

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

PERDITA PHILLIPS¹ AND ASTRIDA NEIMANIS²

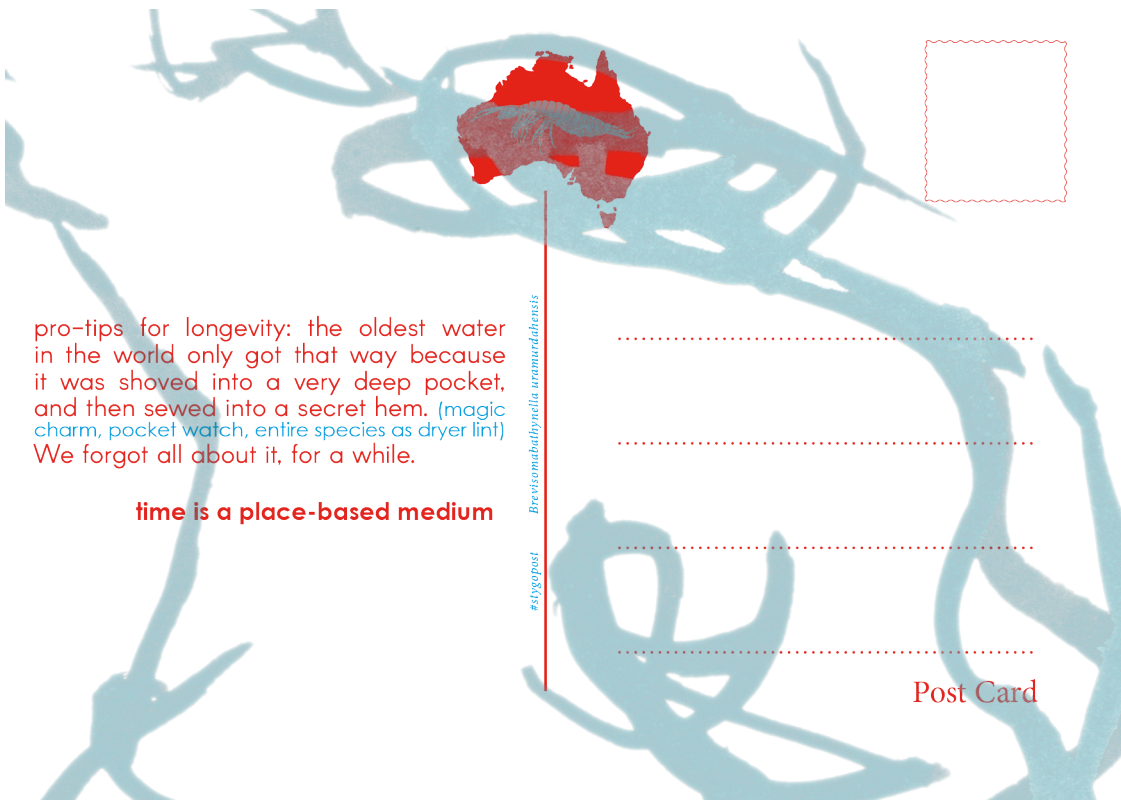
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Introduction

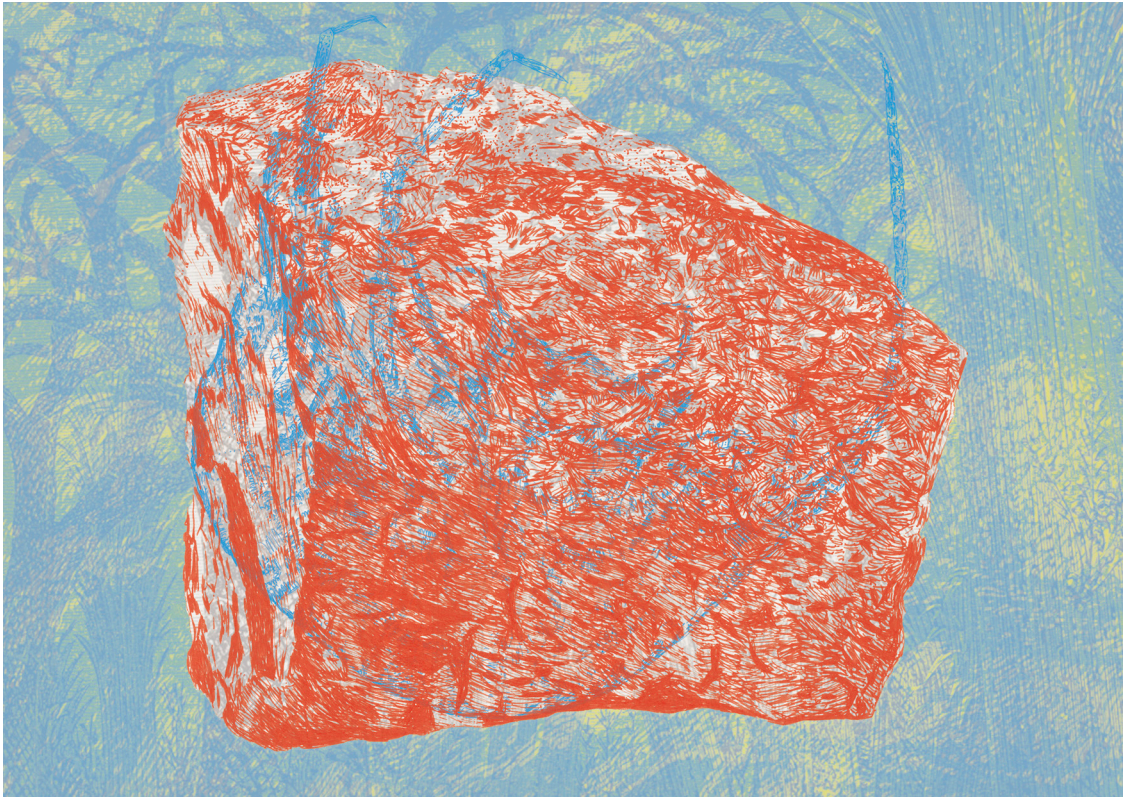
Four pairs of images from the *Postcards from the Underground* (2022) print series are presented here as experiments in translating invertebrate underground worlds. Artist Perdita Phillips and cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis collaborated to create an interdisciplinary ‘walkshop’ event to the coal 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.

