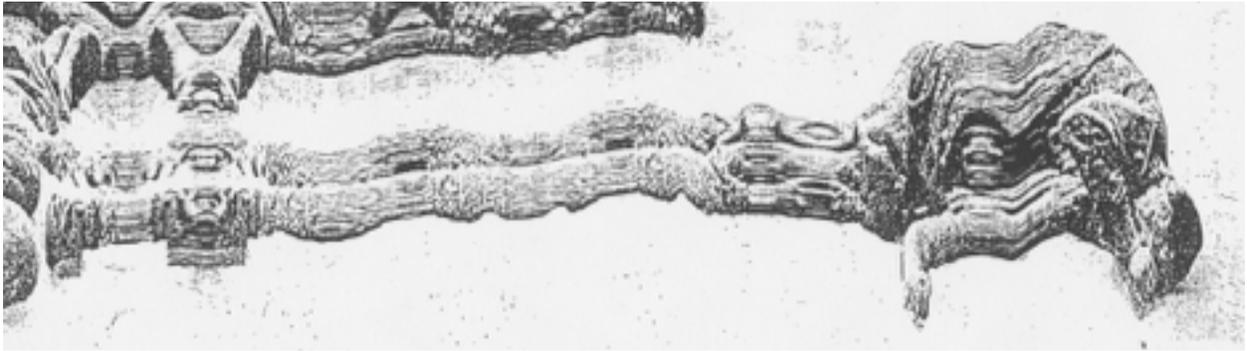


Fig. 1. Example of a Stretched Appendage

Auto-Biography of a Recliner 2: The Body

I laid down, I was laid down. It must have been a lathe that was pulled over my recumbency. Shearing the top sides of me downward, having me flat was its base intention, I have been pulled, the pulling continues. My spinal column means nothing, or it is plastic and irrelevant as a component of coordination or movement. I hardly remember motion that was not of the earth, that was not kin to the air itself. How am I always seeing a setting sun without an orb? Why is this dying light, a glowing blood all around me, not dying light at all, but brilliant and consuming?

My arms have been bent even further now, my forearm has become terrible, it is titanic, a colossus of absurd material, while my hand has shrunk, now in miniature, there is nothing to grab at though, the fingers are merely decorative in this place. Meanwhile my trunk fits the word; it is something long and made of wood whose fibres are growing too thin. The filaments still maintained look like those of dry rot found in a stump, or the innards of a freshly hewn pumpkin. It would be a mistake to think my body soft though, even with these pleasant similes, for the filaments, if I can call them that, are hard as a precious stone; they are enamel and gold, bone and even more so they are glass.

How can my own eyes mean so little here, be of such poor use. I am not blind, by no means, my sight is well retained; it's just these lenses, they have gone all long with the stretching. The lenses have gone all long under this mantle of weight and speed. So what I see would try to convince me of perpetual movement, that my body, this strange vehicle, was in constant motion, a haggard locomotive. But this is a lie, for I remain still, the velocity I wrongly perceive is only the stillness and deformity of these lenses brought to me as an image, as from a devastated camera.

Liminal Functions: Languishing Subjects, and Recumbent Materialities: The Body

In beginning to speak of the body and its relevance to my pictures, I will first assert exactly *how* I observe these bodies entering into the ground, the nature of this interaction and my role within its production. I do not view the body, the figure, as an element that is merely super-imposed upon the existing ground; instead I see the relations between the body and the ground through the voice provided by Jane Bennett by way of Spinoza:

Spinoza's conative, encounter-prone body arises in the context of an ontological vision according to which all things are 'modes' of a common 'substance'...what it means to be a 'mode,' then, is to form alliances and enter assemblages: it is to mod(e)ify and be modified by others. The process of modification is not under the control of any one mode —no mode is an agent in the hierarchical sense. (Bennett 21-22).

This pushing and pulling between and within the two substances described by the divisions of body and ground is vital to these works. This is compression acting upon the body, while the body meanwhile collaborates with the forces of compression inherent to the setting provided by the ground and manipulates the earth around itself. The one leaking into the other— not an aseptic division of properties, but a bleeding seam. This collaborative dynamic is echoed again through Bennett's work, this time invoking Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the assemblage: "Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within..." (ibid, 23-24).

