

Between Bridges Residency
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Lucy Beech
Out of Body

22 November - 22 December 2024

Unmade

Lucy Beech's exhibition *Out of Body* includes a photograph of a burst bank inside a concrete wave channel. The dyke was constructed by scientists to test its viability for coastal protection against an onslaught of mechanical waves. The image points to the mutual relationship between flow and containment. In order to be understood the wave must be contained and in this human context the containment vessel emerges as inseparable from fluidity.

The central focus of the exhibition is a new film installation which shares the exhibition's title. *Out of Body* is a poetic and psychedelic reflection on impermanence, rupture, and fluidity. Worrying at the boundary between body and environment the film traces flows of biological material in and out of hum/animal bodies through sites of scientific and reproductive control. From the production of biomedical pharmaceuticals derived from urine to breeding technologies, bacteriology and waste management, the film permits us glimpses of the hidden labour that sustains an image of the body as bounded, complete, impermeable. The film is woven together by a series of poems performed by Logan February in which borrowed language accumulates. Sourced from different fields these found poems refer to fluid dynamics, spirituality, medical history, psychoanalysis and reproductive science.

Early in the film we observe a drain technician monitoring a sewer robot as it scours the city's digestive tract for cracks and signs of insect life. The poet describes leaving their rubbish out for collection, a daily act likened to the pleasure of feeling their guts unburdening themselves: "*the sensation (at least for a moment) / that my body contains nothing but myself.*" At the heart of this imagining of "me" as made whole by the habitual expulsion of everything "not me"—trash from the house, waste from the rectum—lies the fantasy of biological autonomy. Part of what *Out of Body* exposes is

the effort involved in maintaining this illusion. Moving from sewer to salt mine, from medical laboratory to urine processing factory and farm, the film incorporates technologies such as microscopes, circulation tanks, and robots, all integral to the infrastructure of these hidden worlds.

In one instance, the camera descends deep into the fragile underground caverns of a former salt mine, where scientists work in a subterranean lab to develop materials capable of creeping into cracks and sealing radioactive and industrial waste encrypted within the mine's hollowed spaces. Here, the flow rate of unique salt mixtures is measured for their ability to adhere to and integrate with the excavated salt formations. The scientists' rehearsal of containment and leakage parallels Logan's poem *Bilirubin*. Through a microscope a healer reads the law of the poet's liver: "*Across the dermis, deeper below*" Logan's bloodstream is "*bright with bilirubin*" a yellow pigment produced during the body's breakdown of red blood cells. Logan's Gilbert's syndrome affects the liver's processing of bilirubin, leading to visible buildups of the yellow pigment that "*glows like needless gold coins*" in the bloodstream. This accumulation mirrors the fragile task of containment in the mine. "*You would not dream to expel excrete that inherited gold pigment*" the healer suggests—"your body contains your fathers ghost". Playing with questions of waste, value and containment Logan's poem speaks to the futural side effects of excessive retention.

Later the camera rests on an industrial building that appears to have a giant pink colon, replete with intestinal kinks, running through its centre. Situated on an island at the edge of Tiergarten the *Umlauftank 2 (T2)* is a research facility of the Technical University of Berlin used by nautical scientists to test ships and

experiment with fluid dynamics. Built by Ludwig Leo in the late 1960s the architect was also responsible for Berlin's iconic pink pipes which are used to transport groundwater that is pumped from the swampy marshland below, creating space that will be filled in with concrete— stabilised and contained. The building recalls a famous illustration by Fritz Kahn, *Der Mensch als Industriepalast or Man as Industrial Palace* (1926), in which the body—bisected so that it is possible to see its inner workings—is depicted as a well-ordered factory. In the brain, workers stand at panels that control the central nervous and respiratory systems, the thyroid gland is an industrial silo, the heart an engine room of pumping pistons and the stomach a conveyor-belt to the intestine. Produced in the 1920s this futuristic vision of sleek modern efficiency was sustained by great public health innovations and vast sewage networks of the previous century which had instituted a sanitary order that removed excretory procedures and products from view.

