

**(M)Other Is An Opera!**

**Josephine Mead**

IVF is a mountain  
and  
*(M)other is an Opera!*

**UPLOAD.**

You turned on music and started kissing me. We lied there, facing each other. Visually tracing one another's markings. It's been weeks since we've slowed down like this. We've been overwhelmed by plans for starting a family and the stress that this entails. You put your fingers inside me and it felt like you were rearranging things (in the best way). I forgot how warm your skin can be. In that moment, you became the sun. When you're pregnant the baby literally rearranges your organs. I started folders on my desktop yesterday for new works. One folder is called "Motherhood," the other called "Otherhood." Under "Motherhood" an automatic message instantly appeared:

*Waiting To Upload...*

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## **WISH.**

I had meant to be working during the day.  
Instead I wrapped myself up in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* for the fourth time—an old friend. It felt right to settle into queerness and a book about parenting. It took a long time for it to take for her too. And then she had her baby Iggy. I read the chapters of her birth story and wished for the pain...

Mum said to me on the phone,  
“at least you won't have morning sickness in Japan.”

I replied,  
“I'd love to have morning sickness in Japan.”

~

## **THEATRE.**

Our first visit to the clinic. He imaged my womb through sonogram. On the screen I saw an empty galaxy. He said it looked ready to conceive. It was the most beautiful picture I'd seen. I asked for a printed photograph. He said *No*. I guess a woman's womb is not marked worthy of immortalization until it carries. Still, for me the empty sonogram was a picture of possibility—*the dark belly of a theatre*.

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## MEAT.

*Meat eating as an allegory for a new language:* I'll soon begin learning your mother-tongue, *Tagalog*. I'll skirt new sounds, echoed by my new digestive vocabularies. After 16 years of vegetarianism, I've started eating meat. I want to raise my iron levels for a baby. I want to connect with your family's deep values. I started on a research trip in Greece. I was alone and it seemed fitting to figure out these new feelings without you. We had a video call and realised we were on exactly the same page: ready to start a family once I returned. I took a screenshot to immortalize the moment. Your eyes were sparkling. During a poetry reading in Heraklion, Clare Bale spoke of tearing a cooked chicken breast apart for her lover. Her description was erotic. There is a primitivism to eating meat. People do not gnaw at vegetables in the same way. There is a satiation and a surrender. Perhaps I need to eat meat to understand *Tagalog*? They say that pigs are the smartest animal. Luckily pork is one of the main meats in a Filipino diet. There is also an eroticism to giving birth, or so I'm told. There is much that has been written about the pleasure of labour. There are tales of birthing orgasms. To her lover, Polly Borland stated, *your language is what is missing in me.*<sup>1</sup> Yet, not all knowledge should be free. With my colonial tongue, do I deserve your words? Perhaps I haven't thought enough about your consent when making new work...

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<sup>1</sup> Polly Borland, *Fifty Sounds* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021), p. 110.

## UTTER.

It's an embodied experience – the *knowing* of how to say sounds. The *knowing* of how to move your tongue around. *Tagalog* is an embodiment that I'm not privy to. You are nurture and nature combined, as adopted child. You are a combination and it is an utterance. If it doesn't work, we will adopt. Polly Borland notes, *all utterances are marked with desire*.<sup>2</sup> Language is inextricably combined with behavioural practices and social codes.<sup>3</sup> The way you place your weight on me—is this a product of your experiences of language? Of not always knowing how to voice things? Syllables are emphasized clearly in Tagalog. You often push your elbow into me when relaxing, without realising your strength and it hurts my fragile skin. I have learnt to move backwards, as you move forward—still cradling you, while maintaining a distance. *Still cradling you, while maintaining a distance.*

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<sup>2</sup> Polly Barton, *Fifty Sounds* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021), p. p111.

<sup>3</sup> Polly Barton, *Fifty Sounds* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021), p. p75.

**BODY.**

I saw a dead body at the train station in Tokyo this morning. A woman. She appeared to have fallen down the escalator. Her body, lying in foetal position. Her shoes: pumps at the end of manicured legs; *resting*. They were shoes that had been put on to go somewhere. Did I see blood on the floor? I think I did. There were station workers around her. A few men. They were holding up sheets. They weren't moving fast enough for her to be alive. There was no sense of urgency. She must have been dead. She seemed dressed to go to work. Everyone walked around her, skirting—taking the stairs for that section of elevator. Not looking up. Pretending not to notice. I will never lose the image of her feet and the holding up of the white sheets.

...

"If she was dead they would have just covered her"—you a few days later.

~



## **DEATH.**

I was at an opening for work talking to an artist-mother whose practice I've long admired. It is precise and poetic and critical in a literary sense and she has seemed prolific in her making, before and since birth. Her bub—a bundle of smiles, tucked on her hip—she looked like perfection. Everything I want. I told her I loved her most recent exhibition. She immediately told me that she had prepared it all before the bub. “It’s the only way... You want to be able to enjoy that early time.” I feel like I can barely slow down enough to get pregnant. Even if I prepare before, will I just be full of new ideas for making once the baby arrives? That night, I drove home in the rain along country freeways. It was getting dark. The only light from flashes of passing cars. The rain was my radio. A kangaroo jumped in front of the car. A grey ghost. A slither of body and muscle, a split-second before me, veering in such a way we just missed a collision. I skirted slightly to avoid the flash of body. A cinematic moment of illusion that could have resulted in a death, a silence, a stillness. A moving Berlinde de Bruckere sculpture before me. Since we married I've been creating oil paintings of my bridal bouquet. Strong fuchsia flowers, always on a black ground. Still life paintings are allegories for death (and living, but mainly death). How does matrimony relate us to our demise and our birth at the same time? Will birth be a type of death and what parts of me will survive?

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## **TRIGGER.**

...

A day after I had told you about the kangaroo you brought it up in the car. You told me you had been thinking about it. That I had described it as a *glimmer*. You said it is more like a *trigger*. You said glimmer and trigger means the same thing. I said that was incorrect. A glimmer is a flash. A trigger is a proponent that causes an effect – that makes something happen through an exchange between two parts. What you said didn't really make sense, but I loved that you were thinking about it. During the IVF process they will give me a "trigger injection." IVF is performed 32 or 36 hours after the injection. *The purpose of the trigger shot is to send eggs into a reproductive division or meiosis.* I have been trying to track my ovulation. It has been inconsistent, like my moods. Was the flash of the kangaroo a trigger for my reproductive division? Was it an apparition?

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## **COWBOYS.**

I was walking to work thinking about how we had trialled a cowboy insemination. Hitching up to Brisbane twice last year. Giving it a go with our donor (now friend) and a syringe. Attempts before trialling the rigmarole and expense of the IVF clinic. I looked up as I was walking to work and there was a lone cowboy boot, hooked on a wire fence on Johnson St. A relic of a wild night? To wake up and realise you've lost your shoe. To wake up with blood between my thighs after both unsuccessful inseminations. We lost two shoes, but we were still cowboys for trying.

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**FOUNDATION.**

We went to dinner at Toyo in Manila and you make a speech towards me:

*I'm painfully uninterested in any day that doesn't have you in it*

*You are the foundation of our life together, of our family.*

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## **SWING.**

Playing with a swinging microphone on the first day of the Engine Room residency in Bendigo. I was there with two artists for a week. Free to use the theatre as a space to make new work in. I had a dream of swinging microphones, hitting front row seats—pendulums of sound—blocking the audience. The swinging microphone didn't make any sound. It needed to hit a body. So I let it hit my belly. I let the sound hit my body. My empty belly, not so empty. I'm trying to lose weight, but am ever-aware of the lack of a child in there. I was in the theatre alone. No one could hear the sound of my empty, yet full, womb. This morning I have been reading Brandon LaBelle's thoughts on sonic agency. LaBelle suggests that, *sound and listening are situated as the basis for capacities by which to nurture an insurrectionary sensibility*. He talks about, *how being public is seen to carry the weight and meaningfulness of political engagement*. Is my sonic belly, awaiting to be fully with baby, awaiting to be full, an awaiting force to be reckoned with? Am I about to be filled with insurrectionary sensibility? How will sound function in the pregnancy? I can't wait to hear the heartbeat for the first time.

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## BOUQUET.

In the middle of a residency at the Engine Room Theatre in Bendigo. I've made twenty-four paintings of my bridal bouquet. Colourful flowers on black backgrounds. Reminiscent of classical still life paintings—allegories for life and death. I lined them up on the seating bank in the theatre. They were looking at me, instead of me looking at them. Is a marriage an allegory for life and death? *Till death do us part...* Perhaps not in our current economy?

I still hope to be with you forever, even if I've felt overwhelmingly apathetic of late. It's the rigmarole of the IVF; the appointments, the paperwork, the never-ending task of taking out the bins, and your ability to see mould on every home surface. Our over-arching differences and our similarities that stubbornly bring us both to always say the thing we shouldn't. All underpinned (and saved) by my deep love for you. All underpinned (and saved) by your deep love for me. Rigmarole is defined as a *long, rambling story*. The story of us is what I'm writing. You are what I'm reading. We are chapter books being read in reverse. I spent six months painting the twenty-four paintings. It's been six months since we got married. When googling, 'what to expect in the first six months of marriage,' the following response appears: "You may want to spend most of your time with each other during the first six months of your marriage. You may also experience some disagreements and fights as you get to know each other more." I miss you all the time and still want to spend most of my time alone making. I sat in front of the seats for a few hours, looking at the paintings. It felt like I was sitting before a listening audience. I made a sound-score in response. Noora commented, *the paintings felt so calm, but there is an anxiety that comes through when you start the sound-score*. I was thinking about big bands, and orchestras and the dramatic, theatrical feeling of symphony scores that accompany classic black and white films. I was thinking about the way the strings section tests their instruments while you are taking your seat, ready for your body to settle as the darkness descends on the audience, akin to feelings of the cinema. "Perhaps it's the calmness of the wedding before the reality that comes next." We laughed, seeing the truth in this statement. The work is in the working through, and a marriage is an ultimate type of work. A good type of work. But work nonetheless. Jude later defined this as "anticipation." Am I still sinking into the anticipation of you?

~

## **FIGHT.**

As soon as I get on the train I send you a message. It's my usual response – try to calm her down and remind her to have perspective. It could go either way. What will I get? A nice response back (20%) or a misreading of the text, a defence, the worst things you could say right now (80%). A total misplacement of timing. Predictable. We tried to get pregnant last month. And didn't. Your reaction was terrible. Couldn't have been worse. You were wonderful on the night my period came. The nieces were with us and this softened you. Softened you for me. Softened me too. We had planned to see your cousin the next day and meet her baby – one week old. I told you that I wasn't up to it. That it was too much. "We're not doing it for you, it's for my cousin. You need to keep moving." I hadn't even had time to change my period undies yet. Holding the newborn baby, the blood soaked through my dress. One of the worst days. I put your requests before my needs, and I got hurt. Three blow up fights happened after. Instead of admitting that you were gutted, you found irrational things to be angry about and took it all out on me. I was exhausted late at night and left the couch cushions askew. "I'm so angry" – you didn't have to say it. It was pouring out of you. How can the one who bleeds be the one who the pain gets taken out on?

~

## **WAR.**

When speaking of scenes of tearing and ripping apart, in relation to the Peloponnesian War, Page duBois talks of the subsequent re-building of the structures of the city. She refers to the foundations of these new structures as the *bones of the mother*.<sup>4</sup> I haven't thought about the ripping apart of the body that might occur when having a child. The tearing and the stitching. I'm worried about my emotional capacity, but not my physical one. I want my bones to be **the bones of the mother**. Last night you talked about the violent need to protect me and our family from harm. I don't have this. Violence exhausts me. But the birth—this is where I am ready to go through war. To tear my own body apart so that I can enter another, so they can enter the world. This is where I'll strike a line with violence, for our protection. The French word for orgasm translates to *a little death*.

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<sup>4</sup> Page duBois, *Sappho Is Burning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 62.



## TIME.

*Ekphrastic poetry has come to be defined as poems written about works of art; however, in ancient Greece, the term ekphrasis was applied to **the skill of describing a thing with vivid detail.*** The dominant ways that we structure time dictates how we see the world. Most is viewed through a heteronormative lens—timelines ascribed by culture and assumptions of biology, to an extent. The queer mother is usually secondary in thought, even in the words and work of professionals in the field. The counsellor who approved us for IVF: “I try to keep up with queer developments, given that so many of my patients are same sex.” Hearing this annoyed me. This should be a given and not something that needs to be stated for approval. The majority of your clients would be queer. In 2017 I wrote my Honours thesis on my grandmother who was in the depths of deep Alzheimers. I examined the ways we were in and out of time with one another. We were seeing things differently. I used the work to try and find temporal meeting points with her. She, a staunch catholic, whose biological rhythms had produced ten children, had suddenly moved out of a heteronormative temporal framework. The child becomes the grandmother ... the grandmother becomes the child. Memory can displace one radically. This slippage can be devastating, but can also allow for new possibility. The potential of sensorial euphoria grows stronger. She lost three adult children—the timeline broken. Perhaps this triggered the Alzheimers? Now her youngest child, my aunty Trish who has Down Syndrome, has suffered a minor stroke and is showing signs of memory loss. My favourite story Mum tells me: Nan gave birth to Trish. The older siblings (Mum included) went to visit her at the hospital. The doctor had already asked my grandparents if they wanted to leave her with the state. They told the children Trish had Down Syndrome. They said she was a special gift from God – given to their family because they had enough love to care for her. I remember Nan in later years being nervous stepping from carpet to tiles. The change of texture was a change of country. When timelines break, new spaces form. We agreed that if we found out our baby in utero had Down Syndrome that we would have enough love to care for them. That we would proceed with the pregnancy. The deeper the love, **the more scope for describing in vivid detail.** When a baby is created through queer parentage, worked for despite the obstacles this entails, there is already a deeply considered base, made from the deepest form of love.