So then, in introducing the body to the ground, it becomes vital to state that while I accept the phenomenological differences between these two materials as existent, I see them as being democratically weighted. The hierarchical dominion of the subject, the body, over the ground is removed in this sense; the two, when acting together, instead form a homogeneous, seething whole. It is this undulating collaboration, or assemblage, that allows for the breakdown

of the binary inherited from discussions that separate representation from abstraction. In this way, these pictures, while maintaining their status as such, become imbued with affective power; they are agents of: "...what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite." (Kristeva 4). The compositions remain recognizable as pictorial constructions, while occupying an occulted and unclassifiable zone.

This flattening of the images' hierarchical relations is what allows me to address the figure. It is only in viewing the figure as a non-prioritized element, as one object amongst others, that I am able to access the empathetic and potentially affective energy stored within it. I view the body as an aspect of a landscape. Laszlo Krasznahorkai sheds light on this seemingly contradictory relationship:

...a landscape painter, the kind who cannot do otherwise than paint landscapes: meaning this is so if there is some kind of landscape on the canvas, but also—and to the same degree—if there is a figure, so, well, what can be painted by the landscape painter, is always, in this sense, a landscape, and nothing else.....what it means to paint a landscape, to stand before a scene, and then it doesn't matter if the scenery is that of Grammont or Augustine on the deathbed, to stand there, to look at this life withdrawing for all eternity into death in the human and natural landscape, and to depict what is before him... (Krasznahorkai 362).

Engaging with representations of the body through the understanding of landscape then becomes a play of borders and intersections. I am interested in the meeting place of these two nodes of energy; I am concerned with the liminal border produced through their affective interactions. In this way, both the figure and the ground can enter into a relationship akin to alchemy, and through this collaboration both primary elements can reach past their original constitution and begin to suggest a third, and novel whole. This merger, this fading of the figure

into the surfaces of the earth, and likewise the dissolving of the earth as it moves under the weight of the figure, is achieved through a system of material interventions played out along the surfaces of the body. These manipulations are both cosmetically and ontologically charged at once, each action pushing the depiction of the body towards indeterminacy, finally threatening total eradication and invisibility. These operations are both virtual and actual, the accelerated decay exacted upon the body through material techniques is both an illustration—a demonstration of the concepts it supports, as well as being an *actual* embodiment of the liminal body communicating as some breed of absurd iconography.

I work with a photocopy machine, a sharp knife, glue, and acetone—or at least this describes the initial phases of my work, for ultimately, I feed the products of these tools through the obtuse gaze of the silkscreen process. I approach the body first either as a found body, a photograph of the body pre-existing, or conversely I engage the idea of a body in space, constructing this figure from multiple photographic sources. The latter is typically brought into play to meet the demands of a particularly challenging or rarefied ground; while the former is an exercise of finding, a method of engaging a vitality that is already present in the original source. In both cases, however, the energy inherent in the form, in this case the body, must be brought to the ground and introduced into a kind of affective pooling with it. For this to take place successfully, I must first enter and adjust the images that either sum up or construct the body in hopes that the surgical imposition thus enacted with the ground will yield something rancid, a generative infection given over to the certitude of decay. I cut, stretch, rub, and flatten.

When cutting paper, and thus into the image of the body (the rendition of the figure) I am inventing with the knife. It is a process and method that bears a physical relationship to the act of drawing. However, using the knife is always subtractive instead of additive; it is a way of emboldening the presence of a given material through its contradictory removal. To follow the grain of the bodies' surfaces with a sharp point is an affective gesture, a gesture rooted in both

cruelty and empathy. I identify with the object I am fabricating through the cutting; I am pursuing an alternative body, a body removed from the demands of movement and functionality—a stack of musculature that has its place in the realm of impossibility, the body as an unworldly material. I pursue this with the knife, this tool, almost above all others, allowing for the adjustment of the geometry—the strident rearrangement of the body’s structure. With it I am able to shape given forms into something that continues to reach out toward the viewer through gestures of undeniable recognition, while speaking from the other side of an invisible border; grasping from a place of impossible deformity toward the known and the lived as manifested in the viewing body. This alternative bodily geometry, this unworldly re-organization, is reflected in the Deleuzian concept, initially attributed to Artaud, of the body without organs. Deleuze explains:

The body without organs is opposed less to organs than to that organization of organs we call an organism. It is an intense and intensive body...In fact, the body without organs does not lack organs, it simply lacks the organism, that is, this particular organization of organs. The body without organs is thus defined by *an indeterminate organ...* (Deleuze 39,41).