Phillips, Perdita and Astrida Neimanis. *Postcards from the Underground*. 2022. Private Collection.

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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.

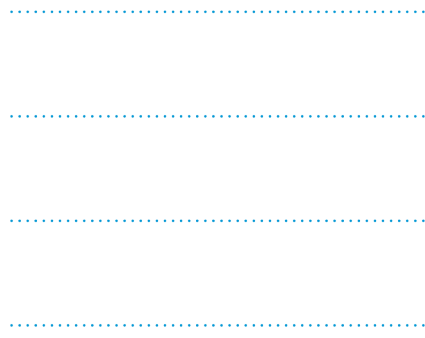


Our flight was precipitated by a changing geological choreography: the break up of Pangaea and Gondwana, the drift north of a progressively thirsty world, the rise of the Antipodes from the belly of the sea. Hot might call us climate refugees. Where there had been rain forests and water in abundance, the Dry soon arrived. We went underground, seeking refuge in the cool, and in the dark. The climate there was pleasing. Without sunlight the temperature remained steady for days, months, and years. Millennia. We didn't mark the seasons by the light, the heat, or the angle of the sun, but by flow through the poles of our mineralized homes. Seasons were turned on and off by rainfall and river flow or by temporal patterns of irrigation. We adjusted to these thermal comforts, and cycles of wet. We've even survived. When our surface home cleaved in two, some of us stayed while other kin drifted. Some of us took up residence in the anchialine systems strung out along the vast Tethyan coastlines. In these refugia, polished by the ebb and flow of underground tides, we remained tied to our kin across space by the pull of a moon we would never see. Like other refugees, we learned to like the geometries of separation. We learned to live without eyes. We learned to love at a distance. We responded to these partings with a fine-scale endemism, and learned the tricks of internal speciation. We are now in place in radically local ways. We have become maps of evolutions written on our mostly spineless forms, in a silent subterranean braille—traces of these kindrups snill legible in the texts of our flesh,



