

Unspoken We

May 11 – June 17 2018

W139

Jason Dungan

Sarah Bayliss

Minna Bohn Pedersen

Gabrielle le Bayon

Pippa Connolly

Sara Giannini

Belén Zahera

Susana Cámara Letet

Introduction

Unspoken We

a choir of discordant voices
unsung and quartered by a multitude of minds
limbs of bodies clasping rhythms
a chaos so vile no ears
remain untouched

confined in flesh and bone
never to escape the loneliness of one
each of us dance to the scoreless tunes
whistling nervously, frivolously
and frank

I open the palm
of my hand towards you and
we rise and fall with the tides of the others
caught between the soft outline of the 'I'
and the rumble of the rest

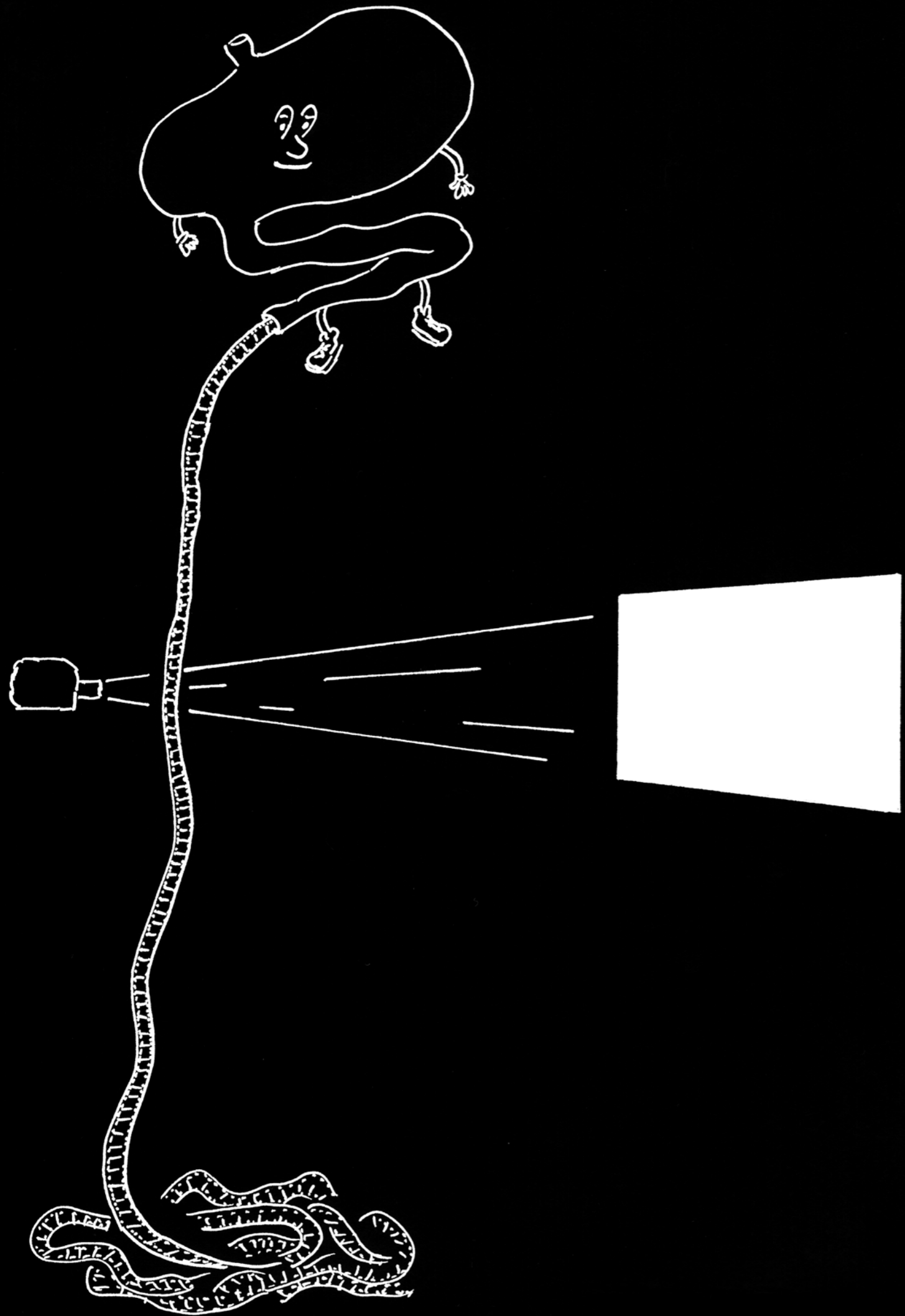
we build castles in sky
in which stories unfold and tumble
here we lay the skeleton of movements
point towards the missing links
map the highway to get lost
we name the
unspoken

we

not like heroes
like fools in love
like the acrobat in flight
like the sum of all that is consumed in a day
like the seal/women who mutates between states
like a tale of two cities by two women turning into one
like vegetation housed in buildings that cut the line of the horizon
like the fluttering of butterfly wings above the reminiscence of its former self

on this ground, that is not really there, not really said, we stand like all else
depending on a fiction
spoken or silenced

Us



EATING

I woke up early yesterday and made a cup of coffee. After 15 minutes I had some toast and looked out the window while music played in the background. A tree waving in the wind cast a shadow on the kitchen wall.

