



Wipstandan (Afterword)¹
Jan Bryant

A great (touchy, lovey) friendship for an ancient blue gum in the beautiful garden near my home in Naarm [Melbourne] has been focussing my thinking about plants and trees and water and art. And it was in this time of swelling bird calls and lighter air, repose and discussion with friends and colleagues, of daily respect for this tree's longevity and beauty that I got to know Jahne Pasco-White. Our meeting played a significant part in my feeling the vibrations of the non-human world in my body, and a sense of vitality that makes palpable the resonances in *Ngár-go* [Fitzroy] of the generations of Wurundjeri who lived on these lands.

And then there is climate change...

Atmospheric, oceanic, and seismic activities are entering into subliminal experiences of time and confounding embodied expectations of how the future is likely to flow from the past. (Erev 2019, 836)

Pasco-White's practice today is pitched in response to our shared environmental emergency, confronting the professionally fraught question: *how is one to continue to paint today?* Her incisively designed enquiry around

XXIII painting acts as a trigger for ongoing critical reflections

on some thorny dilemmas about making art. Pointedly, she grapples with the impact of art materials as toxics and waste, and the part played by artists as actors in a system of commercial exchange, tied to the proliferation of commodities.

Pasco-White's response has been to develop an elevating (joyful) poetics, something like the 'eco-poesis' described by Stephanie Erev (2019, 843-47) as the integration of poetics with affect that makes our senses react to the reshaping of *oikos*.² "Climate change is more than a discrete issue demanding political attention and response", Erev (2019, 837) writes, "a changing climate permeates political life as material processes of planetary change reverberate in our bodies, affecting subterranean processes of attention and evoking bodily responses at and below the register of awareness."

Above, I bracketed the term 'joyful' as a way to illuminate its power as a tool of activism. It is one that resists diving into a wholly bleak and disconsolate ocean.³ Crucially, though, the joyfulness that I identify in Pasco-White's artmaking and writing is not a pollyannaish papering-over of darker realities—her personal and cataclysmic description of the micro-plastic deposits in breast milk is testament to this. In an age of awareness for epigenetics, a frightening image is summoned that once

drawn can never be forgotten. She writes to Oslo, her daughter:

I consider that through breastfeeding that I have potentially and exclusively delivered you the most toxic human food available [...] Realising this toxic embodiment has led me to understand that the flows of my body and studio practice embed themselves in future generations of this blue continent's water cycles and lives. (Pasco-White 2020)

In accepting the necessary darker side of Pasco-White's enquiry, joyfulness then becomes a pragmatic mechanism to flip from a loss of hope (resignation), into the kind of energy that ignites action and resistance.

I am foregrounding, as an example of this, Pasco-White's experiments in developing non-invasive, non-toxic materials from household waste for her paintings. Her eco-poiesis places limitations (necessarily) on her paintings' aesthetic possibilities, such as light emitting vibrancy produced from phosphorous-based colours, which some call the "Devil's Element" (see Kathryn Harkup 2019). Instead, the artist extracts colours from "processes of natural dying from olives, crab apples, barks, leaves, grasses, clovers, cleavers, wattle blossom, apple skins, avocado skins and stones, turmeric, paprika, chilli, indigo, mushroom, lichens, carrot onions, cabbages, blackberries, rosemary, as well as staining from Lilly Pilly berries, violet flower and leaves, clovers and mandarin skins dried and ground as pastes. Also earth pigments (ochres), sand, soils and dusts", producing muddy, almost smudgy, moving surfaces, with touches of colour (Pasco-White: 2020). Her paintings won't reach out and grab us greedily with a showy presence. They consist of subtly translucent layers that seem to move and vibrate at the level of the body and in coexistence with the world around them.

Pasco-White's method is a negotiation between our darker thoughts and our promise of hope. It is an acknowledgment of the political world's (death drive-y) inclinations to treat climate change as a phenomenon sitting at a distant point, something over there, a horizon never to be reached. Her paintings are part of an ongoing enquiry to ameliorate the burden humans have placed on the health of the earth.

Endnotes

¹ The title of this homage to Jahnne, *Wipstandan*, is the Old English (500–1100c) word meaning 'withstand' or 'resist'. It is meant to signal our connection (our kinship) to political resistance that reaches back to the earliest moments in the formation of our language. But it is also an acknowledgement of an inevitable darker side when resistance is viewed as an ongoing challenge to power that

stretches back for millennia—we continue our struggles to resist, to withstand, despite their Sisyphus-like madness. The forces of *yfelwillendnes* (OE) [malevolence, malice] that continue to ignore a dying planet, conjures Walter Benjamin's (1992) image of history as a piling up of debris and misdeeds—thwarted class revolutions, colonial invasions, genocides, self-interests, labour exploitation, the alienating effects of capitalism, the corruption of our natural world, and so on... Notably, though, lest we forget that these massive social and political ruptures are clothed in centuries of patriarchy, *yfelwillendnes* is a feminine noun. The tendency is to normalise the misdeeds of patrimony, while the image of the woman is attached to malevolence and malice for her 'havoc-causing' ways.

² Further, Erev (2019, 843) writes: "They are referred to as 'vibrations' to signal their capacity to move bodies—including our bodies—as they travel and transmit energy through them. As they move through our bodies, these energetic waves move us to the rhythms and tempos of the goings-on on the land, in the air, and in the sea."

³ What comes to mind here is the force of the blacker-than-black, rubbish infested Tsunami of 2011, and its aftermath of unsettled, wandering ghosts who have been troubling the living of Tōhoku ever since.

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