Brevisonabdyrhynella aramurdahensis

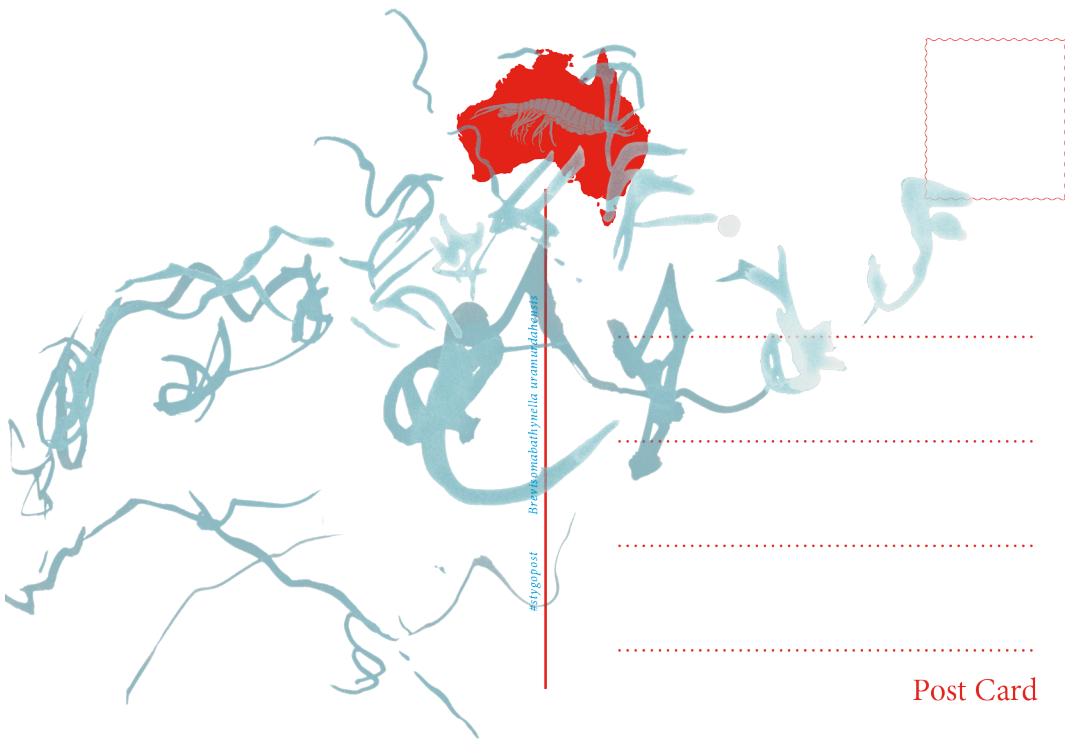
#stygopost



Post Card

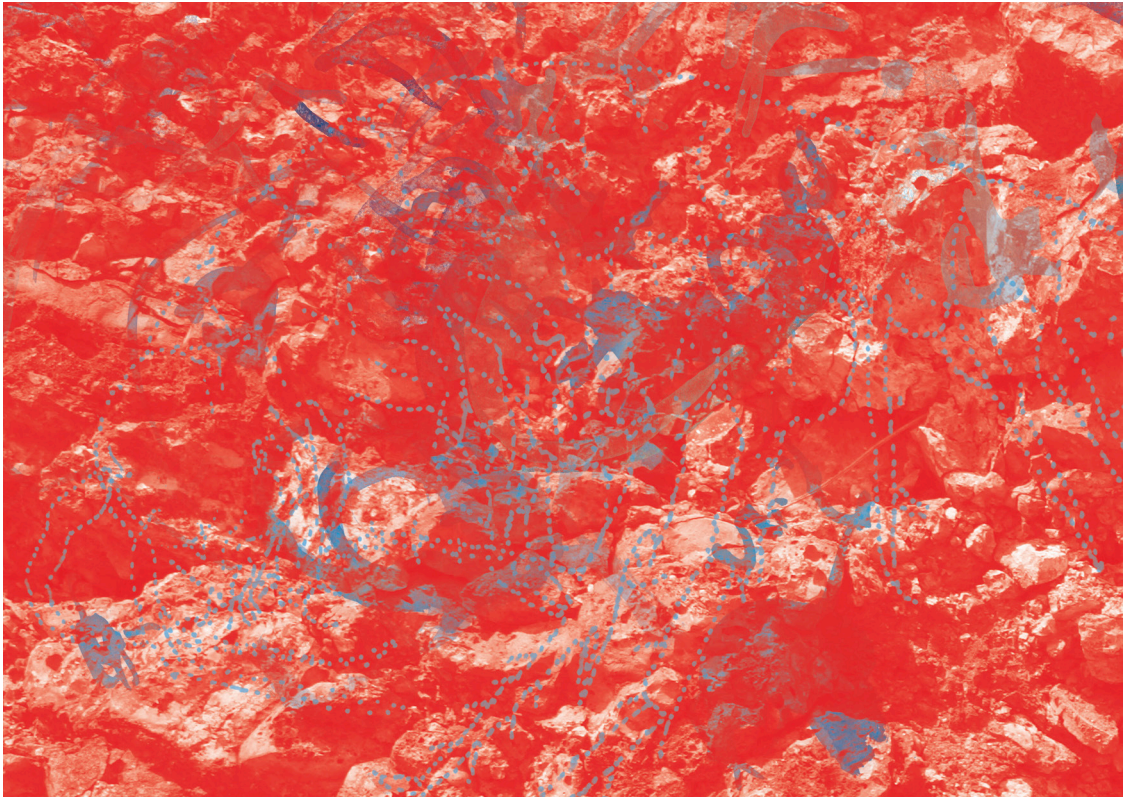
before the weather underground

Figs. 3-4 Postcards from the Underground (© Perdita Phillips and Astrida Neimanis). Limited edition digitally printed postcards 14.8 x 10.5 cm. Stygo fauna/coal fragment and our flight.



Post Card

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