After a long walk, I ingested a 1963 Bolex H16 REX-5 spring-wound 16mm reflex camera, along with 800 feet of tungsten-balanced FUJI colour stock.

For lunch, I had 6 takeaway coffees, plus 1 liter of photo developer, and a stack of newspapers.

I took a nap.

Walking home, I ate a man I saw in the street, in 5 big bites.

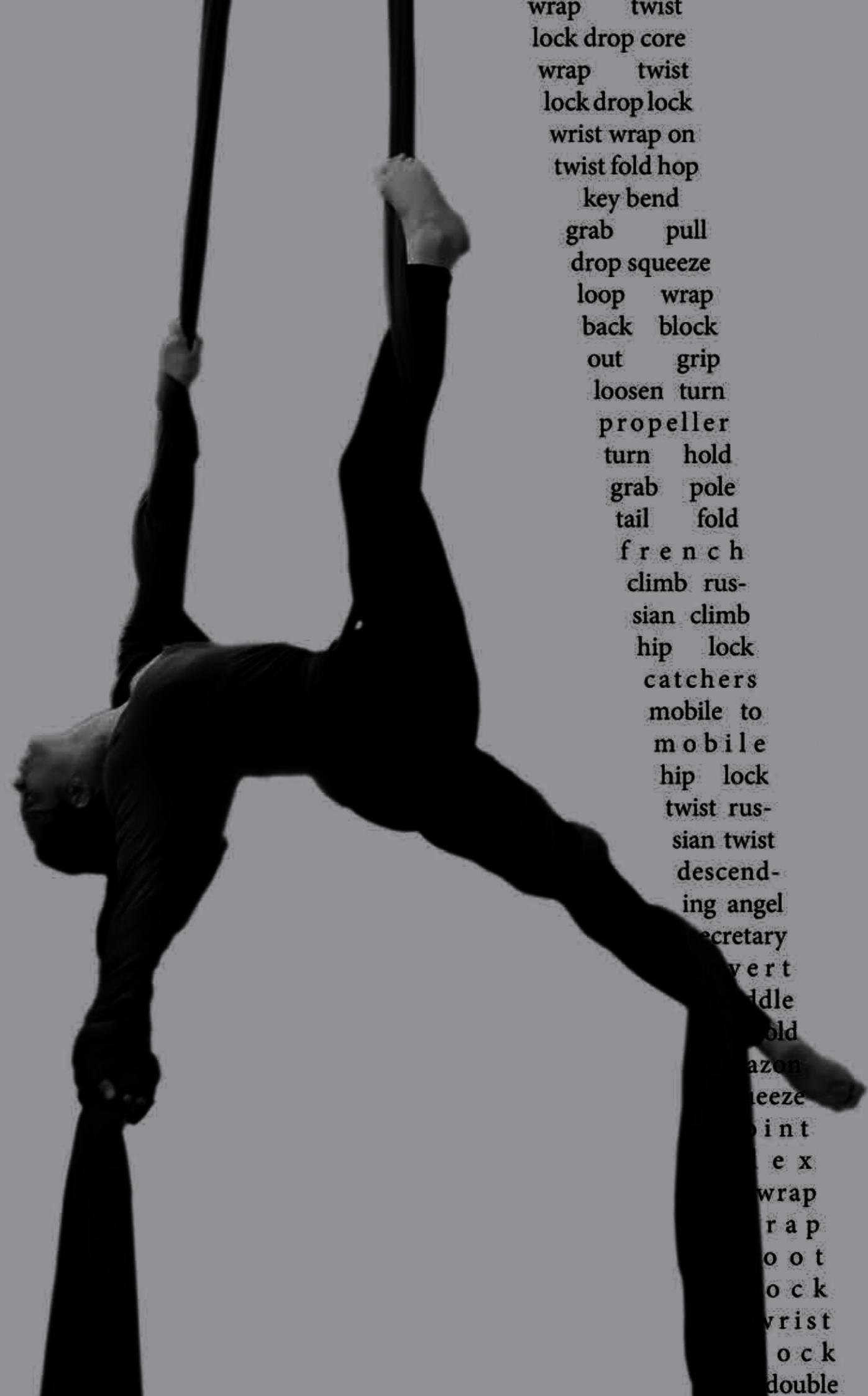
In the evening I consumed a forest of pine trees, over 10,000 liters of seawater and a saxophone, along with a stack of steel beams and a vegetable lasagne.