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## **ALTITUDE.**

Two days ago in the Engine Room theatre in Bendigo, Kirri noted that time has been measured to move minutely slower when at higher altitudes.

Timelines of conception look very different for a heterosexual couple to a same sex couple. We exist on different planes. The tagalog word *panahon* is used to suggest a portion of time. Erika explained that it addresses time, but also has a relation to the weather, it talks of the epoch. I love these sorts of holistic words that can encompass many things. They are much kinder to a non-speaker of the language. There is room for misunderstanding and multiple translation. Their meanings are more flexible.

We move in different timings. Our paths only align when said hetero couple is experiencing a sense of lack in their reproduction. We meet at the intersections of their failure. We are paired with their failure from the get-go, even when we have not failed yet. The echoing definition of women as lack, espoused by Freud etc., reverberates loudly. It gets to you. It gets in you. You become more tired. There are bags under my eyes that were not there a year ago.

I never have enough time for all the reading I want to do. As a result I am often reading several books at once. We need to settle into queer timings and surround ourselves with those moving temporally in a queer way to situate ourselves in a timeline. To find a situation that is not new or other, but that just is...ours. And hopefully a common one at that. It needs to be common for us, but the system un-commons us, constantly. We are trying to catch up with strike of metronome. Trying to keep to beat. The term *commons* was traditionally used for spaces such as forests, fisheries, or ground water resources, but increasingly the word has come to encompass a wider set of domains, such as knowledge commons, digital commons, health commons, cultural common, etc. We need to allow for a multitude of queer commons, to lessen the othering, to lessen the lack, to lessen the failure. Reading Quinn Latimer's *Like a Woman*, I was moved when she suggested that the act of reading can be a commons—a community to rest within. A place that I can always return to for safety. When pregnant I'll read as many books as I can. I want to fill the baby up with words.

~

## **LISTENING BODIES.**

In a sound-focused reading group called *Listening Bodies* we spoke about the *itinerancy* in sound, espoused by LaBelle. I love the feeling of itinerancy when travelling alone. I love to identify as itinerant. I love the feeling of a sense of placelessness, where new places are ones to encounter and inhabit and you are surrounding yourself with questions, not answers. Of course, I would feel this way, coming from within a white body, always searching for other ground to stride into and claim. I hope to travel gently, but I carry a sense of entitlement within the cells of my skin and the traces of my ancestors that I must take accountability for. Can you be itinerant when you have someone relying on you? A lover or a child? Which will take more of my time? For so long we yearn to not be alone and then we struggle to be needed by entities outside of ourselves.

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## LANGUAGE.

I had a conversation with Chloe Ho, a researcher born in Singapore and currently doing her PhD at Melbourne University, while re-framing Art + Australia's digital archive. She recently facilitated an event in Manila—a panel discussion and performance, shaped by Austere Rex Gamao's text, *Swardspeak: Ang Pulos Sang Pag Beks Ko Sa Lengguwaheyyy Kag Forma*. The event was called *Baks Paki-translate! Conversations on Queering Translation*. It was partly held in Swardspeak—an evolving Filipino language created, for community, as a new queer mother-tongue. I asked if it was slang. Chloe said, “no...it can form whole phrases, whole fluent conversations, so it isn't slang.” It's interesting to think of how we can queer language. I've always thought that language brings power and control. We often need to build new terminologies, new articulations, to situate ourselves when existing outside of heteronormative binaries. Language has the ability to ground, place and provide a sense of safety. This has been true throughout queer histories. It's hard to describe oneself when the right words have not been invented. Language also has the power to leave-out and obstruct. We spoke about the risk of entering, or meeting, a new language. There is nowhere to hide when trying to speak in a tongue that is not your own. You are exposed. The gaps are clear. Swardspeak, or queerness in general, exists within these gaps. It's a live language. You learn as you speak. It makes space for reclamation. When you are queer you are forever negotiating gaps. Queerness can provide a safety net, holding you safely within a gap. First, we learn to articulate. This doesn't always come through spoken language. Articulation and communications is embodiment. Queerness is embodiment. Queerness is a body language: It is food. It is heat. It may be Indigenous ways of knowing and being. It is spatial. It is a verb. It is acoustic and sonic and can exist far beyond words. It has endless meaning and is different for everyone. What is the relationship between how we can embody language and how one embodies a pregnancy? We all carry in different ways, and you don't have to have given birth to mother.

Chloe told me of Taiwanese Indigenous musicians she has been working with, who harmonize their flutes with the sound of the wind. Their music must be played outside, in the elements. I suggested a possible venue for performance. “I don't know if it will be “outside” enough.” Whatever that means. We commented on how the moon is upside down, when speaking of different time zones, when

situated in Australia. We commented on how everything is upside down. We commented on how place is important when thinking through language, when situating oneself in a language. We need to attune to different intonations and temporalities. I know that I am out of step with my body at the moment. As ever, I am moving too fast between projects and conversations and creative endeavours. At a time where I should be slowing and making space to commit to the processes of IVF, I am in some ways speeding up. I almost can't help it. It's a coping mechanism. When "out of control" is coming, I need to have more irons in the fire. What is the relationship between how we can embody language and how one embodies a pregnancy? We all carry in different ways, and you don't have to have given birth to mother. I am building a tower of books beside my bed that growing quicker than I can read.

All of my writing situates you, my love, as the reader.

Even when you are not interested in reading my writing, which is regularly, you are the one I am writing to.

~

## **FIGHT.**

We've had a few fights. Big fights. Blow out fights. Shaken to the core fights. Starting to question us and everything fights. Still anxious a week later fights. The appointments, *T* coming down, the paperwork, the emails. It's all too much. I ended up screaming. So loudly that my throat hurt. I spent the afternoon searching for anger management diagnoses for myself on the internet. What if I blow up like that at our child? The dog looked at me and he looked frightened. Have I damaged him? A week later, I still feel guilty. I'm on edge. We came together again. Period sex can do that. So can the spliff we smoked and the time for deep rest the weekend afforded us. I get restless when we rest though. You can rest forever. The weekends here become quickly monotonous. I'm ready to leave the country. If I'm not moving fast, am I moving at all? I get so angry three days before my period. Anger that I didn't even realise was in me. *Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) is a severe form of PMS that includes physical and behavioural symptoms that usually resolve with the onset of menstruation. PMDD causes extreme mood shifts that can disrupt work and damage relationships.* I need to clock when the anger might be coming and practice mindfulness. I need to drink less coffee. I need to add more steps for a woman (me) to try to control herself, because this is what we are trained to do. I blew up. You blew up at me too. You are about to start a new role at work. I know you will be amazing. I paid for a star in the sky to be named after you to prove it. I wish you could see how intelligent you are. We spent the night in bed talking and looked up your star on an ap. I paid for the lowest star. I could have paid more for brighter options, but I don't have enough money. Money is usually our sticking point. I'm not earning enough for the lifestyle you want and let's be honest, I probably never will.

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**BUT.**

Overheard conversation from a woman at a café in Sydney:

*If you're Christian, judgment will come on judgment day for you. It's not my business... **But.***

*When Roe v. Wade got reversed last year, everyone said the Federal Gov don't have the right to regulate this. The states have the right to regulate, because it's a state issue. But this is a medical procedure. So, what you should be regulating is just the safety of the procedure. **But** I'm not saying we should advocate whether it's accessible. The moral dilemma of living with what you have done. That is between you and your God. That's not for me to tell you what your value judgement is. **But.** The lefties here make me feel like I'm a fucking conservative. Legislation is there to protect peoples rights. **But.***

*But how are you protecting people when you are banning them from doing certain things?*

*When you have made a legislation that bans abortion, you've just made 50% of the population criminals. Why not give guys vasectomies? They're reversible. Why don't we tie up their little sacks until they get ready for marriage? Here's the argument: that would prevent pregnancy! Do you have any children? None, that I'm aware of. It would solve a lot of family law. Iran says we don't have homosexuality. When a man says he wants to sleep with a man, he gets a sex change. There is a whole group of gay men who have been forced to have a sex change. They are called the overnight brides. What have they just created? Constitution. So now, my friend whose Iranian goes, so now I have to ask my partner, how many times have you been married? They said only 4 or 5 times. Has that law really bettered things? I just have to believe and I want to believe that the majority of people do the right thing. We don't need more laws and micromanaging. We just want safe medical procedures. Look at the percentage of people that get abortions. It's not that much. It's a small percentage of the population, so why do we have to regulate it?*

I heard Carmen Winant talk at the PHOTO 2024 Ideas Summit. I've admired Carmen's Ohio-based practice for some time. In particular her work around birth and artistic lesbian familial lineage. She was presenting her latest body of work,

*Notes on the last safe abortion*, as part of PHOTO 2024 and was live-streaming in to discuss the project. She'd just put her children to bed. Focusing on the near-fifty-year period that abortion was legal in the United States, the project visualises the comfort, care and daily practices of safe abortion care, through the presentation of photographs of abortion care workers and practices, drawn from organisational and personal archives across the United States. In 1973 *Roe v. Wade* guaranteed federal right to abortion up to foetal viability. This was overturned in 2022. Abortion banned, limited or tested in 26 U.S states and three territories. Often rape, incest and the life of the mother were not factored into this decision making. Carmen noted how the artist-book can be considered as the consummate feminist object. This echoes a conversation I had recently with artist Tai Snaith, where we talked about the greater need for artist-books on women, particularly senior women artists—those whose voices had been previously censored or silenced. The work counteracts the use of photography as propaganda for anti-abortion movements. Carmen noted how these practices, *void the mother, void the science, void the care. Essentially, we are nowhere*. I thought about how artist-mothers are more frequently listing themselves as a mother in their bio, alongside artist or writer or curator. I look forward to doing this myself. But also feel concerned that it leaves out a multitude. Where does this leave non-mothers, who want to be mothers? I have a pang of envy when I see “mother” in an artist bio— *Essentially, we are nowhere*.

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## PEARL.

Your Nanay dove for pearls. Pearls are the only stone in your ears that you'll wear. We both wore pearl earrings on our wedding day. We swam over huge iridescent pearls at the Great Barrier Reef in 2021, holding hands as we were swimming. It was the moment I knew we needed to stay together. I stamped our wedding invites with shell wax seals and hand-painted a shell on the sign that we put outside the venue. It said *Maligayang Pagdating*—a message to welcome. I got a shell tattooed on my arm right before the wedding to represent you. Should we name our child *Pearl* in reference to your Nanay? I'm thinking through the meaning of a pearl as an allegory of a child. I am thinking through the meaning of our child's future as an allegory for a pearl. I'm thinking about names constantly and add *Pearl* to the list.

~

## ITALICS.

I met with academics Ian Rafael Ramirez and Erika Carreon at Melbourne University. Ian is doing a PhD on *bakla*, examining its multiple embodiments to consider relations to the broader socio-political contexts—essentially examining what it means to be queer in the Philippines. Erika has just submitted her PhD for assessment and is awaiting results. She has been looking at eco-fiction and questioning its power. She told me about two books that she has written about – one set two days after the 2023 Mindanao earthquake, and the other two years after it. I wonder how I will feel when I read this writing in two-years time? Will there be a baby on my lap while I am reading?

We spoke about their panel discussion for the *Bakli Translation* project. Ian referenced that Austere was concerned their *Swardspeak* was more outdated than lans. Erika was concerned that she wasn't fluent enough to edit the project. Chloe had previously commented that the non-English sections of the panel took up more time than anticipated. I said to them that I am planning on learning *Tagalog*. I am planning to improve my knowing (of you). I'm also interested in the places of uncertainty and discomfort that form in the gaps between our languages. The gaps that form when we can't understand one another. Sometimes these are just uncomfortable and there is a *missing*. Sometimes the gaps allow space for new, different understandings – relations that surpass language, or that employ languages of embodiment that go beyond ethnitized speech. There is much creative fodder to be found here. If I become fluent in *Tagalog*, much would be gained, but would anything be lost? Erika spoke about the decision of whether or not to *italicize* words from a language that is not your mother-tongue (or perhaps, that is your mother-tongue, when you are writing in an *other* tongue). The act of italicizing can be an othering, a type of colonisation. I usually will always italicise *Tagalog* words when I use them, but should I? I'll also often italicise sentences that seem poetically important, even when they are not quotes, usually in English. Perhaps I am italicising what is of most value (*Tagalog* and poetry)? To what extent is being queer a type of world-making and a type of word-making? We can't progress until we have adequate terminology to describe our becomings. But to what extent do these experiences go beyond words?