The presence of the body re-addressed through these theoretical means becomes an object that is plastic instead of set, less a subject than an agential object. The unorthodox arrangements and geometric understandings of the body that I search out through the means of the knife are meant to degrade the borders that define a conventional body occupying a ground, to allow for a vital leakage that traverses both entities. As stated above, this transformation is empathetic; both for the producer and for the viewer, the body is affected and through this communicative and material affect insists on affecting back: “...the eye becomes virtually the polyvalent indeterminate organ that sees the body without organs (the figure) as pure presence. Painting gives us eyes all over: in the ear, in the stomach, in the lungs (the painting breathes...)” (Deleuze 45). The knife is not merely concerned with the modification of the body

as a representation, the modification of the body as it exists in the picture, but is also concerned with the recalibration of the bodies that gaze upon it. This particular functionality of the symbolized or iconically mutated body is one of the recurring sites of affective potential in a ritual artwork. It becomes a message that not only communicates but transforms through its presence.

The body in these works is recumbent, simultaneously resembling both a corpse and a reclining form while making claims to neither position in any affirmative sense. Stretching these bodies, laying them flat, and toying with their latitudes is a transformative act that reaches through and beyond the material world: “...the overwhelmed individual throws back his head while frenetically stretching his neck in such a way that the mouth becomes, as much as possible, an extension of the spinal column, *in other words, in the position it normally occupies in the constitution of animals.*” (Bataille 59). Laying the body down on the ground of the image exaggerates the points of contact between the body and the earth and recomposes the arrangement of the limbs in relation to the head and trunk, highlighting this seam of contact while giving way under the transformative exertion of compression suggested by the ground.

Stretching is achieved on the glass bed of the photocopier. The photocopier is significant to many aspects of my work, but is particularly relevant to the act of stretching, which is impossible to achieve with any other analog tool, and remains materially unconvincing within the realms of digital manipulation. There are two varieties of photocopy machine, and within these two varieties are many other variables. The first machine is the truly photographic machine that utilizes static flows and heat, transmitting its hot and dry image with fused toner. The second machine is a digital hybrid, a duplicitous object that communicates its information and loss through systems of pixelation and inkjets. While both varieties yield strengths the first type of machine is my preference—it is archaic, obtuse, and hot. Both the light of the bulb and its relentless off-gassing are hazardous, and as one moves further into the image through the

generation of many prints, information is gradually, and in some cases rapidly, lost. The rapidity of this loss can be managed, and to some point predicted, through adjustments within the machines on-board controls. However, what remains more pivotal for me in regard to the loss of information carried out by the xerographic machine is the choice of machine itself, together with the regular monitoring of the mechanism's material fluctuations. In the room in which I work, there are five photocopiers. They are the same make and model and contain identical components; however, these machines are open to the public and their ink and toner levels, as well as the surface qualities of their glass beds, fluctuate relative to the whims and desires of the collective body that describes their users. For instance, out of the five machines, the one nearest to the doors of the room will always provide the most predictable light tones, as the toner in this machine is heavily used. That is, until the cartridge finally runs out under this continued and focused pressure and then the arrangement will shift, where upon for a brief period this machine will provide me with beautiful darks. It is in this way that constant monitoring becomes deeply significant to my process, this becoming especially important to some notion of a practice. If I take two weeks off from producing, I will fall out of the predictable loops of the machines and will have to work to re-integrate myself within the web of their collective fluctuations and abilities.

This again, is of great importance to the stretching essential to the image, for the hue and patina of the stretch has far reaching consequences for the body as well as the picture at large (See Fig. 1). The stretching is played out through a game entered into with the glass bed and the bulb: the line of light runs along the bed of the glass rapidly, the stretch is a chasing of this light, and its gifts lay in allowing the bulb to interact with specific areas of information while hiding others from its vicious and lacerating sight. This strategy has everything to do with velocity and the nature of the movement the paper is subjected to through the gestures of the

arm. To waver in the wrong direction is folly; over time the muscles must be trained to remember, and the light, of course, represents a passageway to my own blindness.