As a late snack, I warmed up the remains of an old zoom lens and polished it off with a bowl of human hair.

I slept almost 12 hours.

When I woke up this morning, my stomach was empty.





wrap twist
lock drop core
wrap twist
lock drop lock
wrist wrap on
twist fold hop
key bend
grab pull
drop squeeze
loop wrap
back block
out grip
loosen turn
propeller
turn hold
grab pole
tail fold
f r e n c h
climb rus-
sian climb
hip lock
catchers
mobile to
m o b i l e
hip lock
twist rus-
sian twist
descend-
ing angel
secretary
invert
middle
hold
amazon
squeeze
point
ex
wrap
rap
oot
ock
wrist
ock
double

H e ' s
c o v e r e d
h i s
h e a d
w i t h
h i s
h o o d

I feel like that sometimes

but you can do it by staring
at
the
floor

I can't take a photograph

because of the man opposite
who
jiggles and mutters

AND THINKING HARD OF

THE VOICE

a n n o u n c e s
v e r y n i c e l y
t h a t w e a r e
a p p r o a c h i n g
T e m p l e



ELSEWHERE

it means nothing but another stop on the way

to

NOWHERE

cables snake around

jiggling man
has gone

Muttering

.. I get my camera ready



on top

dark thickness earth and brick
Sloane Square

trees and air



Scene

Spring in one city arrived early blending the smell of cigarette smoke with sights of pale green. Here one woman, A bends in her knees to pick up the paper towel she dropped. In the other city the snow filters through sunlight against a blue sky. Here the other woman, B begins climbing the stairs to the fourth floor shaking the crystals of her coat. These women out of reach but in touch to impose upon reality those boundaries do not exist, that only nearness and proximity of thoughts count. Both with writing at the tips of their fingers, they combine a story of one woman in one world.

A

This morning I woke up in a startle. I thought I was falling into a void.

B

My jaw clasps so easily together.

A

To write. To write, but not by chance, with the only aim to invent incredibly lively hearts. Another experimental narrative, another voice-over, another mystery.

B

She watches the dancers who are blind. Wonders how they mirror the shape of the each other? The body meets limitations, but chooses to move beyond it. She sees with her hands and feet.

A

She moves on through life, through her life, as if she was dancing through life. A woman who works with her body, who thinks fast, who moves swiftly, who doesn't want to waste time, to waste her life.

B

She turned swiftly and the knife nearly tumbled towards the floor. Abruptly she stopped breathing, but then laughed.

A

It's her who recognized me first. We laughed. She said I was jumping everywhere and that my hair was a mess.

B

He went through the doors to collect the blue jumper. I also gave him coffee and offered a kiss, but it was left hanging in the air. Instead he just grabbed my waist.

A

Count on your own strength, he used to tell me.

B

The noise massive. No talking. Just leaning against the window, looking beneath the orange wings: The farm, someone waving, the field with peas and cornflowers.

A

She dares being slow, like people who are confident in themselves. She tries to picture in her mind a landscape the way it is, although she isn't in front of it.

B

Under our brows lie the stories and the final resting place of the horizon. It tilts every night as the eyes shut.

A

Make physical films. Make films physically.

B

Scenes in greenish water, where I am swimming with fish, large fish. In an aquarium not in a river.

A

Unruly scenes that overflow the friezes' frame like melting whipped cream. Angels and clouds, pink marble, Nicolas Poussin's tomb, an ice cream, ten coffees, two glasses of prosecco, a pack of slim 'Club' cigarettes. A crab.

B

The tongue no longer suspended between languages, but regressed to the origins, no longer caught in pools of curiosity and inventiveness.

A

Writing creates a space between words. It gives a sense of time to the mise-en-scene of the film, or of the novel.



B

The text. The written word. Acts differently. It somehow also moves hand in hand with the logical or the definable. Language perhaps is always on a quest to define and dissect. Perhaps looking without the use of language opens another place.

A

I'm not sure I can write it all. At the end. In the end.

B

The voice is sometimes, that which opens up the image. Here I mean quite literally. The voice can scratch into the surface and move it beyond the varnish.

A

The body speaks. When it manifests itself for real, it's violent.

I need futile moments that don't lead anywhere.

B

I feel the others are turned away and turned towards them selves. They are compartmentalised in their different lives.

A

I don't need to speak. There's nothing to say. Nobody's fooled.

B

Against the sky all bodies are cast in darkness and become alike.

Their hands are merging. Their eyes blinking in tune. They have moved through the spaces and emerge at the edge of the windowsills of the everyday. Here we leave them opaque, superimposed and luminescent. From two into one.

















The skin – Curzio Malaparte
The seal's woman skin – Patrick Harpur
Other fictions, edits and comments
by Sara Giannini and Belen Zahera



The only certain, tangible, undeniable thing is one's skin. It's the only thing we possess, the only thing that's our own and nevertheless, allows us to become other to ourselves. The most mortal thing in the world!