~

## DONATE.

Finally the time for donation has come. We've flown *T* down from Queensland. *K* has carried me. **Really** carried me. I'm so grateful for her in the last 24 hours. I am having doubts about myself and what I can give to a child. Does there need to be more white parents in this world? I often find fault, but perhaps I am the fault? I tried so hard yesterday. Then made a badly executed joke about race, that offended *T*. I didn't mean it. I deeply regretted it. It was a product of being tired and perhaps being used to joking around with *K*, who is used to my humour. It was good to be pulled up and I'm sure it bothered me much more than him. But it left me thinking, how racist am I? I am racist, with my white conditioning. I always will be. It's a product of being a white person on stolen land. I must always do better. It is highly likely that I will have a baby in my womb with Javanese blood, if these plans we are in the midst of come to fruition. It is highly likely that we will bring a baby into a Filipino family—your family—with you as a strong Filipino mother. Am I equipped to handle this with the care, awareness and insight necessary? I took *T*'s son *M* to play mini-golf while he was at the clinic for the first donation. I seemed to be able to keep his enthusiasm up and I think he had a good time. I have never had much competitive drive, until it comes to wanting this pregnancy. What a strange game I am currently playing with myself. Can I create safe space in the world for a child of colour? I'm doubting myself and you later remind me that we are always improving. You tell me you are not the person you were a year ago, or were when we met each other. You tell me you are getting better. That we are behaving better. I want to improve alongside you for the rest of our lives. I am awash in love for you when you offer this insight to me. You said, *we are not at all prepared to raise a baby in a rainbow family. I don't know enough.* Of course you don't. Because we're not a rainbow family yet. But we will get there. You (read: *We*) have never done this before. You say, *we should learn all we can from T. We should be offering him more.* I'm at capacity. I'm doing my best and feel like I'm failing. You reiterate: *he's offering us such a huge, selfless thing. We should be doing more.* Am I deeply selfish focusing on how I am feeling in this process, not knowing what more I can do?

~

## **ASSESS.**

We realised that it would be 5 hours of driving all up for the last donation, after some changes of plans, to pick up *T* and *M* from the city, go to Ballarat for the donation and return them to the airport. It was too much for *K* with a busy work week. We change plans. I take work off to do the driving. I guess this is what having a family means – constant adjustments. I must try not to get frustrated in the process. *K* said last night we have to remember what a huge thing this is that we are being given. We might end up with two babies out of this. We might even end up with three. Apparently, at my age, the chances increase between the first round of IVF and the second. I wonder why? Perhaps because my body will be fuller of artificial hormones? Or perhaps I will be more desperate by the second go, so the universe will tip in our favour? I'm so eager to become a mother. Yet, I am so deeply overwhelmed. I am concerned that I am not an adequate choice for raising a biracial child. I don't know if I can provide the right direction from a white outlook. But I'll try. We're not even there yet. We are getting closer though. You flicker from deeply supportive, to focused on logistics and deeply impatient. But you have done so well over the last few days and I'm so proud of you. You have coped much better than me: Steady. Will we both crumble on the weekend? Likely. Is *T* assessing me? Probably. I feel as if I am not meeting the mark in any direction. I already have *K* and a family that loves me and the security of a future and a home. I'm so deeply lucky. *K* said last night that we have absolutely no experience for raising a rainbow family. That we have to do our research. I'm meant to be writing an essay on queer matrimony, but instead I'm here. Until August I will remain in a stage of underdevelopment. Waiting for the sperm quarantine period to end so we can move forward with IVF. Waiting for the stages of bureaucracy that make us wait and wait and wait.

~

## **RAINBOW.**

Driving away from the last donation appointment with *T* and a rainbow appeared in the sky. It felt like a sign that we were getting closer. We have to wait for three months for the sperm to be quarantined before we can begin. *T* is on the Board of Rainbow Families Australia. It was the thing that most drew us to him as a donor.

~

## **WAIT.**

We have three months to wait while the sperm is quarantined. I keep thinking we can try in three months. Then I realise we will have to wait for the post-quarantine test results. Then I realise we can't trial insemination until I'm ovulating. The three months wait will actually be four months. Sometimes it feels like time is moving in reverse. I think we should be able to try in early August. I do the maths again. I realise it will be late August. At least we have four months of a break from the admin and appointments. Should I try to focus on other work to give my brain a rest? The writing (right here) is cathartic and helps me feel like the waiting is productive but is it also making me ultra-focused. I am writing to the page of this book like it is a lover. Returning to it and thinking about it when we are apart. Finding it hard to think of anything else. There has been a real drop in passion in our relationship this year. My friend Clare notes that her friends who were trying (and struggling) to conceive were struggling with their sex-life too. It had become mechanical, times for procreation, rather than pleasure. As a heterosexual couple, at least they had to keep up sex as part of the process. We don't. So it's harder to get the motivation when we are steeped in the thickness of IVF administration. You don't have the writing ... where are you finding a sense of catharsis?

~

## TILE.

I listened to an artist talk by Sarah Ujmaia, a first generation Chaldean artist whose practice I've watched flourish over the past several years. A practice that is prefaced, narrated and bookended with notions of the mother-tongue and mother-country. She said, *I carry my tongue within this research*. We've been living in a four-bedroom home in the country for the past 18 months. We are moving back to the city. In the process of trying to condense everything to fit into a one-bedroom apartment. The way my artworks accumulate will forever be an issue. She said, *language finds its way into our bodies and I'm trying to figure out what to do next with it*. She showed a photo of 10kg of sunflower seeds in a suction-sealed bag. She showed photographs of drawings made with the pigments of the seeds. She spoke about the bi-directional feedback of different languages within a region. She spoke about how language is ever-evolving. She showed a photograph of a table created by UNESCO, with a set of criteria used to ascertain whether a language is endangered or extinct. She likened this to the criteria used to mark art-works at art school—the non-sensicality of this type of marking. The observer will always come to an artwork with their own presuppositions and understandings. We can't give a universal rating. She spoke about the difficulties of carrying out research in Iraq. A roll of film from the last research trip under-exposed, leaving black and blank images – some with slightly definable details, others left as voids. When we packed up my childhood home several years ago, I filled a few rolls of film – wanting to immortalise memories. Two rolls failed. When we returned from our honeymoon last July, the film had not exposed. I wanted to make work about our first moments of marriage. Where did these moments go? She turned the underexposed negatives into new works, allowing the graphite of her drawings—the black sheen—to become both content and form. What is the meaning of an underexposed image? She noted, *it was a poetic gesture for me to return an image to light ... when it wasn't given that to begin with*. She recreated the underexposed images in graphite for her exhibition *Of Particle and Wave* at Heide. I walked upon her most recent work a week ago: For *Marmoreum*, she covered the floor of Gertrude Contemporary with handmade tiles. Shell grit was cooked and moulded to make white chalk tiles. They were cast by hand in Gertrude's basement. Halfway through the process they needed to be moved upstairs, away from moisture, as mould had started to appear. She was weary

of Carl Andre references in relation to the tiled word. It's thought, but hasn't been formally proven, that Carl Andre killed his partner, Ana Mendieta. We drove *T* to Ballarat three times for donations. On the radio we heard about three women who had been murdered in Ballarat while driving through the town. While Sarah was installing the work, laying pavers by hand, Carl Andre died—the testament to the power of women artists? The installation considered marble (and by extension the chalk tiles Ujmaia had made) as metaphor. After deinstallation the floor of the gallery was grided with white lines from where the tiles had laid. She noted that *there were still gentle marks*, after cleaning. At the end of the lecture an audience member asked what was to happen to the tiles after the show. She shut down the question, noting that it called for a commercial aspect to the work, which isn't there. I often get asked this question and hate responding. The viewing, exhibiting, thinking, is the reason for making. The connection is the reason for language. Storage can always be found and can be figured out later. Sales mean nothing. I worry that our new one bedroom apartment will be too small for us, especially when we are frustrated, especially when our baby cries, especially when I am too busy making.

~



## **ECHO.**

When I was in my late teens I loved the book *Echo* by Francesca Lia Block. It was lyrical and poetic and spoke of the passion and the pain and the beauty that I was craving, but not yet ready for. One passage that always stuck out to me was Echo's description of how she yearned to be looked after by her lover:

*I wanted Thorn to take me out for dinner and order brown rice and vegetables and white wine.*

At 17, I thought this was the most romantic thing I had ever heard. I dreamt of this. I dreamt of you. You can't always find the words, but you always find the food. All that you cannot say appears on our kitchen table as *Aroz Caldo*, *Pancit*, Tuscan bean soup, stir fried noodles, charred asparagus, Beef *Mechado*, *Adobo*, *Cavallo Nero* pasta and *dauphine* cheese. You heat up *suman* for my breakfast and know how to make coffee perfectly. I know that our babies will always have full bellies.

I dreamt of you.

Should we name our baby *Echo*?

~

## **LOUISE BOURGEOIS (LB).**

The largest showing of work by Louise Bourgeois in Australia at Art Gallery of New South Wales: *Has the day Invaded the Night or Has the Night Invaded the Day?* I knew I needed to get up to Sydney before it finished. When I arrived, the exhibition had seven days to go and all the merchandise in the gift shop was marked down to 50% off. I was worried that the catalogues may have sold out already, but I guess they ordered an overabundance. I spent the morning in the exhibition and stopped to take a breather in the gallery café. I transferred 152 photos, taken quickly, from my iPhone to my computer. Most were blurry. I planned to go through each photograph taken in chronological order, write down anything of interest, and then re-enter the exhibition with the weight of having to get things off my chest removed. It always needs to start with words on the page.

wall didactic:

*When two things are like night and day, they could not be more different. When someone works night and day, they do so incessantly.*

I'm an incessant artist and we are often like night and day. You are measuring and strategizing—*constantly*—I am feeling—*constantly*. Sometimes there is no room for understanding between us, only a gulf that echoes the emotional depths of LB. Other times, it feels like we balance each other perfectly.

The wells of loneliness that LB felt, *with children*, illustrated throughout the exhibition. Will I feel this way ... *with children*? I have always thought I would be a sitting duck for post-partum depression. We took your niece to an exhibition on motherhood when she was 6 and the words "postpartum depression" flashed on the screen. She asked what it meant. I explained that it was when a Mum gets sad just after she has had a baby. I said that some Mum's didn't have the support of friends and *Titas* like her Mum did and felt lonely, and other Mum's may have that support but just feel overwhelmed and tired. I said that it was a special type of sadness you felt, just after you have a baby. She didn't say anything, just took it in quietly, the weight of womanhood starting to dawn.

I come from a making space of incessancy, my curiosity is insatiable. I always am struggling to give enough time to you.

Another wall didactic reads:

*She made, destroyed, repaired, made again. She was the question she sought to answer.*

I am the question I seek to answer and there is much space for rage within me. I arrived at the gallery as soon as the doors opened and hoped there would be no school groups of children in my way.

~

**LB (FIGURE).**

wall didactic, Room 2, *The Personages*:

*They manifest one of her lifelong preoccupations – the tension between ‘one and others’. Bourgeois was in her late thirties, with three young sons, when she made these works. She carved them on the rooftop of the family’s apartment building in Manhattan, in a room in their home, and at their country house in Easton, Connecticut. A decade earlier and newly wedded, she left France for New York to be with her husband, art historian Robert Goldwater. Creating this family of figures was a way of conjuring ‘badly missed presences’ from her past. Slender and precarious, the Personages evoke states of fragility, defensiveness, instability. Their placement in relation to each other is essential to their effect.*

*They manifest one of her lifelong preoccupations – the tension between ‘one and others’*

*Bourgeois was in her late thirties, with three young sons, when she made these works*

*Their placement in relation to each other is essential to their effect*

There is a loneliness to these clustered figures. They are grouped in a room but are separate identities. To what extent will my child feel like an extension of myself? One of *The Personages* catches my attention—a long white bean, free standing. A blue hollow, with an egg like form balancing inside. I see the egg as a clitoris: a line for pleasure; or a gap for pleasure; a lacuna. Is pleasure a lacuna? The calm blue connotes sea and sky and ease and holidaymaking. LB was not an easy person. I am not an easy person. You are not an easy person. The best ones never are. The bean sits in the shell. The bean as the point at which pleasure can emanate. A silly word for a serious thing. How can pleasure be humorous? I was struck by this work. The precariousness of pleasure or perhaps the knowingness of pleasure. The confidence that pleasure has regarding its own value and place in the world. Pleasure comes from a relinquishing and giving into. It comes with surrender. You need a certain amount of confidence to release pleasure. Pleasure has a big ego:

Could I end up in my later thirties, with three young sons, making the work?

