Writing with Multiple Appendages: Scratchings of the Skittering Limbs of Stygofauna

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Introduction
Four pairs of images from the Postcards from the Underground (2022) print series are presented here as experiments in translating invertebrate underground worlds. Artist Perdita Phillips and cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis collaborated to create an interdisciplinary ‘walkshop’ event to the coal mining town of Lithgow, as part of Phillips’ Artsource both/and artist in residence at Artspace, Sydney in 2017. The many forms of stygofauna—small invertebrate animals including worms, mites, snails, insects and many crustacea—can be found in the millimetres-wide in-between spaces in groundwater. Short-range endemism is common—due to their distribution in isolated patches beneath semi-arid to rainforest landscapes in Australia—and sporadic relic distribution world-wide. Working between Neimanis’ text and Phillips’ drawings and found images, the conversations with and through stygofauna, underground water and mining were then developed into colour postcards, that use a red/cyan optical masking technique. The images can be decoded with a red filter that is held up to the eye. The previously invisible cyan delineations are then revealed from beneath—alluding to the layers of concern and the double state of both/and—“caught up in both the noticing and not-noticing of each other” that the artist/author were articulating (Neimanis and Phillips 137). The swirling patterns of swimming and the complex fingering of many limbs were rendered into cryptic scores. The postcards explore notions of hiding/revealing and comprehension and miscomprehension of subterranean ecosystems, through the multiple scratchings of the skittering limbs of stygofauna.

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Figs. 1-2 Postcards from the Underground (© Perdita Phillips and Astrida Neimanis). Limited edition digitally printed postcards 14.8 x 10.5 cm. Lithgow Iron Works and time is a place-based medium.

*pro-tips for longevity: the oldest water in the world only got that way because it was shoved into a very deep pocket, and then sewed into a secret hem. (magic charm, pocket watch, entire species as dryer lint) We forgot all about it, for a while.*

*time is a place-based medium*
Our flight was precipitated by a changing geology and
characterizing the break-up of Pangaea and spreading
the earth’s mantle. It is a progressively hurried world, a
flying of the continents from the belly of the sea, and
as we departed our austral refugees, like there had been rain
pitchers and water in abundance for. By our arrival,
we were underpinned, seeking refuge somewhere, and
we are back. The climate there was falling. Without surf-
light the atmosphere remained steady the day, moments,
and past to present. We didn’t expect the interval. 
And light, the smell, of our angel of the sun since the
Place among the poles of our disintegrated bones. Glassed
were formed on and off by central and external
seemingly adopted powers outwards. We descended to
reach tortured comfort, and types of were here been
around. When our surface became “wedded in”, some
of us passed, while others were drifted. Some of us took
up residence in the atmosphere, upland snow covering
and were then encased in film, then dry, polished
by the rise and fall of underground where, we re-
mained and let motion almost space, by the pull of a map
we would never see, the hollow wind of the world, as we
learned under the hypnosis of repetition. We learned to live without
eyes. We learned to look at a distance. We responded
to these, pairing with a five-time acceleration, and
learned the thrill of internal experience. We are now in
peace, in radically tilted ways. We have become maps of
evolution written on our newly神器森林, in a
silent submarine silence.

Figs. 3-4 Postcards from the Underground (© Perdita Phillips and Astrida Neimanis). Limited
edition digitally printed postcards 14.8 x 10.5 cm. Stygofauna/coal fragment and our flight.
Figs. 5-6 Postcards from the Underground (© Perdita Phillips and Astrida Neimanis). Limited edition digitally printed postcards 14.8 x 10.5 cm. A letter from father to son at the time of the 1911 Lithgow Strike and skitterings.
Figs. 7-8 Postcards from the Underground (© Perdita Phillips and Astrida Neimanis). Limited edition digitally printed postcards 14.8 x 10.5 cm. Stygofauna/slag/thrash and walkshop layers