It is worth remembering that **tales of skin-shedding**¹ are extremely widespread. In Norse mythology, for instance, the hero Sigmund and his nephew Sinfiotl find two wolf-skins in the forest and, putting them on, become wolves whose adventures seem to constitute an initiation for Sinfiotl.

Two years ago, on a rainy day in London, I was on my way to have dinner with a friend when I slipped and fell awkwardly in the street. My left hand started bleeding. **I had a wound on my palm**². I continued walking, arrived at the Vietnamese restaurant and pressed a cloth against the wound while waiting for my favorite dish of *phish*³.

On a kind of stretcher, covered with magnificent red, they carried, in the traditional manner, an immense solid silver tray, containing an enormous fish.

– “Here is the Siren!” exclaimed General Cork.

In the middle of the tray was a little girl, or something that resembled a little girl. Her eyes were open, her lips half closed; and she was gazing with an expression of wonderment at Luca Giordano's painting of the *Triumph of Venus*⁴ which adorned the ceiling: the blue sea, the silvery fishes, the green sea monsters, the white clouds that drifted across the horizon; and she smiled ecstatically. This was her sea, this was her lost country, the land of her dreams, the happy kingdom of the Sirens.

All along the northern seaboard of Europe the story is told of the young man who sees a flock of seals swimming towards a deserted shore under a full moon. They stepped out of their skins to reveal themselves as beautiful young women who dance naked on the sand. The young man steals one of the skins preventing its owner from resuming her seal form. He marries her and they have children. But she constantly searches for the seal skin her husband has hidden. One hot day her human child comes to her, saying “Oh mother, is not this the strange thing I have found in the old barley-kist, a thing softer than mist to my touch”. Quickly, deftly, the seal woman put it on and took the straight track to the shore. And, with a deep down and keck up she went, liltng her sea-joy in the cool sea water.

1. Sara Giannini: Reading the text that inspired your work for the show, I was struck by the desire of getting back to the hallucinatory, cruel, mind-blowing, synesthetic novel *The Skin* (“La Pelle”) by Curzio Malaparte. Malaparte (an artist name that in Italian translates as “evil side” and is the contrary of Bonaparte “good side”) was a soldier during WW2 and the book tells the story of the liberation of Naples by Americans. It is structured as a series of tableaux of sorts depicting the surreal, abjectual misery of a city of victims/perpetrators and their optimist, well-mannered and deeply corrupted saviors.

Belen Zahera: I would be interested in the *texturization* of the apparent good/evil divide. I wonder whether it is at all possible to move away from emphasizing those categories towards exceeding, unfolding and transforming them. What is this show, “Unspoken We”, if not inconsistent with its own principle, that of contamination and contact? The unspoken, the unexpressed, the secret, is precisely that which stubbornly remains untouched, uncontaminated, unalterable, fixed in a state of purity: an eternal interior. I guess this is when fiction comes into play: writing as a conscious form of parasitizing, showing the entanglement of divides, embracing contradictions instead of purging them.

2. Sara Giannini: There is also something else that intrigues me a lot. The cover of the English translation of *The Skin* is a red Concetto Spaziale by Lucio Fontana. The same piece was used for the cover of the first edition of the equally disturbing novel *Les Bienveillentes* by Jonathan Littell. *Les Bienveillentes* is an intimate first-person narration of the life of a fictional SS Nazi murderer. Maybe you've heard about it, it stirred quite a hell of a discussion when it came out especially for its cold depiction of the assassination of a little girl and for the fact that the reader is pushed to identify with the narrator. I find this coincidence quite compelling... if you think of Fontana's piece as an act of profanation of a skin or a membrane.

Belen Zahera: The coincidence between the covers is interesting (I must say I'm a big fan of covers' role in relation to texts and books' titles). Fontana's cuts always reminded me of Mary Richardson's attack on the surface of the Rokeby Venus, not only because both can be interpreted as a gesture against representation but because many times they are somehow inclined towards the right side, probably because the “authors” were right-handed. And so, I've always made a mental (even naive) connection among Fontana, Richardson and the slash sign (“/”) which always establishes a divide, an either/or relationship. But again, I wonder whether the slash sign is actually a cut or an infinite surface of which we only see its edge or thickness. Like the woman/seal in Harpur's tail, who mutates from one form to the other through the skin.

3. Belen Zahera: Phish is our own bait here, our camouflaged referent: an American rock band, founded in 1983, known for musical improvisation, extended jams and blending of genres; the attempt to obtain sensitive information by disguising as a trustworthy entity in an electronic communication; a fish, a seal, a siren, a voice in disguise, the unspoken we.

4. Belen Zahera: It seems there's not a specific painting by Giordano with this title. Perhaps Malaparte made a hybrid of pictorial references, a meta-trick within the novel?