~

## HUMOUR.

What do I need to create space for humour? I've never been able to employ humour in my writing and wonder if this is the thing that this book is lacking? My grandparents dealt with several losses: three children passing away as adults, loss of a memory, loss of lung capacity. My mother often noted that it was their humour that got them through it all. 2017 was a particularly hard year for me. During it, I went to see *The Humours* at Monash University Museum of Art, an exhibition curated by Hannah Matthews presenting the work of Gabriel Abrantes, Barbara Cleveland, Matthews Griffin, Mary Reid Kelley with Patrick Kelley, Glenn Ligon and Mika Rottenberg. The exhibition looked, "for new ways to approach the issues that confront us, using humour for comedic and acerbic critique of the labour market, patriarchy, gender performativity, artificial intelligence and race". Often when we upset each other and have an argument, our defence will be, "I was only joking." Humour either gets us past the obstacle or halts us. It makes us laugh or we become even angrier with each other. When we have felt stressed with IVF, there has been little space for humour. As Matthews notes, "the term "humour" originated in the fifth century BCE as a diagnostic formula in medicine. Identified by the Greek Physician Hippocrates, it referred to the equilibrium of the four bodily fluids (blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm), collectively known as the humours and believed essential to good health." I wonder if all four of these fluids are necessary for pregnancy? Will I be able to laugh at all during labour? When we were in Sicily on our honeymoon I bought you a gold-plated ring in Palermo—a large, upturned mouth, representing the Greek Muse of Comedy *Thalia*, to remind you to see the bright side of things. You haven't worn the ring often. Perhaps it is time to put it on? I have found even better humour in works from the exhibiting artists that were made prior to the exhibition. Humour is all about timing. It was Barbara Cleveland's work—*The one hour laugh*, created when they were previously called Brown Council, and seen when I was at art school—that originally got me laughing. The work is a video of the artists standing together and laughing non-stop for one hour. The laughter becomes forced and faked throughout the durational work. I saw the absurdist film *Mary's cherries* created by Mika Rottenberg at the Venice Biennale in 2015. The video work documents maraschino cherries being created from red fingernails by an assembly line of female workers. I have a book that documents Rottenberg's work. On the cover is a picture of a bare bum. I always enjoyed putting this on my bookshelf, with the bum facing out to the world. It always made me laugh. You

would often turn it around the other way, so that it was hidden in case family came over. Prior to seeing the Kelley's *The thong of Dionysus* (2015) I went to an artist-talk at M-Pavilion in Melbourne and heard them describe the process of creating the work. At the same location, I saw the iconic Breadwoman—a performance artist who has appeared regularly, covering herself in bread. I remember watching a video of LB, as an old woman, being carried around her studio on the back of one of her young male assistants. Through video interviews she presented as a tragic, with a wicked sense of humour. How can I employ humour to up my chances of pregnancy?

~

## **LB (RED).**

I was a red head in my early twenties and I'm thinking of trying it out again. Perhaps just from now until the pregnancy period and then dye it back to brunette before birth so I don't have to worry about it. Is it a last attempt at rebellion before motherhood? In LB's motherhood room there were big expansive drawings in red blood ink that had loops and orifices and wounds (or birth canals or openings or possibilities or deaths). I love seeing orifices in drawings. The drawings had light grounds and deep red linework. Downstairs in the dark there were more watercolours in pinks and bloody reds with breasts and more wounds. Trying to write about them from memory, I remembered the second lot as being full of colour – whole fields of red. Reminiscent of the Mark Rothko painting at the National Gallery of Victoria that I have been visiting since I was a child. It never ceases to make me cry. My eyes scan the thin layers of paint that meld from orange to pink to red and back again—vibrating. Rothko created his work by pouring many layers of paint, heavily diluted with his medium of choice, onto the canvas. Drips are visible—a confession to the messiness of painting. The drips make me visualize the blood that would have dripped from Rothko when he ended his life, cutting his wrists in the bath. I often have wondered if the colour of the bath water was the same colour as that painting. When I looked back at the photographs of the second lot of LB's drawings on my phone, I realised that many had no coloured ground—just the cream of the paper, marked by scarce bloodied lines through drawing. My memory had played a trick on me. Why did I need to remember these works as colour-fields? Recently I was working with a group of cultural workers from Taiwan on a conference that would take place in Taipei on artist residencies. We had been using red fonts as part of our branding. One of them advised me to use another colour—that red in Taiwanese culture connoted a type of warning. I changed everything to blue. In 2022 Frances Barrett's *Meatus* filled the hallowed halls of Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA). The exhibition emerged from Barrett's research into listening. Barrett "read about the structure of the ear and learnt about the external acoustic *meatus*, the passageway that leads from the outside of the head to the eardrum [...] *Meatus* refers not only to the ear, but is inclusive of other openings of the body." Seeing this as a *space for collaboration with others*, Barrett was "interested in experimenting with performance, to see how a performance [could] exist without an actual body present." When we collaborate, do we make space for people within the very bowels of us? Birth is

always in the body. “Conceiving of the galleries of ACCA as enacting *meatus*: as ear canals, oral cavities, vaginal canals, and anal spaces that passage through and into each other,” Barrett and her collaborators created a space to “swallow an audience member.” The entire space glowed red. Wanting to enter motherhood, I’ll need to see my orifices as *a space for collaboration with others*. One thing that annoys me about ACCA’s programming is that the catalogues often are not printed and distributed until after the show has opened. This was the case with *Meatus*. The book was even further delayed due to Covid-19 impacts. I was able to get a copy several months after the traces of the exhibition had been removed. The photographs of the gallery space, with people in it, were printed on shiny paper—interspersed throughout textual reflections by the artist and essays by others. The images felt slick on my fingers. They glowed bright red. The visceral nature of them took me back to the experiences I had in the gallery. For once, I was happy that the catalogue had been delayed. I recently saw prints that a friend-mother had made, pressing her freshly birthed red placenta on paper. If I give birth I would like to save my placenta and have it encapsulated. The tablets are the best source of iron that a mother can digest during postpartum. There are lots of companies that can facilitate this for you. I wonder if the tablets will be red. In the bowels of the LB exhibition was presented *The Destruction of the Father*, an installation from 1974 which consisted of sculptural forms that LB cast from hunks of real meat, under red light. A butcher-like scene that references the cannibalistic eating of a father, by mother and children, as a way to silence the paternal. Our baby will have many father-figures, but not a traditional and present biological father.

wall didactic:

*Bourgeois contended all her life with smug and seductive father figures. Her father Louis was the prime example; she felt similarly about the French surrealists. A critical disgust with male authority was also emerging among artists around the time this installation was conceived. Yet The Destruction of the Father is not a protest or lesson. It is an exorcism and sculpture catharsis, full of relish and wicked comedy. Even as it destroys the father symbolically, it expresses a desire to ingest his powers. After it was first shown, Bourgeois said she felt like a different person.*

~



## **NAMES (LB).**

The names of the two buildings forming the Art Gallery of New South Wales were recently changed. The North Building, currently holding LB's works, renamed *Naala Badu*. It means *seeing waters*. Water is often related to the mother. It's important that these buildings pay reference to the mothers (and fathers) of this Country, the traditional custodians, the Gadigal. This morning I googled "fertile springs of the Philippines" to see if there are any waters we should wade within when we return there in two weeks time, upping our chances of conceiving. Only Manila based IVF clinics appeared in Google's answers. To name, is to empower. We are going there so that you can continue to establish your new business – exporting natural wines from home to Manila. It's called *muni-muni*, which means *to ponder* in *Tagalog*. You joked yesterday that you weren't really sure what my role on this trip was. I said I was CFO, *Chief Friendship Officer*. Titles can be helpful. I file my emails into named folders to try to keep a sense of order. I'd been filing anything related to IVF into a folder titled *Little Love*. I named it at the beginning. I named it before I realised how emotionally taxing the logistics of IVF were. A few weeks ago I renamed it *Medical*. I needed a sense of removal, for a moment. Making work about one's experiences can be cathartic, but it can also leave very little breathing space. I needed to create some separation by way of a new name. On the wall didactic aside LB's work called *Untitled* (1940) I read,

*Bourgeois felt torn between the emotional polarities defined by her parents: the rationality of her mother Joséphine, and the emotionality of her father Louis. (Both parents appear in her name: Louise Joséphine Bourgeois.)*

I share the name of LB's mother. Throughout her life LB was consumed with making work to unravel and grapple with the complex relationships she had with her parents. She was trying to define herself through them. Would she have still applied this constant pressure unto herself had they named her something else? The power of a name will completely colour our child's life. I googled the names of colours to add to our list of potential names: *Silver. Blue. Cerulean. Violet. Amaranth. Amber. Arylide. Aureolin. Azure. Coral. Lilac. Cherry. Cinnamon. Dandelion. Magenta. Orchid. Emerald. Fallow. Fern. Flame. Fuchsia. Mauve.*

~

## MANILA.

A flying weekend in Manila. We arrived Saturday and left Monday. It was good to be back to your island home. We travelled there for a wine festival. You haven't made an export yet. You're still getting the lay of the land. Still deciding who to work with. Relationships need to be built slowly. As usual, I'm impatient and you're deeply measured. The festival was loud. It was hard to have robust conversations. There was a DJ and it was a scene. It didn't fill the spots you were hoping it would fill. Driving along the busy city streets a poor woman came up to the car, trying to sell us a garland of *sampaguita*—an equivalent to what I know as jasmine. The next night we went to a fancy Thai restaurant with your cousin. You had brought a bottle of wine from home and encouraged our server to try a glass. You had a beautiful conversation with her. When trying to describe the floral notes, you said it smelt like *sampaguita*. She understood immediately. When we had been in the Philippines a few months prior to meet importers, we both commented that the most enjoyable part of the meeting was talking about the wine with one of the young staff members, a sommelier in training. You said you think your place might be in education. We talked about how tasting notes should be translated to talk of fruits and flavours of the Philippines. There shouldn't be the assumption that Western flavours are understood universally. You told me about eating an apple for the first time as a child, that it was something to be celebrated, a taste you'd never had. There are many people in the world who have not tried an apple. Westerners have a habit of assuming. You are constantly pulling me up on this. We talked about whether you should have eggs extracted for our second baby. You are worried about what might be passed on. I think a baby from your womb would be miraculous. I have already said yes to the challenge of you. It was nice to be in a new country where thoughts of the logistics of IVF could feel far away for a short while. My mother recently bought a carton of eggs that had three eggs with double yokes—an omen of abundance. She sent us photographs of a new double-yoker each few days. Two yellow suns, staring up at the camera and hoping for a baby. When travelling to a third world country, the ethical necessities I focus on at home suddenly seem over privileged. When you can't feed the mouths around you, you haven't time to worry whether your eggs are free range.

~

## SHOWER.

Last night you woke me and dragged me off the couch to go and see the *Aurora Australis*. The *Aurora Australis* is a form of space weather. Also known as the southern lights, it is a natural light display in the Southern Hemisphere that appears as curtains, rays, spirals, or flickers of green, red, and violet light. We didn't know in advance that it was coming. Twenty years have passed since a geomagnetic storm created the same effect. A few days ago, four coronal mass ejections came from the sun. The highly charged plasma streamed into space. Those charged particles, known as the solar wind, hit the Earth's magnetic field and from this collision streaks of green and pink streamed across the sky. We watched them from the shoreline, amidst other people in their pyjamas. The light display was easier to see through the camera of our phones. An allegory for modern life—seeing most things in hindsight through a screen, never fully in the moment. I was grumpy for getting out of bed and grateful for your enthusiasm. Grateful for what is possible in the world. Suddenly I wanted to kiss you on the beach, passionately. There were lots of people around, so we kissed, tentatively. I often pull myself back, not knowing who is around, not knowing if they will have an issue with two women kissing. There's always a second guess. Always a second take. The exposure of my phone showed the lights as bright and brilliant. The real-life view showed a black sky with a faint green haze, in the moments where you thought your eyes weren't (or were) playing tricks on you. I am reading *Portrait of a Genderkweer on Fire* by Ellen van Neervan.

Ellen speaks of their lover [...] *in the high tide of language* and asks,

*Do all kweers feel like sunset is the safest light the covering of emerging night. Are we most safe when we are slightly hidden in the darkness? What do we need to become the pink/green on my phone screen in real life?*

~

## TEARS.

I went to see Rainbow Chan's *The Bridal Lament* (哭嫁歌) at Arts House. She prefaced the performance by saying, "I come from a long lineage of cry-babies". Everyone laughed. She ended it—the last laments and the audience applause—with real tears streaming down her face. When I was in my early twenties I went to Paris for a university course. I walked around the Louvre and took close-up photographs of women crying in paintings—their tears held still on cheeks. In the poster for *The Bridal Lament*, pearl-like plastic tears sit on Chan's cheek, as if she is one of those immortalised women of history. I have cried much less since you entered my life. On my wedding day I started crying before walking down the aisle. I cried the whole way through the ceremony. My friend Rhys commented, "I've never seen that amount of waterworks from a bride!" The night before the wedding I gave my mother and father a silk handkerchief each. I had embroidered our collective initials on the handkerchiefs, to bind us together, and to provide them with a handkerchief should they cry during the ceremony. My earlier years were spent reading books about crying. When our families first met each other at dinner, you made a beautiful speech and I cried. My mother said to your mother, "That's just Jose, she always cries." Your mother said, "we know."