I rub the figure with acetone, often to a degree that produces invisibility in isolated areas of the form. This rubbing and fading away is an effort to establish a vital symmetry between figure and ground that threatens to totally remove their phenomenological contrast. For instance, the undulating desert floor of *HEULMACT-AUTO-NNEUI* must be made to vibrate in a harmonious frequency with the gathering of heads that rests upon it (see Fig. 2). The ground must be allowed to hover and rise up to meet the borders of these forms, while the surface of the heads become porous through the rubbing, allowing the ground to fill their gaps. In wiping away and dissolving information, opening these pores of the figure, I am calling upon similar strategies that Deleuze detects in Bacon: “Bacon has not ceased to paint bodies without organs, the intensive fact of the body. the scrubbed and brushed parts of the canvas are, in Bacon, parts of a neutralized organism, restored to their state of zones or levels...” (Deleuze 40). Rendering and manipulating the figure through the introduction of acetone and other solvents allows me to build an unbuilt body, a body that allows for total plasticity, a body that can accept the ground as a sensorily harmonious aspect of itself. Producing something akin to a body without organs is a way for me to recalibrate the geometric and structural aspect of the figure to match the existing frequencies of vitality inherent to the ground and communicated through the forces of compression that come with it. Alternating the visibility and graphic presence of various limbs and sections of the trunk and head with solvents enables me to highlight the relative appearance of others. The body is turned into a system of gauges and meters that interact, affect, and display the play of vital forces operative in the picture. The ground, as noted above, acts as a pressurized vacuum, a space that is not neutral, not merely a setting for the objects and figures that it supports. The ground affects through forces of accelerated decay, pushing these forces across the surfaces of the body. As this decay is

enacted, these processes of disintegration are then echoed from the figure back onto the ground.

This particular circumstance of cooperation between the body and the ground can be further articulated through an understanding of the forces of dissipation that Deleuze posits as being operative in Bacon's work: "What makes deformation a destiny is that the body has a necessary relationship with the material structure: not only does the material structure curl around it, but the body must return to the material structure and dissipate into it..." (Deleuze 18). The effects of acetone and rubbing, when used within the material manipulations of the figure, are further mirrored in the gestation processes of adult house flies, wherein the fly never forms mouthparts capable of mechanical digestion and chewing; instead, the insect secretes saliva that acts as a solvent transforming solids into liquids the fly can then absorb. Rubbing away sections of the figure with acetone is akin to this secretion, changing the properties of the body and the ground that carries it into something movable, a liquid, porous and shifting material that is both materially and formally homogenous. The body in this case secretes the results of its own compression and disintegration back out onto the affective ground it inhabits, thereby disfiguring and opening that ground onto liquid and flexible modes. In the case of these pictures, the fly then would not only digest the earth around it, but would merge with the properties of the earth, thereby becoming a composite object and a visceral occupant of both figurative and abstract space.

I go to great pains to constantly flatten the image. Initially this is achieved through routine photocopies executed during the generation of the image, and later, through the finalizing role of the silkscreen. When new elements are added to the composition with glue and as more papers are layered on top of the existing composition, I will make a xerographic print, and in this way establish all of the material movements made up until that given point into a new ground that is paused at this material plateau. From here I can continue to initiate actions,

adding and manipulating further material. This process of flattening by way of an additional print is repeated each time an addition is carried out. However, the nature of the xerographic process is such that it is given over entirely to its paradoxical production of loss. Each time a new print, a new copy, and a new ground is established through the efforts of flattening, more information is shed from the image. Addition, in this case, is phenomenologically congruent with subtraction. The flattened image is a composite one that communicates time and degradation. These flat images are a visual likeness of the processes of decay that are illustrated in lived experience by conceptual metrics of time, and serve to break down any notion of linear progress that the image may have suggested or contained.

This flattening is then cemented, indelibly paused at a chosen point through the silkscreen process. The fidelity of the silkscreen medium is an indifferent one. The process is akin to that of xerography in the way light reduces a referent to the compelling tedium of a single colour on one uniform layer. These processes rely on the fragmentation of a given image and its subsequent amendment, although that amendment takes place on the medium's new and restrictive terms. Both the exposure table of silkscreen and the glass bed of the xerox unit are eyes that defeat their function, they are eyes that reduce, degrade, and perpetuate instead of accurately perceiving. This pathological inaccuracy is the fundamental setting for the innate romance of the silkscreen.

The screen empties the images presented to it by imposing a sense of pressure, in line with the forces of compression. The heavy lid of the exposure bed embraces, and then smothers its contents under thick rubber. The air is removed through a murmuring vacuum. I wait, standing under yellow lights as the stencils are left to the ravages of the table's eye. This operation is performed in the interests of visual democracy, and for the body it is a burial, a total erasure of the phenomenological hierarchies that may have initially been assigned to it.

Viewing the whole formed by the end product of these images is to view a paradoxical machine that is locked in a state of constant movement, development, mutation and transformation—all the while rending itself apart, towards invisibility, through the strain of these various efforts of expression and affect. The process of flattening could very well be seen as a response to the issues of representation at the borders of the livable as presented by Julia Kristeva, when she writes: “ The problem is to give form and colour to the nonrepresentable—conceived not as erotic luxuriance...but rather as the nonrepresentable conceived as the dissipation of the means of representation on the threshold of their extinction in death.” (Kristeva 254). Time, process, and the equation those aspects form with material devastation are the nonrepresentable, the pictures forming a diagram of unknowable processes and machinations.