Technologies like the drain robots, MRI, ultrasound and endoscopy allow us to experience the city or body from the inside out. This resonates with the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion's use of the gut as a metaphor for psychic processes. In *A Memoir of the Future* (1975) he imagined what it might be to take an intestinal view of himself: "*Suppose I used my alimentary canal as a sort of telescope. I could get down to the arse and look up at the mouth full of teeth and tonsils and tongue. Or rush up to the top end of the alimentary canal and watch what my arsehole was up to*". Adopting this bottom-up perspective on the self was, for Bion, one approach to the problem of what he termed 'undigested facts': memories, feelings, sensations, and other fragments of psychic matter that get stuck in the system. In the fragments of a psychoanalytic case study that wind through the film the patient pictures his colon as a site of psychological spill and pollution: "*when I'm angry/Putrefied materials/Stagnate. Seep into my other organs/Intoxicate my insides*" so that the detritus of the mind and body threatens to unmake it.

There is something in the flux and flow of *Out of Body* that refuses to see the body as an 'Industrial Palace'. Where the capitalist ideal of the body as a closed system relies on an efficient system of inputs and outputs, Beech's film lingers at threshold spaces where opposing and ambiguous forces mingle. All the sites traversed by the camera—sewer, colon, sieve, mine, placenta—mark thresholds that both establish and erase the division of inside from outside. Thresholds meet other thresholds: the T2 bisected by a colon that seems to be consuming itself, in the opening poem that voices 'Mouth-out an orifice again/discharged end to end the river's mouth, mouthed back' and the placenta's glistening bluey

purple network of interconnected veins. Lurking here is Karen Barad's 'agential realism', a theory born of feminist physics, that envisages the world as composed by overlapping systems and which uses the term 'intra-action' to describe how bodies and other entities are brought into being only by their interaction with one another. Digestion is likewise a kind of co-constitution: an intensely intimate encounter with the environment, mediated by peristalsis, enzyme secretion, and nutrient absorption, eating knits us into the world.

In the film we see the orchestration of microbial diversity in wastewater treatment, human interventions into microbial communities that actively shape the material reality of water. The Sisyphean task of stabilising this waste material, a riot of bacteria, fungi and protozoa revealing something of the work involved in maintaining the fantasy of biological autonomy. Along similar lines, recent efforts to map the human microbiome have found that living with 'companion species'—dogs, cows, protozoa— means sharing their bacterial flora and fauna. The myth of the sovereign self relies on the occlusion of such processes, both in relation to how the body and its waste is imagined, but also in terms of the daily grind of managing and maintaining it. Paying close attention to the work involved in sustaining this collective project, the film stays with miners, van drivers and breeding technicians, the camera's view focused, sometimes diagnostic. In its attention the film enacts a kind of unmaking of its viewer. By drawing our eye to actions usually painstakingly concealed *Out of Body* reveals our biologically autonomous selves as an illusion of our own making. As we enter and leave the exhibition sound spills into the front room, breaching the threshold of the door like fluids forcing themselves through a bank, seeping through invisible cracks, refusing to be contained.

Elsa Richardson, 2024

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Works exhibited:

Collapsed Coastal Protection Bank, 2017 (reprinted 2024)
Original image by Coastal Research Centre
(Forschungszentrum Küste), Hannover
Courtesy the artist

Out of Body, 2024
4K video with 7.1 surround sound
Courtesy the artist

Directed and edited by
Lucy Beech

Poems by
Lucy Beech and Logan February

Locations:
UT 2 Versuchsanstalt für Wasserbau und Schiffbau
(VWS) - Technical University Berlin
The Coastal Research Centre (Forschungszentrum Küste)
Hannover
Waßmannsdorf, Berlin sewage treatment plant
Ruhleben sewage treatment plant, Berlin
Bartensleben mine - Bundesgesellschaft für Endlagerung mbH

Score by
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Virginia Hernandez

Line Producer
Paulina Kleingarn

Director of Photography
Leander Ott

Assistant Director / Assistant Editor
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1st Assistant Camera
Mahdiyeh Agahi

2nd Unit Director of Photography
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Steven O'Connor

Gaffer
Alan Waddingham

Spark
Robert Samplawski

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Gaston Ibarroule

Art Department Assistant
Raina Todoroff

Production Assistant
Daavid Mörtl

VFX
Alik Kadom
Andrii Belskyi

Still Photography
Benjamin Pfau

Extras
Michael Blume, Andrew Wu

Special Appearances
Poet: Logan February
Musician: Alexander Jeanrenaud

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