*The Bridal Lament* (哭嫁歌) speaks of the women past of Chan's family, while she stands strong in the present. It tells the story of bridal laments, sung by Weitou brides in their mother-tongue, before entering into their marriage—mourning songs, as they say goodbye to their family. Traditionally Weitou women enter arranged marriages in adolescence. Saying goodbye to their upbringing, when they must move into the life cycles of their groom's family-time. As they sing the laments, surrounded by the women of their family, their feet do not touch the ground. Chan's mother speaks Weitou, but didn't pass it onto Chan growing up. She had come to learn it as an adult and has since learn bridal laments. The work was made up of spoken explanations by Chan's mother, the bridal laments and original songs by Chan, blending *Weitou*, Cantonese and English.

I had met Chan in a café several months ago and she told me her story. *Weitou* is a language that is being lost. She had travelled back to Hong Kong to learn from the old women. She told me how she had learnt from one of the oldest matriarchs. When she returned, post Covid, her memory had slipped. Chan sang

her a lament. She asked how she knew it. “You taught it to me.” Chan wasn’t working to change or alter the laments, simply to sing them. To tell their stories, and by extension to tell the stories of past women. When she sang, you heard the voice of all the women who had come before her.

My father once mentioned that my grandmother had lost twins. I often wonder where our tears go after we cry. I often wonder if the spirit of those twins has wound up in my biological makeup somehow. The DNA that produced the tears my grandmother would have wept for them, lies within my body. I carry her tears. I carry their tears.

During the performance Chan noted, “instead of saying ‘I love you’ in *Weitou*, we say ‘have you eaten yet?’”

This made me think of you: you wipe my tears away with food...

~

Today 10:28 AM

Hi Klyde

We have approved your application for compassionate release of superannuation. We will send written confirmation to your myGov inbox within the next 72 hours. You will need to take this letter to your fund to request the release.

Your reference number is [7030682103804](#).

Australian Taxation Office



Text Message



~

## **INTERUPTION.**

To love you, is to be interrupted by you.

~

## **BODY LOSS.**

Angela Goh is performing her work *Body Loss* at Buxton Contemporary tonight. I wish I was going. But you have been so stressed with me commuting into the city. You want to stay in the country as much as possible until we move, and you seem to feel so dejected each time I leave for anything. I remind myself that you are dealing with so much at the moment. The work *Body Loss* was acquired by University of Melbourne. It is the first time a work of performance art like this has been acquired in Australia in this way. It is a momentous development. I look up videos of the work and see her scaling walls at AGNSW. Her voice—always activated—a bending gush of sound. Goh’s vocal pitch begins with one note, and is recorded back to itself through a looping device. I look at photographs on her website. Her mouth is open, mid-sound. She echoes herself. And, the documentation echoes the performance, as performance-documentation tends to do. Much of my experience of seminal performance works is through photographs and written descriptions. The read that the work references sirens. I’m always drawn to sirens. Her gaping mouth makes me think of the orifices in LB’s work, the cavities in Frances Barrett’s *Meatus*. We are all made of holes. I feel a pang of longing in my gut. I want to see this work in person. *Tonight*. The text on her website notes, “Her mouth is fixed open, silently, in what could be a cry, a scream, a yawn, a laugh, a shriek, a song—in ecstasy or terror.” Perhaps it makes sense that the work is called *Body Loss* and I am seeing a past iteration through a screen, instead of a physical reality in the present. The other day you said, ‘we’re in a simulation. None of the this is real. It means we don’t have to worry.’ As her body slithers around the space, like an amphibian, her mouth seems to lead her body throughout the space. Once we have children there will be many events I cannot attend. I guess this is preparation.

~



## QUILT.

My dear friend Grace Wood asked me to write about her upcoming exhibition at Bundoora Homestead, where she will present a large wall-hung quilt, titled *Permanent Palimpsest*. Wood spent nine months sewing fabric images onto the quilt by hand. It's not a coincidence that she has also recently given birth to her second child. She engaged in two nine-month gestation periods simultaneously. It's hard to untangle the threads of the mother from the threads of the artist. The mother-artist becomes a body-quilt, pulled in many directions, warming multiple bodies. There are deep connections to be found between mothering, making, and memory. We both share the experience of watching our Grandmother's develop Alzheimers. My aunty, my Grandmother's youngest child, has just been diagnosed with Alzheimers and the disease is progressing quickly. My uncle, a doctor, recently noted via email, *when we see her now, she has lost touch with reality. Because she cannot remember what has just happened, what has just been said, what she should be doing, she will 'invent' her own reality which does not align with the reality for the rest of us. She is living in her own little world which we cannot see or hear. In itself it is just as valid as our reality but different.* I remember watching my Grandmother lose her ability to utilize language. Wood is experiencing the other end of the spectrum at the moment, as her children learn to turn alphabetic utterances into plausible sounds and then words. Children often imagine things that are not there as they attempt to make sense of their place in the world. Their reality is **just as valid as our reality but different.**

In the work Wood has incorporated pieces of a hand sewn tapestry, given to her by her Mum, found in her Grandmother's belongings. The tapestry had lots of rudimentary objects like animals, cars, insects, birds and balloons. Embroidered by hand, Wood's stiches are visible. This sense of the handmade connotes the possibility of both an unravelling and the creation of a memorialisation. Embroidery is a type of memorialisation that has oft been referred to as "women's work". There is an unfurling looseness to thread, that sits in contrast to the tight digitality of Wood's prior work, produced pre-children. When we were discussing the possibility of this essay, Wood sent me a photo of herself out for a walk with her bub, attempting to encourage sleep. With caring responsibilities, the structure of an artist's practice must suddenly be met with loose stiches. Wood's Grandmother passed away as she was making the work.

Wood sent me photographs of segments of the final quilt, noting that it was hard to find a spot in the house big enough to capture its entirety. In the photographs, the fabric of the quilt was quite creased. I found myself wondering if it would be ironed flat for exhibition and hoping that it wouldn't. The crease marks—a testament to the plurality of a life and the labour of the making.

~

**MILK.**

Another Instagram add that is likened to my algorithmic mood swings. You can send your breast milk away and have it made into fake opals and set into a ring. Tacky and amazing. The settings were disgusting. Will I feel like the almighty mother when breastfeeding and want to encapsulate this in a ring to be worn forever? Or will I be disgusted at the very thought of this... likening myself to a cow with udders?

~

## **GRAND-MOTHER.**

I went to see Laure Provoust's *Qui Move You* at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art: a charged movement—taking the viewer from *Grand-Father* to *Grand-Mother*. *Grand* is defined as *magnificent and imposing*. The exhibition started with the story of Provoust's Grand-Father through the work *Wantee*, which presented a fictional tale of Prouvost's Grand-Father, forever digging to Africa. I interviewed curator Annika Kristensen for Art guide in the lead up to the show. The show “ends”, explained Kristensen, with a new installation “celebrating the artist's grandmother, depicting her levitating, and acting as a type of crescendo”. These two artworks acted as “bookends”, moving audiences from “the paternal to the maternal, transforming history into herstory.” The viewer was able to move from the subterranean spaces of *Wantee* to pure light and air, travelling through several works in the process. A sense of release through this journey ultimately ended up positioning Prouvost's grandmother—a floating figure in the sky—as radically free.

This shift marked *her*—*Grand-Mother*— as ultimate liberator; ultimate liberation. A role held by many *Grand-Mothers*, but often not acknowledged. The works in between these two crescendos showed the messiness to the becomings that led to this transformation; a messiness to the overlaps of life and tenderness and sadness; a messiness to the ever-curious mind of an artist; a messiness to the wells and depths of experience-hood that accompany the journey to become *Grand-Mother*. The complexity of Laure's (the artist's) mind was strewn throughout the debris of the exhibition, made of sculptures and videos and gestures and sentiments and memories and sounds. It's hard to describe this work. It's hard to describe accumulative practices that reference many things at once. When entering the exhibition you were met with a gesturing hand—a welcome. *Wantee* comes from the phrase “Want tea?” Provoust began with an invitation.

In the middle gallery, a makeshift campfire set the scene for conversations with artistic lineages of women: a space I am very comfortable sitting within. This campfire resides in me. I am always communing with women-artists-past. I have always been more comfortable in the presence of elders. I stoke their flames for my future making. Looking to other artist's work keeps me moving.

Next, a womb room. Red curtains that felt like moments of birth and suffering and brilliance all at once. The theatricality of red. A clock with boobs above it—cutting through the seriousness. The sound of a baby on screen gurgling, amidst grown female bodies and octopi.

The site of the baby took me back to wishing.  
Ever-wishing.  
Ever-wanting.

*Wantee?*

Want-Baby.

Accompanying the exhibition was a book, *H Oma Je*—a collection of reflections on grandmothers by a gamut of local creatives with ties to ACCA. The contributions act as reminders to the complexity of *Grand-Mothers*, and of women by extension—beings that can be warm and formidable in equal measure. Bodies of strength and complication. In Wendelien van Oldenborgh’s contribution they recounted, *My Grandmother lived on a boat, a big iron barge that felt it could sail away any moment again ... Downstairs, where most of the spaces were located, nothing was straight or seemed stable and all the widows tiny and round ... Staying with her felt like a play, I lived it often.*

Returning to Laure. The last room. Glass birds and a somersaulting *Grand-Mother*. An ageing body, floating in the sky and projected onto a huge screen. This is the real victory of the exhibition: an older woman, celebrated as free. We very rarely see naked ageing bodies that are celebrated and acting playful. We rarely see naked ageing bodies as fluid and sensual and fun. Perhaps the main reason to become a mother is to break the binds that strangle our female bodies? Lose our bodies to another so that others expect less of how we should feel and be seen. To move past the “ideals” cast on us by societal standards so we can embrace future possibilities of play beyond calorie counting and cellulite. The freedom that must be felt for any women who can bring themselves to not care anymore after caring about it all? My body is ageing and it feels as if fertility is being handed to the next generation in slow motion. I am running against body clock, trying to keep up, trying to keep time with the lineages of the women in my

family before me, the ones who have birthed children. I often worry I am moving in the wrong direction. I want to go to the top of a mountain and yell 'Mother' to the wind. One day, I want to fly from the top of the mountain, just like Provoust's *Grand-Mother*.

~

## SEA-MOTHER.

When interviewed about her *Mother* work, Laure Prouvoust noted, *My mother's always here as a system of what's right, what's wrong. What's Godly, spiritual.*<sup>5</sup> My mother, also, gives me an anchor point and a spectrum for what is right and wrong—one that I return to often for justification. *Mother* presented a large octopus-like form with breasts as tentacles. In Prouvoust's words: *a malleable entity*. She speaks of the tentacles as brains, and the creature's ability to think and feel through touch—an ability that mother's often have. I read that Octopus regularly die during birth.

How do we, as humans, differ from the mothers of the sea?

Manatee's as mothers. The mother of a manatee is called a cow. A baby manatee will stay with the cow for up to two years. Male manatees (bulls) are not part of the family unit. Bulls will leave a cow alone after her breeding period is over. Dolphins are described as "helicopter parents."

Dolphin mothers don't sleep for up to a full month after their baby is born—they remain on lookout. [You are a mighty protector woman and will be just like this]. Dolphin youngsters stay with their mothers during the teenage years until they mature at between five and ten years old.

Female starfish can spawn millions of eggs at once. [I wish]. Most sea stars do not care for their young, the female just releases the eggs into the water and the larvae grow up on their own. In Nordic countries, it's a common tradition for parents to let their babies nap outside in cold weather.

Baby beluga whales will remain near mama, sometimes for 3 years or even longer. [I always found it hard to say goodbye to my mother at the start of those early school days].

The larger sperm whale has a longer gestation period and may nurse their young for just over a year while minke whales may only nurse for 5 to 10 months.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLzQCKBHQy0>

For orcas, each pod is a well-ordered matriarchy consisting of an older female, her offspring, and her daughter's offspring. [You see your family as matriarchal.] The female places the calf close to her side while swimming. In this position, called “echelon”, the calf takes advantage of its mother's wake the same way a cyclist at the head of the group makes it easier on those trailing behind.

In 2016, reports circulated with evidence that dolphin mothers sing to their babies while they are in the womb, and for a few weeks after so they can learn their names. Not only that, but according to the report, the rest of the pod holds space for that learning, quieting their other usual sounds so this can happen. [When I mentioned to my Writer’s group that I wanted to read as many books as possible when pregnant, Liz urged me to read aloud so the baby could hear].

I need to spend more time swimming in the sea.

~



## **POSTPARTUM-K.**

Mum noted in the car yesterday that we have to be just as mindful of postpartum depression for you, as for me. You may not be carrying, but you are still a first-time mother and will encounter all the emotions that accompany this. I'm mindful that the experience of having a child will bring many things to the fore for you. We always come back together. Even when things were beyond hard last week, even when they felt like they were ending, even when I was so hurt, your hip makes its way to mine in bed. Your actions and words tell me you don't want me, but your body reminds me you do and your words will follow once you have passed this bad mood. We had a huge fight on the day I was afforded \$13,000 from Creative Victoria for my forthcoming video project.

~

## **NERVES.**

What if all of this comes to nothing?

I cried last night in bed to you.

I told you how nervous I am about everything.

“What are you nervous about?”

“That it won’t work.”

“Same.”