The initial layers suffer the most devastating losses. The spaces in the distance fall apart, while the limbs of the figure in the foreground endure the same processes of disintegration and dissipation arrested at alternate stages. The strategic juxtaposition of these various phases of decay allows for a disruption of time, upsetting the expectations of a predictable fall beyond the borders of the lived and the known. The body and its limbs are promised the same fate in time—materiality and representation here form a communion with the abstractions embedded in the real.

Auto-Biography of a Recliner 3: The Text

I could describe two instances, though one description will be sufficient for both cases. I am laying on my side, there is something under my ribs, on the left side of my body, my left set of ribs, pushing towards some protuberance, shifting the ground underneath. Though uncharacteristically for my body, and even more for the ground, there is no pain, no sensation, not even numbness; I am merely a node of perception that is paradoxically aware of a body while maintaining no relations with it. This then is the setting, my vital geometries in place. In this posture I perceive another set of eyes, these soon fade and a mouth emerges, after that a voice, and then nothing else. If I could only find a way to describe the voice, how its vibrations heave and oscillate producing a horror of calm. The voice carries with it a function of its own invention, both the engine and the fuel as perpetual as it is transformative.

What is this articulate noise that interrupts the silence that until now was total? The sound is this mouth, it is the voice, and it describes my body to my body itself, bypassing my transmissible modes, it addresses my body "...a cluther of limbs and organs, all that is needed to live again,...I'll call that living, I'll say it's me, I'll get standing, I'll stop thinking, I'll be too busy, getting standing..." (Beckett 109). As this body is addressed, it not only hears, but listens, and from there obeys the articulations this vast mouth suggests; my organs fall away and my limbs dissipate, I am performative and odd to the earth. My spine arches backward, remodelling my shapes, and after some soft breakage, the heels of my feet meet my crown now softening under the pressure of these appendages, forming concavity hitherto unknown. This is the first time, and the physique, the demands of this earth, of this mouth, shift, the spine lengthening and pulling towards tension; now, it is my knee, my left knee, that is undone. I bend, ever athletic toward injunction. I am this message; perhaps I am a linguist unable to read, I am a statement embodied but unavailable, this mutilation, the one that describes my contortions, is an incantation that I live but cannot know.