Sara Giannini: Il *Trionfo di Giuditta* is a fresco by Giordano in the ceiling of the Certosa di San Martino in Naples, considered one of the jewels of Italian baroque. Malaparte must have muted the skin of the fresco for his siren.

– “Is it a good fish, the Siren?”- someone asked.

– “Excellent!” the majordomo had replied, without batting an eyelid, and had written on the menu: *Siren mayonnaise with a border of coral*.

And now, pale-faced and dumb with surprise and horror, we were all looking at that poor dead child as she lay open-eyed in the silver tray, on a bed of green lettuce leaves, encircled by a wreath of pink coral stems.

Here and there, especially about the shoulders and hips, the skin had been torn or pulpified by the process of cooking, and **through the cracks and fissures a glimpse was afforded of the tender flesh**⁵.

Later on **the cut stopped bleeding**⁶ and became a scab.

– “It may be a fish,” said the chaplain, “but it looks more like a little girl ... Allow me to insist: it is our duty to bury this little girl ... I mean, this fish.

In the end all dead cells fell off, here and there, like dust. I heard that the skin regenerates itself entirely approximately every month. It seems that we shed around 3.6 kilograms of dead skin every year. That’s also what we inhale, I suppose: the partial death of others floating as tiny particles in the air.

Such beliefs are as old as they are widespread. Skin-shedding is a variation, rich in metaphor, for shape-changing; for it tells us, among other things, that there is only the softest mistiest skin between this world and the **Other**⁷.

After a month the wound was healed but a new line had been born on my palm. It didn’t look like a scar but just like any other line to be read.

“A good day for palmistry” – I thought.

5. Belen Zahera: The cut profanes the surface of representation but it doesn’t erase it. It’s not the Derridean trace but an additive element, it reinforces the representation, so to speak. It is metamorphic. So, regarding the two novels you mentioned and their unfolding, I guess the interesting part is to consider the strange, the other, as something that *is already there*, not outside but perhaps just “a skin away”.

Sara Giannini: The devil, il diavolo, el diablo, apparently comes from the Greek “Diaballein”, which means to divide and separate. The separating function of the devil is opposed the symbolic, synthetic function of love, “syn-ballein.” Is the cut an archetype of evil? Or is it perhaps the only way through which we can glimpse at the obscene, the remainder, the uncanny flesh that permits the surface of representation to manifest itself? Is the cut the indexical sign that sustain the sacred space of fiction by means of profanation?

Belen Zahera: No love without its devils. The monster (from Latin “monstrare”) is ultimately that which shows itself. Are not images just monsters, omens, every time they appear to us, always already waiting for a reenactment, looking for another skin?

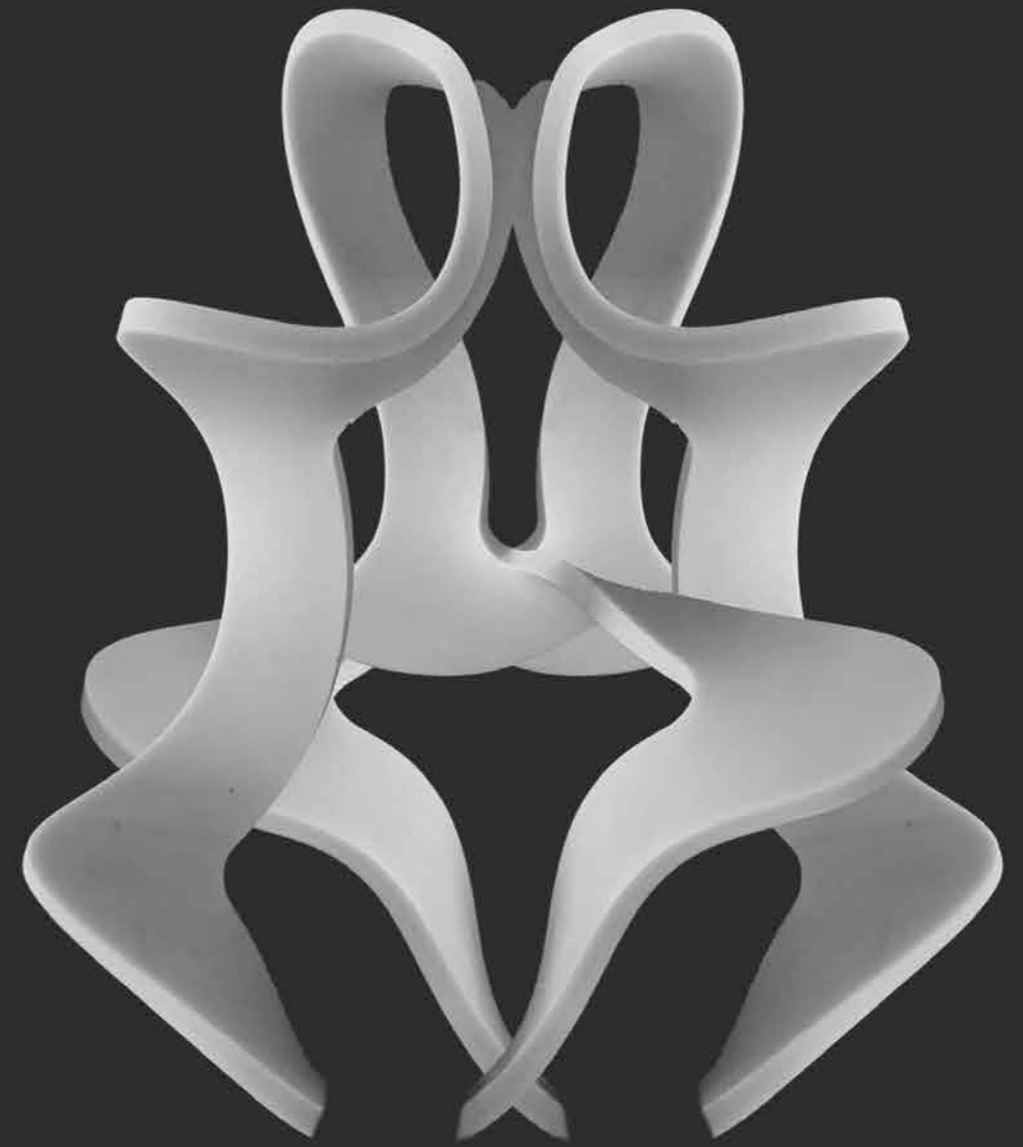
6. Belen Zahera: Cuts and bleeds, the text overflowing itself. Like editing something too much, so much that it turns unrecognizable.