You’re always preparing yourself for the worst-case scenario. Making plans preemptively. This is a response of needing to have coped with so much in the past. It can be a great thing, when it prepares you. But it is sometimes destructive. It means you don’t have hope and miss being in the present, focusing on a future that often won’t come to fruition. You said, “If it didn’t work, and you needed to leave me to have a baby with a man, I would understand. I would let you go.” This broke my heart. I don’t want to leave. I want to stay with you and find other ways to have a baby. Or to make a family. Or to find other means of meaningful existence. Regardless of what happens, **I want to stay.**

I feel like I can’t plan anything when we don’t know how many cycles of IVF we will need to go through. At the same time, I want to plan everything, hoping that we will be successful early on in the piece. I need to meet your realism, to prepare myself. You need to meet my hope, to prepare us.

~

**QUARANTINE.**

I bought you coffee and croissants this morning. On the paper bag I wrote,

*Happy end of sperm quarantine!*

*We made it!*

*I love you sexy Xx*

~

**CLOSE.**

“We’re almost there,” you said this morning.

“We’re almost there.”

We keep saying it to each other.

“We’re so close.”

We are finally moving forward. The news of a friend’s unplanned pregnancy. And we feel on the back foot again. Such joyous news, but we feel so much envy.

~

## **LEAVE.**

You said it again last night. That you were worried I would leave you if we couldn't have a baby. That it is one of the worries that runs through your head. I'm not going to leave. I want to protect you against all odds. I know that you need me. You would survive without me, but you need me and I need you to.

I want to protect you.

I also want a baby.

Some days it feels like I want this more than anything.

The thoughts of a baby are insidious. I can't think about anything else. I can't get away. It seeps into every thought. I worried yesterday that I have too many wonderful things in my life. That I am too blessed. That this would be asking for it all. That I don't deserve it all. But I know you deserve it. I hope I can give it to you. Yesterday you said, "I feel helpless." It's the waiting. Two people who are proactive when things need to be done, have everything out of their hands, and have to wait.

You always have the very best of advice for me.

When (if) we have a baby, will I write these stories for them too?

~

## FERTILE.

I went to Ruth O’Leary’s studio in Castlemaine today to pick up an artwork. It’s a red drawing on a piece of white card. A pregnant body, fashioned into a jar, without a head. Two eyes as nipples and a tongue protrudes from the pregnant figure’s stomach. I bought it in hopes it would call into power my own pregnancy. I showed a photograph of the drawing to my mother. Her response was, “Hmm.. Interesting.” Ruth has three boys, *Apollo*, *Solaris* and *Florian*. She had an abortion a year ago, which she has been vocal about through her work. I had a coffee with Kate Just earlier that day and mentioned that I was visiting Ruth. She advised me to “go get some of that fertile energy!” Ruth’s studio was filled with work. There were photographs of her wearing dresses marked with words heralding stages of feminist resistance and photographs of her naked and pregnant in a cemetery. Ruth was in the process of finalising work for a show at Bus Projects, reflecting on her experiences of breastfeeding and abortion. After seven years of breastfeeding, she is weaning her youngest, *Florian*. We spoke about the act of breastfeeding as monumental, and an everyday task, simultaneously. Both natural, and phenomenal. She spoke about her family referencing her as the “medicine chest”—if there was a wound, “spray it with breast milk”. I told her about how I’d recently found someone online who makes clarified breastmilk into opals for jewellery. These pieces are often purchased by mothers at the end of their breastfeeding journey—as a talisman for what they had given and achieved, as testament to their power and an acknowledgement of the work that has occurred. We spoke about the pelvic bowl as a carrier of grief. We spoke about the push and pull of motherhood and how hard it is to be both a mother and an artist. She spoke about the guilt of being at openings without her children. She spoke about the video she had made for the show which had documentation of her putting on the abortion dresses and her son blowing up and deflating a red balloon. How perfectly children can sum up situations without realising what they are doing. She said she had created forty two abortion dresses to represent the forty two days that are considered as postpartum. We agreed that it lasts much longer. I said I had heard that it takes two years for a woman’s hormones to return to “normal” after giving birth. We agreed that there is no end to these periods. I am aware that I am deep within a numbers game. She spoke about her rib muscles being pulled apart from birth and how they have not had the chance to reconcile. There is now a space under her sternum that wasn’t there before. I came home and told you about her three children’s names, *Apollo*, *Solaris* and

*Florian.* We both loved them. You said, "I don't think I can have Greek names when I'm Asian." I said, "but we'll likely have a Filo name and I'm white." We had a difficult day yesterday. You said to me, "what if it doesn't work. I'm worried that we won't fall pregnant." I feel the same. I woke up in the middle of the night and you were awake, eyes wide. I said "are you worried about the apartment." You said, "I'm worried about us."

I didn't get much sleep after that.

~

## **SYNCH.**

There's always mothers with prams outside cafes.

Last night you said to me it's important to know who is in synchronicity with you. To not chase those who you reach out to, who do not give the same energy back. Those who are not really interested in talking to you. This rattled my confidence, but I also know I need to hear it. I am more interested in other's practices than they are of mine.

I'm on a live chat with the fucking energy company. We are moving house and the last two weeks have been overtaken by admin and packing and car-breaking-down and car-buying and all the fucking draining life admin shit that I am definitely not put on this earth for. Coupled with so much social stuff, so much family stuff. Too much. We had a full day out with everyone yesterday. It was lovely. But I should have been home. I should have been working. These tasks are such a waste of time. Ruth put up a post from her interview with Howl saying she has a messy house, because she is an artist. I want a messy house. I hope you will let us have a messy house when we have children. You haven't allowed it before and I feel like so much of my time in Kyneton has been spent cleaning. I haven't had any time alone in the last few days and it's been another long stretch of time in the country and I can't wait to leave.

I'm so impatient at the moment.

Last night you said, "we're getting closer. I can't wait to have a baby with you."

I can't wait to have a baby with you.

~



## **DISCOMFORT.**

I met with Kate Just. She's had a huge career and taught as a senior lecturer at VCA for the past 20 years. She spoke non-stop and was generous, discussing the ways she had been challenged through systemic inequalities and discriminations, both personally and professionally. Her and her partner have been together for a long time. They went through the process of IVF before it was legalised in Victoria for same sex couples. They needed to fly to another state each month to go through a clinic for insemination. After this process proved difficult, they decided to adopt. It is women like this, that have sat within this discomfort, who have made it easier for K and me. They adopted one child at two years old and another as a young teen. I told her about our story so far and our future plans. She told me about advocating for trans kids at their primary school; about needing to advocate for pay discrepancies and precarious tenures at VCA; and her work for the pro-Palestine movement. She spoke about the power of advocacy. She talked about the discrimination that artist-parents face. She said once a body of work is done, she moves on. The speed in her. I have this speed in me too. We spoke about the issues of adopting and how there is a current ban on us adopting a Filipino child. I told her we had bought the apartment in Kensington. I corrected myself and said, "well, Klyde has really bought it." She said, "don't say that – contributions come in different ways – it all evens out in the end." This is what I needed to hear. This is what I need our marriage to be. Later I talked with Rosa and we acknowledged all the labour of those before us, contributing to things being easier now. We are still doing this labour, to a lesser extent. I had applied for the Masters by Research program at the end of last year. I had applied with an idea to reposition the artist-mother as curator. To reposition the act of conception and birth as a conceptual and artistic one. Kate was wonderful in assisting me to submit a late application. I wanted to use the research as a way to wrestle with the bureaucracy and red-tape of the institution, and by extension the barriers met by artist-mothers when working in institutions. I wanted the discomfort that comes with mothering—the "guilt", the lack of time and the pressure—to be part of the work—it would be the only way to survive the onslaught of ethics approvals that I would need for a research idea such as this. My application got rejected just as our second attempt at IUI failed. I am a long way from being beyond the discomfort.

~

## BEADS.

I popped into Caves Gallery to pick up another work I donated for a fundraiser that didn't sell. Camille Laddawan was installing her exhibition prior to it opening the next day. She had her 5-month-old baby strapped to her chest as she was setting up her meticulously beaded works on a beautiful wooden shelf. I felt a pang of envy. I wanted to be right where she was, working as an artist, with a baby. When I see work like this I feel as if it's been stolen work from my mind, before my body has conceived and birth and earned the right to make it. I am envy.

I went back to see the exhibition a week later.

The exhibition, titled *K-h! [ʃā]*, explored the sounds of Laddawan's baby—her utterances, a type of pre-linguistic speech. The delicate laborious beadings that Laddawan is known for mark scores that were created from recordings of the baby's cries. The scored notations, presented as drawings and a large wall hanging, felt like a departure from prior works. A slight unfurling, meticulously displayed on wooden shelves. I guess birth will unfurl you to an extent. The exhibition statement notes that through these acts of notation and translation, "the baby's sounds have been lost; the voice has been separated from the body." What an interesting note to make. It is not often that one voices lacunae, gaps, loss... in relation to acts of mothering or the existence of a baby. This is what drew me to the writing of Sappho: the gaps. This is what draw me to the complexity of you: the gaps. Mothers are programmed to say they are whole when with child. We know this isn't true. There are multiple existences that are valid, some involve children, many do not. There is so much wonder within stages of parenting, but there is also so much lack within this space. We can feel filled by having children, or in places emptier, as a result of them. There are gaps where social and mental spaces existed for the mother prior to the baby, that no longer exist.

As I write this at a café, a mother stands before me absentmindedly pushing her baby in a stroller while waiting for coffee. She looks lost; a little dead inside.. Perhaps just tired. I wonder if she has many words? I am still struggling with my own speech. Pre-linguistic utterances. Specific topics for speech. Well, specific speech about money, that is. We have been trying to talk about money. Needing to sort out how we manage it together as a couple before we become parents. You are incredibly focused on our finances. You are currently working as a

Financial Advisor. You are programmed for it. You make spreadsheets and note everything down. I am hopeless, trying to get better, but probably never will and also can't be bothered. It's hard to talk about it because we come from such different mind-sets and cultural positions when it comes to money. We usually end up fighting when we try. Sharing our finances means a big letting go of control for you. It means a stepping up for me. You love to remind me that the majority of divorces relate to disagreements about money. I know that this is so hard for you—the giving up of control. You have worked hard for your money and have much more than I do. So you should feel in control of it. But starting and sharing as a family also means the need to give up that control. That doesn't mean giving money to me. It means sharing control. It means no micro-managing. It means seeing things as "ours". My contributions may not come through payroll, but they are there in so many other ways and it all contributes to our shared life. It is hard for me to speak about money and I decided to write you a letter. Suggesting some suggestions for how we can share money. I tell you it's ridiculous that I am running out of money at the end of every month when we have a high combined income. My sole income is low. But we are married. I wait for the right time to give you the letter. When you are calm and things don't feel precarious. When external pressures aren't at play. When you aren't stressed from work or the prospect of us moving house. Three weeks pass and I haven't been able to find the right time, so I just press send. You email me back. A little heated and very blunt as usual, but you are listening and I feel that this is progress. That night I am almost asleep and you decide we should talk about it. It's 11.30pm. My eyes were already closed and I can see you are stressed. I tell you it's not the right time and we need to find a time when things are calmer. You tell me to talk to you when I am ready. I am proud of you for this (uncharacteristic) patience. Over the next week I know I need to talk to you. I can't find the right time. We are quick to bicker and put each other down. You keep telling me you are not stressed with the move. *You are so stressed with the move.* It is hard for me to speak. I schedule send an email to you to go out when I am at a work meeting. It tells you that I am proud of your patience and that I am scared to have a conversation at the moment, as it may turn into a fight. I tell you that I have said what I needed to say in the first email. I hope you will agree to my suggestions—to have a shared account for groceries and spending, that we put in what we can and don't keep score of contributions; to give me control of the IVF funds so that I can pay any invoices that come through without you needing to get stressed

about them. I tell you that I want to re-frame my speaking. Instead of saying what I have done for the move and what you have done, I want to combine our efforts. “I spent 15 hours getting the garden under control to get our bond back” becomes “We spent 15 hours getting the garden under control to get our bond back.” You haven’t set foot in the garden, but you have done so many other things to contribute to our move – let’s share our efforts and see them as combined, rather than apart. Let’s speak of “we” more often. I guess I can find the words, but only in written form. I hope you will reply via email, or not at all – just take in my suggestions and accept them as the right move forward.

In linguist Dr Adele Gregory’s essay that accompanies Laddawan’s exhibition she notes, “speech requires the coordination of over 70 muscles and many different body parts ranging from the diaphragm to the lips [...] For example, an infant’s ribs restructure, which enables louder and longer sounds to be produced. The oral cavity grows, which changes the relative proportions of the tongue or oral cavity. This enables an infant to have increased tongue mobility and dexterity, which leads to them producing new and interesting sounds.” I guess I should go easier on myself for not having the ability to speak—my whole body is having to work to make the right sounds. Ruth O’Leary told me that there is a space under her sternum where the muscles moved apart as a result of her pregnancies. Her body hasn’t had adequate time to heal. Laddawan’s baby is currently in the state of *lalangue*—a term that “concerns the function of vocal utterances for the baby, before they are bound in language.” When it comes to being able to talk about money without getting stressed, I am still within a type of *lalangue*. There are two other essays to accompany the exhibition. In Helen Johnson’s text she describes Laddawan’s acts of translation: “strung together, the sequences become a continuity, a record of the fourth trimester, this slow process of emergence made possible through a bond”. When speaking of the beads, Johnson notes, “it is Camille who provides the thread that holds them, their positions otherwise unfixed: imagine the beads without this thread, a sea of chaos that would atomise and disperse to all parts of the space, gathering in drifts.” Roslyn Orlando, Laddawan’s partner, also writes “the recordings are not just documents of her voice, but demonstrations of our listening.”