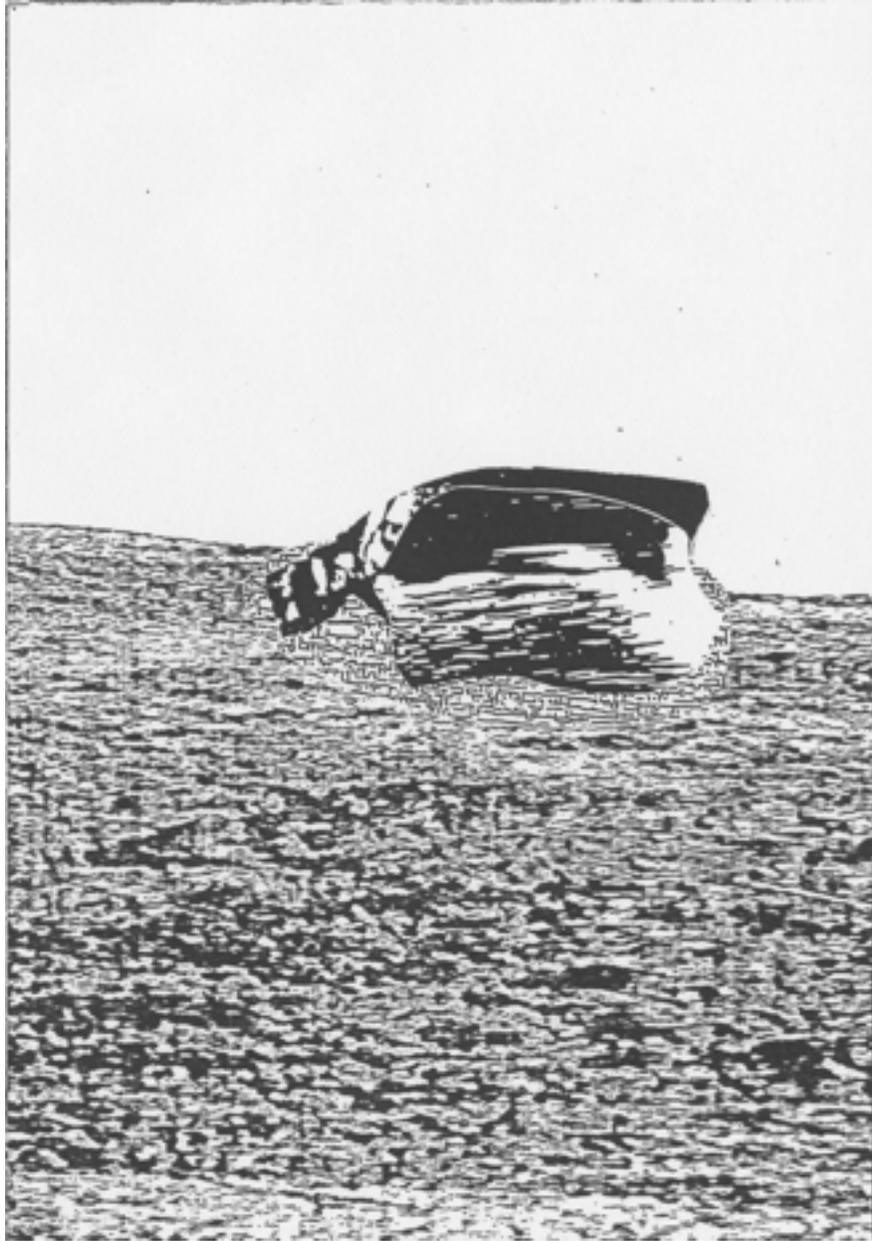


Fig. 2. *HEULMACT-AUTO-NNEUI: A Portrait of the Desert's Floor*

Writing Towards a Body, Dry Assemblages Grow Wet: The Text

During a 1976 interview with Roger Ebert, underground American filmmaker Kenneth Anger responds to a question relating to an artwork's affective potential and its functionality beyond display:

I've heard, I said, that you are a follower of Crowley, and that you believe your films are invocations of magic spells.

"That's right," he said...

How do your films create magical states?

"Some movies can be the equivalent of mantras. They cause you to lose track of time (when) you become disoriented magical things can happen. Magic causes changes to occur in the universe. You can mix two elements together and get an unexpected result just beyond the edge of what you realize.

My chosen point of reference, when attempting to locate evidence of Anger's occult assertions in his own body of work, is one of his earliest films entitled *Puce Moment*. Produced in 1949, this six minute early colour silent short film opens with what I would describe as a mantra of optics. The shot is simply and marvellously composed, with the dark bars marking its boundaries creating verticals on either side of the image, and in the middle, in the centre of the frame, an unseen hand pulls a long series of gowns toward the camera; then moves them up and away with a shuddering motion. The myriad colours of the train of gowns glow lush and vibrant on the early colour film stock, and the palpitating gesture that removes them from the frame grows increasingly violent as the dresses are sifted through, until the termination of the shot, when a shimmering grey-green full sequined garment is selected, and practically snatched away from the camera. This is followed by a delirious, almost intoxicating unfocused close-up of the surface of the dress, swallowing the whole of the shot in a full bleed of glittering stones. This initial scene both depicts and manifests ritual incantation through the play of colour

and movement within the static composition of the frame, thereby recalibrating the frequencies of the viewing subject. The transformative aspect of the picture is embedded in the very tissue of the shot, where it waits for the eyes and the body.

The use of text in my pictures comes with a similar set of intentions. By this I do not mean that I am a follower of Aleister Crowley, but that I see the completed image in my works as an icon imbued with occult functions, a communicative and transformative object capable of transmitting real affect towards living bodies and the matter that composes them. This is true for the entire image— the three movements described by the body, ground, and text— but is especially pertinent to the manifestation of the text. All of the words contained in the text transmit definitive messages. These messages address the body; they are phrases or words that cause a kind of pause or shudder when I read over them, they are messages that engender anxiety and elation. There are words, and combinations of words, that resonate within the body that can both describe the body and its current state, and suggest the transformation of that same body. These words quiver and shake towards our linguistic registers. Over time they become recognizable through this characteristic approach; they almost itch, they nearly have a taste. I call these *dangerous* messages, and for a picture to be successful, this aspect of the script must be powerfully felt.

A point of clarification: these messages are not so-called dangerous messages because of any lack of faith I have in a potential viewer or for that matter because of some claimed import on the part of the dispatch contained; instead they are dangerous to my own body. The messages contained are terribly awkward, or they fill me with an odd flavour, or they somehow resonate in an almost audible way. These incantations are a record of my own received affects, projected outwards.