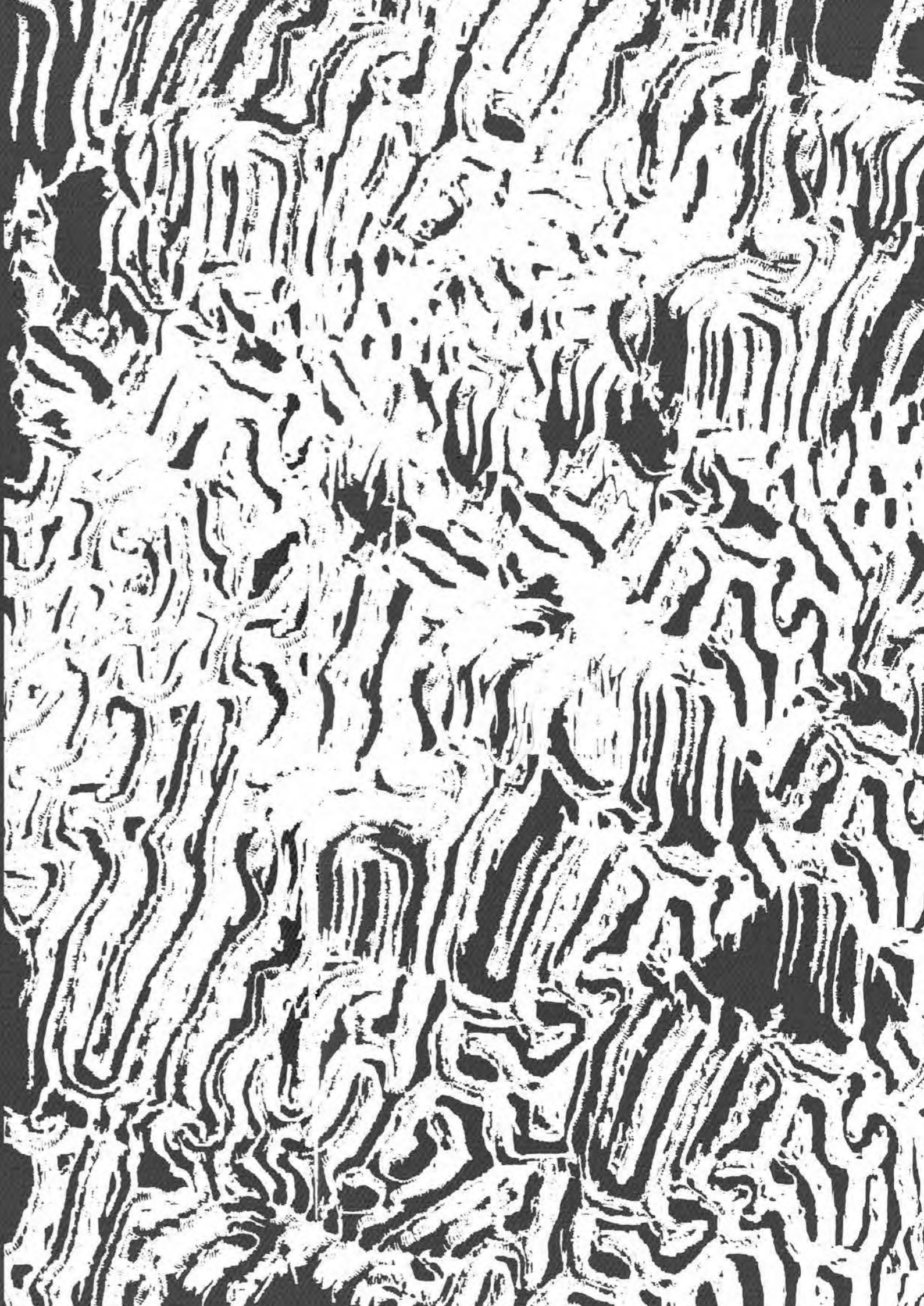
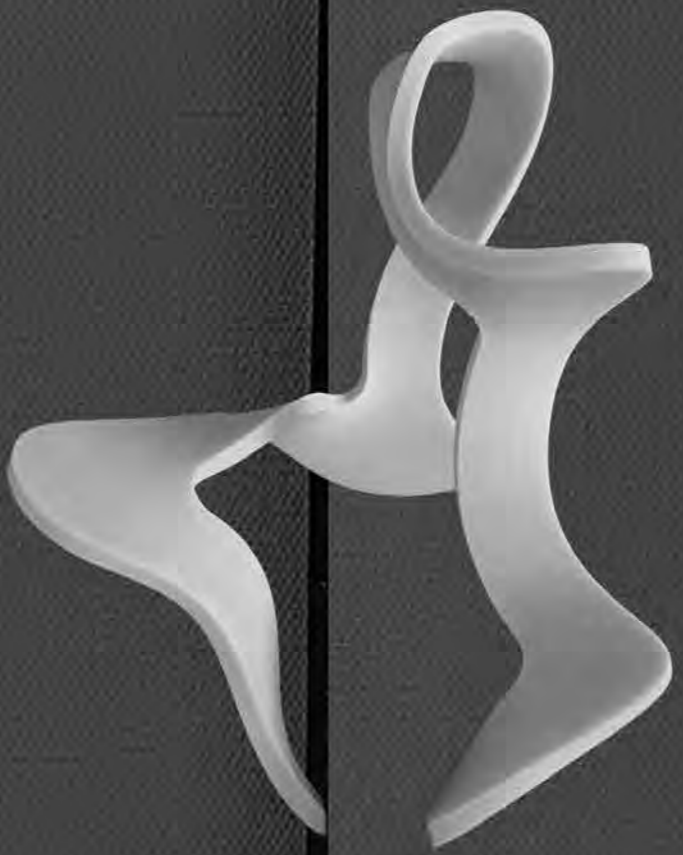
Sara Giannini: In relation to representation, cuts, and editing... The cuts of Fontana on both book covers strongly remind me of the theatre curtain. The heavy velvet curtain lingering over representation regulates the pace of its opening and closing, the pulse and breathing of its lifespan.