~

## **EKPHRASTIC.**

I attended an online ekphrastic writing workshop through MOMA called *On Queer Intimacies* facilitated by Amber Jamilla Musser. We began by responding to the work, *Study for Blue Water Silver Moon* by Carry James Marshall. I wrote:

*The tail, or the space where legs would be – a mermaid’s tail.  
My best friend and I often comment that we have mermaid energy.  
She has just fallen pregnant.  
I’ve been thinking a lot about swimming.  
I’m about to start my first round of IVF.  
Ideas of strong swimmers are on my mind.  
Last night I watched swimming in the Olympics.  
I loved how the swimmers, in competition, hugged each other at the end of the race.  
A reminder to be gentle with myself. A reminder to not compare my journey to another.  
My cousin had trouble conceiving.  
Another cousin is about to have a baby.  
I need to trust in my ability to swim. I need to trust in our ability to swim.  
The tail is only half drawn.  
My story is being written by my body and the medical system.  
I am still in the utero of language.  
To remember,  
I am my own and only pen.  
You are beside me, and you are swimming for pearls, for us...*

We wrote in response to Nari Wards, *Vertical Hold* of 1996:

*Bottles hanging that represent a bottle tree. I am wary that I am a white artist, writing about work that I don’t deserve to write about (again). The bottles on the trees are to trap evil spirits. In generosity, Ward has hung them for everyone. What are the evil spirits in me and how can I dissolve them? We have talked at length about not bottling up emotions, about pouring things out. It’s hard when there is so much to unpack. It will be worth it for our future children. In two weeks I will start injecting myself with IVF hormones. I have many viles, sitting in my fridge. I will draw up needles and push them into my skin, one by one. I will be the bottle,*

*warding off evil spirits. These bottles have been hung by Ward to be reminiscent of the patterns of a Shaker quilt. I am currently making a sculpture of a golden bridal veil, made from 2000+ brass wedding rings, joined by hand. It's for an exhibition on queer matrimony. It isn't going well. The gaps in my technical thinking always make these things challenging. But I will get there. Queer matrimony is challenging, but we will get there. IVF is challenging. I hope we get there. Making fabric out of hard material, metal and bottles, is challenging. Making life from test tubes and emails is challenging. As queer people, we are forever stringing things together to make new worlds. We are forever being challenged.*

In the group chat at the end of the workshop I wrote:

*Thank you so much for your care, Amber – you have held space so beautifully today. I am writing a book about my IVF journey, through using writing about artwork as metaphor. If anyone in the chat has experience in this area and would be interested in chatting, please feel free to get in touch.*

No one emailed me.

~

**READY.**

I wake early, and it's all I can think of.

We collected all the drugs yesterday.

So many viles.

I can't wait to inject myself.

I can't wait to begin.

The waiting seems endless.

Every piece of sugar I eat, I wonder if I should eat it.

~

**SPEAK.**

My first Tagalog class and Tita Perla said “repetition is the mother of learning.” I had also met with my psychologist earlier in the day. She said it is time to ask you directly for what I need from you. To tell you I need you to do the self-work – not for our future children (although that is true) but for me, right here, right where I am, right now. The issues we have been having have been on repeat for four years. It is time to speak.

~



## THE THICK.

We are currently in the thick of it. Beck echoed this when we saw her a few weeks ago: *I've had friends with pregnancies, miscarriages, abortions, IVF... the whole gamut.*

I went to a language workshop by Grace Vilanau. She talked about the power of names and asked us the meaning of our names. I didn't know the meaning of Josephine. A quick Google search concluded: *Josephine is of Hebrew origin and means "Jehovah increases" or "He shall increase." It is the feminine version of Joseph.* I hate that this makes me sound like an extension from thoughts/figures of man. Hopefully this sense of *increase* will be an omen for an increasing family. She taught us to weave a lay—a symbol of love. I wove it for you. We had awoken that morning and the first thing you said was, "I wish you didn't have to go to your workshop." She said she puts the most work into un-learning with the young people—unlearning self-stereotypes that white people have placed on their shoulders. She taught us a song of safety for the oceans—one that needed loud voices to boom. She spoke of the struggles to find decolonized learning in the institution. She spoke about names being passed down. You asked if we could name the baby Angelina, after your beloved grandmother.

We are currently in the thick of it. A close friend, ten weeks pregnant. Another friend, announced they were five weeks. On Friday they called to say they had miscarried. The rush of blood between thighs and broken hearts. A day later, my period arrived: the thing we had been waiting for to mark the start of my first IVF cycle. How different a period can be for the receiver. Will this be the last time I steal pads from you? Today – the first day on the viles. I pushed the needle into my stomach. A small amount of blood spurted out when I removed it. I was tearful later, but can't imagine I would feel the effects of the hormones so soon. Just the effects of the gravity of it all. A heaviness for the lost life. A happiness and envy for the budding one. A hope and worry for myself. A reminder that I need to be my best friend through this time, stepping away from others for a while. You have been focusing on filling my belly with good food, creating a safety cushion for the needles to nest within.

~

**EDGE.**

Sorry about the leaked box. It might be best to throw that lil gun away as it could be unsafe

And sorry about leaving all the paintings in your room

No need for apologies Jose.

Today 9:32 am

Scan tomorrow! Love you

Proud of you always

Thank you for loving me



Sleep well little one



**SCAN.**

Scan post drugs.

The ultrasound technician told us the results so we wouldn't have to wait.

15 follicles in the left ovary.

12 in the right.

Some big ones.

Awash with relief.

~

## ORANGE.

I went to see Darcey Bella Arnold's *The Orange is Orange* at Cache. Three large sculptures filled the space. They were up-scaled reconstructions of segments of orange peel, peeled by Louise Bourgeois many years ago and captured on video when she sat down for an interview with *former Times art critic Waldemar Januszczack* in 1998. LB's creations: a half segment and swirl of peel as residue; and a human figure torn from the delicate orange peel. In the video, as LB peels the peel, she recounts her father doing the same action at dinner parties to entertain guests. The figure left over has the core of the orange as a phallus. Bourgeois' father would turn the peel over in his palm to reveal this genitalia, noting that the young LB could not be a stand-in for this maquette, as she had "nothing down there." I'd seen the video of LB peeling the orange and retelling this mortifying story, and recognised the reference immediately. We are never far from the lineage and memories of our artist-mothers once they have touched us. LB is constantly in my peripheral thinking. Through closer lineage, there is a direct poignancy to Arnold's work that I love. She produces poetic distillations, that often encompass thoughts of mothering through formal considerations of material. LB is most often related to thoughts of mothering and referred to as *bonne maman*. The accompanying essay by Archie Gibbs informed me that Arnold has been repeatedly reconstructing the citrus fruit in different guises through her work for the last 5 years. As mother, LB repeatedly recast her painful memories as artworks anew. Through repeating LB's actions, Arnold has reconfigured the orange body form – a patriarchal object born from LB's father, re-constituted through the release of memory through LB's hand and the telling of her story, and now formed as feminine by way of Arnold's meticulous recreation. As Gibbs notes, "*Orchestrated as if the figure has been peeled hastily from its flesh to satisfy some urge while the remains are momentarily discarded on the ground, the presentation conjures another favourite trope: the mother.*" And so, through processes of repetition and transformation, from orange to orange to orange and so on, Arnold continues the work of LB, unravelling patriarchal peels that have come before us.

I don't now when we will fall pregnant, but I know that art making will be a conduit.

~

**EXTRACTION.**

We drove to Ballarat for the egg extraction. You booked a beautiful hotel for us. It was wasted on me—full and over-stimulated on the hormones. The restaurant adjoining the hotel was called *babae*—*woman* in Tagalog. It seemed like a good sign. There was a Heather B Swann work in the hotel—incarcerated women and a loom—the resistance. The hotel owner spoke of the legacy of their Grandmother, Vera. There was a feeling that the place was endowed with a female energy, imbued with the mother. I thought about carving images of my follicle scans into marble. We have armies of women behind us.

~

**CARD.**

*Well Done*

*Josephine Mead*

*Date of birth 4 / 10 / 91*

*Today 7 eggs were retrieved at your egg collection.*

*Please refer to the post egg collection instructions you have been given.*

*If you have any concerns or queries today, please call the clinic to chat with a  
nurse.*

*All the best from the*

*Ballarat IVF team*

~

**SEVEN.**

Nurse's call: **seven.**

*You'll have to do a frozen cycle. You're too overstimulated to go straight away. This means you won't have to undergo another cycle of hormone stimulation and an egg collection. If you went straight into a cycle you would potentially have a very unwell pregnancy and you would hate us.*

The number in the chemist: **7.77.**

The number on the phone: 1.11 (I've been here before—don't read into anything).

Scott sent us a photo of him with **seven** eggs.

Mum's favourite number: **seven.**

CB got 18 eggs. "Don't worry. It's about quality, not quantity."

Nurse's call: *We'll call you in two days to let you know how many embryos have survived.*

**seven.**

~

**THREE.**

7 > 3.

The call:

*Only three embryos have survived the first night.*

~



## **IMPATIENCE.**

Impatience: For two impatient people the waiting is excruciating.

Potential name for our child:

*Impatience*

?

~

**START.**

Day 1 of the Letrizole.

We have officially entered an insemination cycle.

Is my body too stressed for it?

~

## **ULTRASOUND.**

Follicle ultrasound this morning. The sonographer was nice. But was she too nice? Was she extra nice because she was trying to cover a reaction? A not so good reaction? She couldn't tell us anything. We have to wait to hear from the IVF nurses. More double handling. She said my lining was 10cm. Did she count 8 or 9 eggs? What is a good amount? Are you doing a frozen cycle? Yes. What day of your cycle are you on? *I'm not sure. Maybe 11? It's all so confusing.*

“Please do not take photographs of the ultrasound screen.”

“I can see a fibroid, but it's very small, shouldn't be an issue. I'll put it all down in the report so that the doctor knows.”

Your lining looks perfect.

The biggest follicle is 12cm.

Counted 15-16....17 follicles.

~

## **FIBROID.**

Two ultrasounds in a week full of teaching and public programs, all leading towards finally being able to go through with insemination this month: October. You turned thirty-nine this month. I turned thirty-three. First ultrasound: the eggs needed to grow a bit more. The second: they looked great and my uterine lining was deemed “beautiful”. I juggled receiving phone calls later that day to book in our insemination for the following week. It was my first day teaching and I came out on a high. I was doing it all and finally moving forward.

Four missed calls from the clinic.

A voice message, “Dr Russel will call you. Something has shown up on your scan. It’s not ideal. Insemination this month can’t go ahead, just wanted to give you a heads up.”

More phone tag, until I hear from Dr Russel:

A benign fibroid tumour in my uterus.

A tiny mass, that would likely interfere with implantation. It will need to be removed through surgery. “I can get you in on November 4<sup>th</sup>.”

“How long is recovery?”

“4-6 weeks.”

So, we can’t try in October. We can’t try in November. The clinic closes over Summer, so it’s unlikely we’ll be able to try in December.

You had wine club that night and I wanted you to enjoy it, so decided to not tell you straight away.

~

**LOSS.**

And a friend's life taken and it's hard to be motivated. And I want to bring a baby into the world to balance the sadness. Palestinians are being murdered. Les died. Eva can't go home.

~

## **PSYCHE.**

The psyche relates to the human condition. I have always understood that my physical self is very entwined with my psychological self. Any physical concerns often have an emotional source-point for me. The fibroid was removed on Monday. I am still losing bloody tissue as it slowly exits my body. The surgery went well, they said. You” have a check-up in a few weeks to confirm, they said. I have to get my head around the idea that there was something foreign in my body, that could have hindered pregnancy. I have to train my brain to recognise the threat is now gone. But my brain is moving slowly and I still feel invaded. We could potentially try in December, but it depends if dates clash with the clinic’s end of year closure. And...I wonder if my body is ready? What if my body is never ready? I don’t want to waste our money. *Panpsychism* is the view that all things have a mind or a mind-like quality. The word itself was coined by the Italian philosopher Francesco Patrizi in the sixteenth century and derives from the two Greek words *pan* (all) and *psyche* (soul or mind). Did the fibroid have any psychological function? To what extent was it a being, unto itself? Did it know what it was doing? And what was it’s greater purpose? Was it trying to protect me from something? Where has its effect gone after it has been removed?