After settling on one of these textual conveyances, I pass it through a rudimentary digital text scrambler. The text, once sufficiently encrypted, is then placed within the image itself.

Through these methods, I act out my own model of an incantatory rite; this stage of my production is a ritual in earnest. The entirety of the message is contained within the text seen, with no additions or subtractions. It is crucial that it is present *in full*; the dispatch begs to be read, it is easily recognizable as text—as a communication— yet evades all possibilities of linguistic understanding through stubborn unreadability. However, I trust that the affective essence of the message, in remaining embedded within the image, still carries with it its dispatch for the viewing body. I want to speak directly with the body through the intellectual artifice of language while interfering with the basic functions of that language by trading its linguistic communications for others rooted in sensation. The text, by way of this process, becomes a dual phenomenon: it is both language and image, it is a text in communion with bodies, relinquishing its basic abilities of dissemination, instead favouring the organs of the trunk and the surfaces of the skin over those found beneath the crown.

In 1919 Franz Kafka wrote a story called *In The Penal Colony*, in which he described a version of script that was a physical and directly affective communicator. The story is a sustained description of an execution, carried out through bizarre mechanical means by way of a device simply referred to as the apparatus. A description of the machine follows:

...three parts. In the course of time each of these parts has acquired a kind of popular nickname. The lower one is called the 'bed,' the upper one the 'Designer,' and this one here in the middle that moves up and down is called the 'Harrow.'...The Bed and the Designer hung about two meters above the Bed...Between the chests shuttled the Harrow on a ribbon of steel...as soon as the man is strapped down, the Bed is set in motion. It quivers in minute, very rapid vibrations...in our bed the movements are all precisely calculated...Whatever commandment the prisoner has disobeyed is written upon his body by the Harrow. (Kafka 142,143,144).

Crucially, this story describes a text that remains unreadable for the victim of the execution, the possibility of deciphering the text through a readerly method is irrelevant to the transmission of its message. This text instead addresses the body in a brutal and literal sense: “‘He doesn't know the sentence that has been passed on him?’ ‘No,’ said the officer again... ‘There would be no point in telling him. He'll learn it on his body.’” (Kafka 144-145). What is this text then? What is this language that addresses the punitive surface of the prisoner's skin in Kafka, or the text in my own work that lectures the transformative surfaces of the organs themselves, of the guts? This is an incantatory text. In certain language, as touched on above, it is the magical aspect of language, language that interacts with material and space in a physical sense, reorganizing these relationships of physique. The text allows the material aspects of the viewer's body to mutate into a paradoxical node, a place where text is allowed to commune with the body, the body becoming a site of a potentially odd transcendence:

...about the sixth hour! Enlightenment comes...It begins around the eyes. From there it radiates. A moment that might tempt one to get under the Harrow oneself...the man begins to understand the inscription...you have seen how difficult it is to decipher the script with one's eyes; but our man deciphers it with his wounds. (Kafka 150).

There is another conversation relevant to language and letter forms that occurs in my pictures; a secondary text formed by the pictorial relationship of the bodies placed on the ground. It is a subtle text that casts off even the barest suggestion of readability in the conventional sense; instead communicating through the body by way of suspicion. As an example, I can speak to the composition in the piece entitled *SDUEHDR* (see Fig 3.). This picture is a remembrance of settings from my childhood and youth, where occasionally, when walking in the woods, I would come across the remains of an animal that had been previously killed, or had died of some other cause. The aftermath of these scenes was always fascinating: a combination of the way the scavengers consumed and then moved the segments of the body

around on the floor of the forest, and the additional movement provided by the flows of regular rain water, conspired to present these corpses as objects that seemed impossibly curated. I could never rid myself of the suspicion that I was witnessing a form of language, that what I was in fact seeing were letter forms splayed out on the ground, formulated through decapitation and rotting matter, the curvatures of the symbols described by damp pelts sinking into the earth. This appeared to simultaneously be the product of a brute and obsessive adherence to some unknown but dictated geometry.

In a period ranging from 1963-1965, Samuel Beckett wrote two short stories: *All Strange Away* and *Imagination Dead Imagine*. I read these stories as being intimately connected not only with one another but with this conception of an obsessive geometrical arrangement of the body. The relentless physical adjustments as well as the environments that they are meant to take place within are laid out repeatedly and in exacting detail:

Till all white in the whiteness of the rotunda...go in, measure. Diameter three feet, three feet from ground to summit of the vault. Two diameters at right angles AB CD divide the white ground into two semicircles ACB BDA. Lying on the ground two white bodies, each in its semicircle...For nine and nine eighteen that is four feet and more across in which to kneel...And even lie, arse to knees say diagonal ac, feet say at d, head on left cheek at b...lying more flesh touching glowing ground...see how that works. Arse to knees, say bd, feet say at c...(Beckett 172,182).