7. Sara Giannini: Chinese carps (what we commonly refer to as goldfish) undergo various color mutations throughout their lives. From black or silver they transition to red, orange and yellow scales. I wonder if their skin mutation shrinks their ability to remember.

Belen Zahera: In order to answer this question, we should have to accept that the locus of thought is far beyond our brains or, conversely, that our brains are spread all over our bodies. We know that thinking as well as experience, change the structure of the brain. What if carps’ skin mutations were just the result of their thinking or remembrance? Wouldn’t that be a perfect image of thought thinking itself?







Imaginal Cells

Susana Cámara Leret

Live butterfly houses for public entertainment are a fairly recent phenomenon amongst the long and complex history of insect breeding and trading. Emerging around the 1980s, one of the first prototypes of modern insect zoos was the London Butterfly House (LBH) which attempted to simulate a tropical, walk-through environment where visitors could encounter various butterfly species¹. Although butterflies were no longer motionless objects of study, pinned to identify their ‘real’ content and meaning as with butterfly collectors, the representation of tropical habitats as hot and humid greenhouses filled with plants dissolved any organism-environment interdependencies. Butterflies would be now displayed by inserting them into a simulated ‘environment’, redefined as a ‘surrounding’, reconfiguring their temporalities and lived experiences.

Butterfly houses now exist in more than 50 countries worldwide, sustained by a network of privately-owned, commercial butterfly farms in tropical countries. The popularisation of insect zoos has, over the past 30 years, given rise to a butterfly house industry with an estimate global turnover of \$100 million¹. Most insect zoos currently import their butterflies from countries like Costa Rica. As one of the world’s leading exporters, Costa Rica currently ships over 350,000 pupae worldwide per year, with a price per pupa of around \$2 and an average value exceeding \$700,000¹. This mass farming of butterflies, is often publicised as an attempt to conserve native species and their habitats through education and rural development. Nonetheless, vivariums are inseparable from the needs of tourism and it is estimated that less than 50 common butterfly species compose the majority of the trade, representing about 0.25% of global diversity¹.