~

## **CHECK-UP.**

I went with Mum because you were working. I was nervous that they hadn't gotten the whole fibroid. I started to cry as soon as I sat down in the Drs office. Starting with an internal sonogram. Looks good so far. The nurse who was assisting was heavily pregnant, which seemed distasteful. He proceeded to thread a catheter into my uterus, to fill it with saline, to get better vision. I didn't realise the checkup would be so invasive and it was painful. I wished they had of explained what the procedure would involve. But he said it had worked. The fibroid was gone and everything looked perfect. I balled my eyes out in the car with relief. Everything has been so much scarier, and so much more invasive, than I thought it would be. I feel battered after each exam. But we are moving forward and you were there to hold me when I got home.

~

## **JEALOUS.**

It's the jealousy that I'm not used to, that I can't quite contend with, that makes me feel like I'm in a black hole. It was hard when Stell told us she was pregnant. Months ago now. She's due in the new year. We were so much further back in the journey then. I didn't realise we still have further obstacles ahead – fibroid and hormones overstimulation. I thought to myself, "how will I cope if we are still not pregnant when we have her baby shower?" Her baby shower has since passed. My brother took me out to dinner to tell me him and his girlfriend were pregnant. I've often dreamed of him making me an aunty. Yet I left and couldn't stop crying. Why everyone but us? When will it be our turn? The conversations that ensued – my parents deciding what grandparent names they would go by. These were meant to be my conversations. We have been working towards those conversations for over a year. Of course over a year doesn't even compare to other couples that have been working towards those conversations for years and years. Many couples never end up getting to have the conversations they imagine. You said I need to draw back. That I can be happy for them later and right now I need to sink into just our conversations – when I enter into the dialogues of others, I feel down. The clouds sink in and it's hard to get out of bed in the morning. I also don't have enough structure on Summer holidays and this is never a good thing for me. It is better if I am reading, even better if I am drawing or writing. Yesterday I drew in charcoal on rag paper – drawings of my uterus sonograms before the egg extraction. I traced them through the light of our lounge room windows. I'm happy for my brother, but it's clouded by the emptiness I have been feeling in myself. We've finally started an insemination cycle. I've taken hormones tablets for two days. Our sonogram is in several days. How many insemination cycles will be need to go through? It could just be one. It's possible. It's hard to get hopeful when you don't want to be disappointed again. It's hard to not be hopeful when you are in a constant state of dreaming.

~



**CYCLE.**

My period came and it was time to commence a frozen cycle. I started on 5 days of progesterone tablets. I was feeling moody. I don't know if this was from the tablets, or just because I am emotional at the best of times and everything is heightened with all-consuming thoughts of IVF. These thoughts have consumed me for well over a year now. I can't wait to replace them with pregnancy worries.

~

### THREE.

On a rooftop in Mexico while undertaking a residency program in 2018 I created this artwork – a photograph where I stand behind a blue sheet on a hot red Pueblan rooftop, holding three avocados. I was single and wondering if I would remain alone. I was also struggling with female health issues at the time and fertility was on my mind. In Mexico avocados are a symbol of fertility. I have always wanted to be a mother, but wasn't sure if life would allow for that. I titled the work *Sin puertas visibles / No visible doors*. On Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2024 I received a call from the Ballarat IVF nurse: “We’ve received your blood test results, everything looks good so we are all systems go for implantation. It’s time for your trigger shot.” On the rooftop of our building later that day: our chicken’s laid three eggs.



The number 3 has many meanings, including creativity, communication, and balance. It is also associated with the past, present, and future, and birth, life, and death. In numerology the number 3 is considered a VIP number, and is associated with creativity, communication, and joy. It is often associated with the planet Jupiter, which is associated with joy, abundance, success, good fortune, and wisdom. People with strong number 3 energy are said to be creative, social, and good communicators. In ancient Greece. The ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras considered the number 3 to be the perfect number, and the number of harmony, wisdom, and understanding. In nature. The number 3 is considered to be an expression of nature, representing the

Earth, Sun, and Moon. In engineering, the triangle, a polygon with three edges and three vertices, is the most stable physical shape. The number 3 is universal as an innate expression of Nature. It is Earth, Sun, and Moon; the human amalgam of body, mind, and spirit. We think of Time itself unfolding as past, present, and future and our full cycle of experience as birth, life, and death.

They asked for a blood test to check my progesterone levels. Results didn't come back that day and I had a sleepless night. A call in the morning. Everything looked good – go straight home and do your trigger shot: 250mcg Ovidrel. The needle felt larger than last time. Did I prime the needle correctly? Implantation booked in for Saturday.

*The invoice will come through this afternoon. It needs to be paid before the procedure.*

~

## **TRACE.**

The sonogram during the period of egg retrieval a few months ago had provided a collection of sonographic scans showing the deep dark theatre space of my womb and the 27 follicles I had grown from a variety of angles. It was nice to see something inside there. The sonographer measured them, marking them with small X symbols and recounting their sizes as she charted them. She wasn't meant to tell us the result. This would be left for the IVF nurses later in the day via a phone call. I've had a year of phone tag with the clinic. She had been through egg retrieval for herself so that she could freeze her eggs for potential later use. She understood the waiting. She understood the stress. She told us we had twenty-seven good looking follicles and would be able to proceed with a likely successful retrieval. She told us so that we didn't have to wait for the call. I printed the scans on acetate following the appointment. With the overstimulation and fibroids, it was painful to look at them for a while. I thought about drawing them and I thought about turning the drawings into carved stone sculptures. But I wasn't sure what this would mean and was tentative to cast possibility in the solidity of stone. I was also tentative to spend the money on stone tests, with IVF costs mounting. I felt a desperation to get the drawings done before implantation and spent the day before frantically tracing the scans in charcoal against the light of our loungeroom window. I was drawing quickly by the end, rushing to get them done in time.

~

## SWIM.

We have been watching many films together over the Summer and have also spent a lot of time swimming in the ocean. At the end of 2023 I swam off Grecian coastlines, researching for a book of poetry inspired by Sappho, and standing in the places she may have stood. Julia Armfield, speaking of dualities within Céline Sciamma’s film *Portrait of a Lady of Fire*, recounts protagonists Marianne and Héloïse’s conversation:

“I’ve dreamt of doing that for years.”

“Dying?”

Marianne asks and Héloïse responds, “Running.”<sup>8</sup>

Armfield reflects, *it is a scene we will recall later when Héloïse finally decides to walk into the ocean, letting Marianne watch her figure out whether or not she can swim. The ocean, here, is something to be feared but also something to long for—much like love and the panic of love.*<sup>9</sup>

The ocean is oft used as an allegory for experiences of queerness—particularly ones that are woman-centred. I am slowly getting to know my lover’s currents. I am slowly building an archive of sea water through my encounters. I am getting better at breathing underwater and my palette is satiated by salt. As I meet new currents and search for gestational possibility through the water and the writing of others, I find myself both *dying* and *running*, surrounded by *much love and the panic of love*. Perhaps this is what it means to be queer? Or perhaps this is just what it means to be me?

The first time I saw *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* was with my older brother. It was just before the movie that I told him I had started dating a woman. I had told him about you: K.

~

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<sup>8</sup> Julia Armfield, *The Ocean is a Lesbian: Notes on Queer Women and Water*, 2022

<sup>9</sup> Julia Armfield, *The Ocean is a Lesbian: Notes on Queer Women and Water*, 2022

## IMPLANT.

*water- swimming – Yiri – calm – screen – embryo – Orlando – water-reading – transcript.*

The day of implantation arrived. So much has led to this point. It felt so good to have an appointment that was nothing but positive—albeit the nerves were still persistent leading up to it. We swam in the sea the night before. It felt refreshing to wash it all off and feel fertile like the water. I repeated three times, ‘I am fertile, I am ready’ to the sea and to you. Earlier that day Rosa had sent me a photo of her holding nine-day old *Yiri*. *Yiri* is the Wiradjuri word for beam of light. She was perfection. A few days prior I had read an excerpt from *Yiri*’s mother, Jazz Money’s piece in *Words to Sing The World Alive*. Pre-emptive of *Yiri*, Jazz had written: *This is a world where I want my small ones to feel held. As natural as their dancing bodies, as their laughing bellies. A language that flows as powerful as the waters that shape our river-bound homeland. We haven’t made these babies yet. Our love will not make them manifest without long conversations, the help of other bodies and fluids we do not produce. For now, they are future beings, with star trails stretched against our skies as we wait for every step in this lasting choreography to come together.*<sup>10</sup> I felt happiness for this sovereign strong woman, bringing *Yiri* into this world with her and her wife’s love, and hoped that our little being would follow suit. I am training myself to see every baby as a beam of light and possibility.

~

---

<sup>10</sup> (10-11 – Jazz Money, *Words to Sing the World Alive*)

**2WW.**

The internet refers to it as the 2ww. Two Week Wait. The waiting period from implantation to result. It feels like 12 years.

~

## FIVE.

Day five. How can it only have been five days? It feels like I've been born and died a million times and time is moving slower than snails. Last night I was swimming in the whirlpool. My mind whirling on constant thoughts of "What if?" "How will we?" "Could we?" "How will I cope..." How will I get through the days preceding?" "What if it works!" "What if it had worked?" There are still seven sleeps before my blood can be tested. The day before I was out of the whirlpool and deep within the fog. Unable to move forward with tasks, stuck on thoughts of it all. People have and make babies every day and have done so for millennia. Still, it feels like we are undertaking the most monumental of tasks. The internet tells me that it takes 1-6 days post a frozen embryo transfer for it to implant. It attaches to the uterine wall, triggering the formation of the placenta. I want to build a beautiful placenta, full and bursting, with all it needs to sustain *you*. I have just begun a new letter, having a different *you* to write to. I am not sure how long this letter exchange will last for. I hope it lasts forever. The *you* that I have been most acquainted with so far is *your* mother. She is the one I have been writing to. But you could be my second *you*. Are *you* a *you* yet? Can you hear me? Are you in there little tadpole? Am I speaking to myself? I love you beyond words already. If you are not there, I loved you as my little embryo and am proud of you for trying. There are three stages of implantation: *apposition*: where the embryo attached to the uterine lining in an unstable way; *adhesion*: where the embryo and uterine lining establish a stable connection; and *penetration*: where the embryo's trophoblast cells invade the uterine lining, creating a vascular connection to the mother. Can you relate to any of these stages? I am so ready to be invaded by *you*. If *you* have implanted, my placenta will produce hormones to maintain a pregnancy. It will carry oxygen and nutrients to *you*—from me—and will take back that which you don't need. I'm happy for you to take all I have. I'm happy to take on all that is not serving you. My endometrium will transform into a placental bed that will support *you*. Your heart and major blood vessels will develop early, at about 16 days after fertilization. I can't believe the possibility of *you* lives inside me. I already feel so lucky at the possibility of being able to carry *you* in my body. We already carry the cells of future children in our bodies as women. I was a Mother before the day that I was born.

~



**NINE.**

Day nine. Tearfulness. Irritability. Anxiety. Fear that this could be PMS. Desperate hope that it is not.

In the evening we went to see the Yayoi Kusama retrospective at the National Gallery of Victoria. We looked at her pumpkin paintings and I watched a video of her talking about her love of pumpkins:

*They contribute to the peace of mankind across the world / Pumpkins bring poetic  
peace in my mind / It is for the pumpkins that I keep going /  
Pumpkins, pumpkins, pumpkins.*

I thought about *you* as a pumpkin. I thought about pumpkins being playthings and the playthings that I could provide for you. Some of the sculptures looked like fallopian tubes and K called me her *Fallopian Princess*. There were large canvases covered in paintings of thousands of swimming sperms. She took a photograph of me in front of one. I look happy and the sea of sperm behind me is swimming with possibility.

~

**TOMORROW.**

I go for a blood test tomorrow. I might know by the end of the day, or might know the following morning, depending on the speed of the lab. I've been counting down the seconds and the wait has felt like an eternity. But today I had a moment where I thought about holding time still. Staying right in this moment. Because if the results are negative tomorrow, this will be the last chance I have to feel the possibility of you inside me. I want to stay within the possibility of you.

~

**CARRY- K.**

You carried me through the wait. You carried us. I am so proud of you, K.

~

**24.01.2025:**

*Not pregnant.* Goodbye my sweet embryo. It wasn't time for *you*. You still existed inside me. I still carried you. The last few days, I thought today would mark the last entry to this book—the resolve of this small project. I'm not sure when the writing will end. I'll re-direct the writing back to your mother, for now. All of the birth books hidden at the back of my bookshelf will remain hidden, waiting to be read. I'd looked at the photograph of the embryo so many times. It looks like two little baby lambs nestled up to each other. You drew a lamb over the top of one and we couldn't stop laughing. It looked so beautiful to me and now it's gone. Somehow, I'm okay. My final letter to you and I'll start writing again to your mother.

~

## **SWIM.**

I swam out beyond the crowd and the sky opened up and it started to rain. The drops sprinkled on the surface of the water like drops of lightening. It looked like the rain was falling upwards. Somehow coming from the water and the sky at the same time. I took a photograph a few years ago of sunlight glistening on water. It looked the same as the photograph, but in reverse. The sky was crying for me and my tears held still, inside, for the first time in a couple of days. I gulped some sea water and felt the salt burn my eyes.

~