The scenario that Beckett relays in these short stories forms something akin to those circumstantial monuments in the woods and to the use of the body as a potential letter form in my own works. In my reading, he is superimposing one text upon the other, first, is the actual text of the narrative, the second being the visualized text of these arranged bodies as the reader is made to picture their contortions in detail through their diagrammatic descriptions. Both of these modes of writing describe physical narratives, the body is athletically engaged in reading

and living these words. This endless remodelling of the body, and the careful attention paid to its vibrating contours, is a secondary text in my pictures whose primary node of access remains the affected body of the viewer. These letter forms barely suggested through the depiction of curated, twisted, profoundly *moved* bodies is a transmission of physical empathy. The back aches, the neck extends, the trunk dissolves, merging with a floor of pale sand.

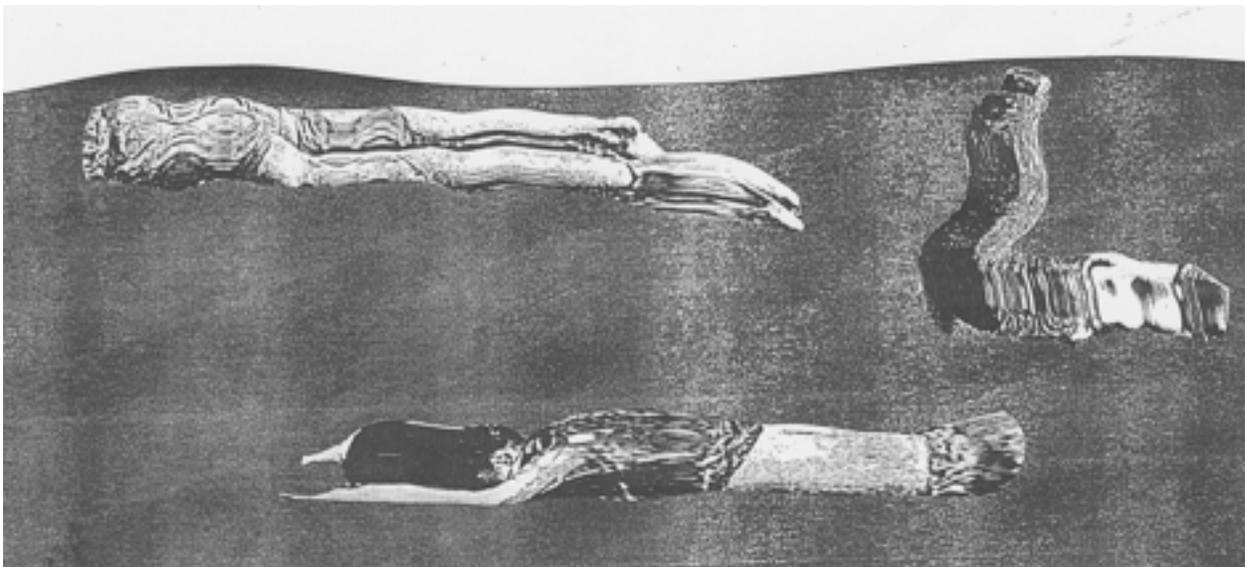


Fig. 3. Figure 3: *SDUEHDR: Body Language, an Athlete's Decay*

Some Concluding Remarks:

I deny that this piece of writing is merely an illustration of a visual device already established, for if I am assuming that the images' functions are sound, this would not be necessary. Instead, this written work is a vital extension and elaboration of this already existing and complementary visual, and material process. This written work is a record of that process, the blueprint for a model found and elaborated upon through a subjective methodology. These movements are not exclusively material or theoretical, they exist instead as a way of doing. Together, the three divisions come to signify the characteristics of a way of life described through the iterations of practice. To truly conclude is too awkward, and to claim to do so would be an inauthentic gesture. This paper has reported the contours of a kind of picture, and more important than the pictures themselves, it has relayed a mode or mechanism whose actions are now ongoing and perpetual. This paper, then, is not meant to demarcate an ending and therefore a body of work past, instead, it is a living transmission broadcasting the manifestations of an operation ever lived and present.

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