The survival of organisms is intrinsic to the functioning of broader systems and their interpretations of the environment². Changes in information technologies and transportation systems have boosted the mass production of butterflies as cash crops. The shipping of insects has become an open activity for anyone, without limits, and butterflies are now ordered online, sold and exchanged on a daily basis, often within hours. Pupa cases from tropical species like *Morpho peleides* are regularly flown across the globe, crossing political borders whilst still in their so-called sessile state. The term ‘sessile’ refers

to a condition of immobility, as when an organism is fixed in one place or enclosed within other structures. Although the pupae do not ‘feed’ during this developmental stage, they are nonetheless involved in a complex transformative process, as the larval tissues break down into an ooze-like substance, inside the pupa case. As it travels from the tropics to more temperate climates, its inside structure is involved in a reconfiguration of parts, immersed in a kind of biological mess.

In this generative process, form and formation become intertwined. The metamorphosis of insects like butterflies is a process of transmutation, similar to the alchemical maxim “solve et coagula”, or “dissolve and coagulate”, where something must be broken down before it can be built up. Thus, a dissolution (of parts) is needed for some-thing to continue to the next (living) stage. Initially, a larva will hatch from an egg and feed on plant matter prior to pupating in different configurations depending on the species. During the final moulting, the larva’s skin splits behind its head and the chrysalis or pupa emerges. At first, the pupa is soft and limp, yet within a few hours its skin will harden into a tough, protective shell. Inside this protective casing, the larva assumes its own disintegration, releasing specific enzymes to digest itself and make way for new growth. It will gradually break down its own larval tissues into so-called ‘imaginal cells’³, becoming a formless ooze with the potential for new life.

It is from this “prima materia” that an adult butterfly, or imago, will emerge. The term imago derives from the latin *imāgō* meaning “image”, also alluding to representation, “to imitate”, and imagination in its genitive case *imāginis*, meaning “to imagine”. Introduced by Linnaeus⁴, in a belief that the imago was the true representation of the organism with its earlier pupa and larva stages (in Latin *larva* means “ghost”) being illusory, butterflies point to phantasm, as a transformation from formlessness to the formed⁵. Prior to its dissolution, whilst the larva develops inside the egg, it ‘grows’ an image of its future self in the form of “imaginal discs”, specialised cells for each of its adult body parts⁴: its imago eyes, its imago wings, its imago legs. In an interplay of spaces, its organs are reconfigured outside of their limits, as all of its constitutive parts become simultaneously an environment for others. The organism sets its own stage. Reassembled in new constellations, phantom memories of the larva’s environment persist in the plasticity of the caterpillar’s nervous system. Chemical associations to lived experiences will remain beyond its own metamorphosis, lasting as a temporal relation to its past, in close connection to its future.

The imago butterfly is therefore an 'atavistic' structure, carrying the traces of that which disappeared in the past. Its short life – in flight, dynamic and unstable - is compared by Didi-Huberman to that of images in their ability of engendering new meanings: "*The image wanders around, it comes and goes from here and there, it spreads itself without obligation and plainly. In short, it flutters around (elle papillonne), as we say. This does not mean at all that it is inexact, improbable or inconsistent but that all knowledge of images must in general be established as a knowledge of exploratory movements – of migrations, said Aby Warburg – of each image in particular.*"⁵

Yet prior to its first flight, the imago must rid itself from the last metabolic remains of its phantom existence. Hanging from the pupa case from which it has just emerged, it expels a pigmented substance with a particular smell, a distinct feature of the transformation and migration of the organism. Amongst a forest of molecular peaks, its transitory experience weaves affective relations in time, animating possible constellations and alliances from previous sensory potentialities.

References:

1. Boppré M, Vane-Wright R I. The Butterfly House Industry: Conservation Risks and Education Opportunities. *Conservat Soc* 2012;10:285-303.
2. Levins, R. & Lewontin, R. *The Dialectical Biologist*. Delhi, Aakar Books for South Asia. 2009.
3. Ferris, J. How Does a Caterpillar Turn into a Butterfly? In: *Scientific American*. August 10, 2012.
4. Linnaeus, C. *Systema naturae*, 12th edition, vol. 1, part 2 (Stockholm, 1767), p. 535.
5. Didi-Huberman, G. *Phalènes*. Essais sur l'apparition II. Paris: Minuit, 2013.

Colophon

Unspoken We

May 11 – June 17 2018

W139

Warmoesstraat 139

1012 JB Amsterdam

The Netherlands

Unspoken We is supported by
Mondriaan Fonds, Amsterdam
Fund for the Arts & Acción Cultural
Española (AC/E)

_____/100

