Anthropo-morphic Trouble

Goda Palekaitė
& Adrijana Gvozdenović

Anthropomorphic Trouble is an artistic project initiated by Goda Palekaite, joined by Adrijana Gvozdenovic and commissioned by Arts Catalyst. Adopting the lens of the Earth as a historical figure and discursive being, it addresses ecological challenges, deep time and geological formations, revealing the troubled relationship between humans and the Earth. It aims to open the possibility to experience and discuss anthropomorphic troubles, as the artists share their research, stories, artefacts and artworks developed through different localities in 2019-2021. Revealing transitional moments within the history of science and questioning its relationship to the world through museological display, the artists invite you to exercise your gaze and touch for a different knowledge of landscape and time.

Anthropomorphic Trouble was developed in partnership with Delfina Foundation, and presented at Whitechapel Gallery in London, November 2021.

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Goda Palekaitė & Adrijana Gvozdenović


Gigartina confervoides.


PISCES
AQUARIUS
TAURUS
SAGITTARIUS
GEMINI
CANCER
LEO
VIRGO
LIBRA
SCORPIUS
CAPRICORNUS

(pg. 3) Cyanotype of British Algae by Anna Atkins (1843)

(pg. 4 - 5) Celestial map by the Dutch cartographer Frederik de Wit (17th century)

Anthropomorphic Trouble

This project came into its shape as a fossil comes into stone. In the beginning there is death — fossils form when a creature dies and mud covers its skeleton. Then further sediments build up, layer after layer until they turn into rock. Crystals and minerals, such as calcite and pyrite, transform the bones into harder materials. Over millions of years, because seas and continents, stones and mountains are in constant motion, these rocks become exposed and release the fossils. A dead mammoth, stuck and completely covered in the mud, preserved the knowledge of her time and environment. Inspired by mud's endless possibilities of hosting bones, shells and imprints of those who are going to become extinct, we propose to have a closer look at it.

Research trip in London: Horniman Museum and Gardens (2021)

Facts, speculations, fictional stories, dreams and opinions have always been squeezed together into dense sediments of truths. Acknowledging the Earth as a historical character, learning from cosmologies and ecologies, and acting as amateur storytellers, we begin our journey from our trouble, from incomprehensibility, through a landscape of associative thinking. `Anthropomorphic Trouble` is an attempt to simultaneously arouse a variety of ways of knowing about us and Her, from the history of sciences to the deep time, while looking at animals and touching bodies of stones, in order to find a tool to drill through the sediments and reach the core of the Earth.

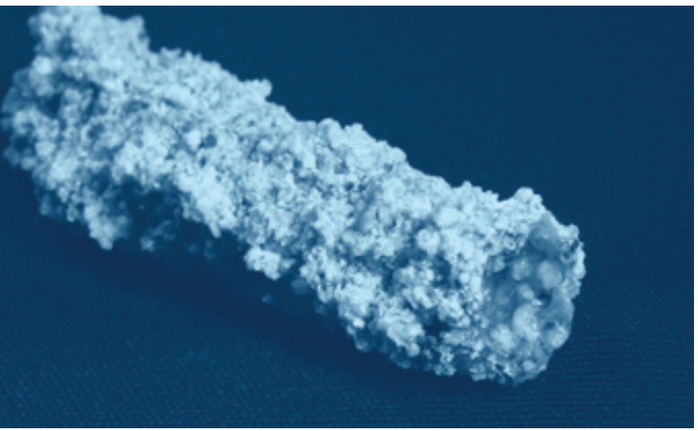
Since the beginning of writing in the Sumerian civilization, all cosmological systems throughout the world have contemplated the agency of Earth. From Mesopotamian personification of Ki to Incan Pachamama, to Greek Gaia, the narratives related to Her have usually endowed the planet with human, often female features, behaviours and occurrences; including family tree, romantic relationships, personality, and other humanistic descriptions. Even the discourse which explains the condition of the Earth to us today, through the term `anthropocene` — an age in which human impact has come to equal or even surpass the natural processes of Earth — has a human face. Yet, we are in an exponential trouble — anthropomorphic, anthropocentric, anthropophilic predicament. One thing we can do is to rethink what humans and non-humans, as well as the political and historical relationship between them, might be, working with localities and correlations, learning through what is near.

However terrifying this condition might sound to some of us, historians of the Earth and our teachers would claim that it is neither new nor surprising. Tracing from the 18th century onwards, there have been scientists, philosophers, writers, and political figures warning us about the rapidly changing conditions of the environment. However, these warnings were helpless and the mechanisms of the growing capitalism. Global trade, displacement of humans, animals and plants, and military powers continued increasing exploitations of the planet. The systematically implemented dualism between nature and culture, human and animal, I and it, resulted in the paradigm prevailing today. French historians Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, in their book `The Shock of the Anthropocene` (2016), insist on the unification of intellectual capacities by scientists, historians, political figures, artists and indigenous peoples, in order to scrutinize the patterns which made us arrive at this contemporary condition, and find a way out. With this project we propose that not only humans have knowledge, memory and ability to predict, but also stones, fossils, living and extinct species, and, of course, the weather. The list of biographies of what we consider our teachers concludes this publication.

Research trip in Dorset: Cretaceous cliffs (2021)

It was indeed crucial for us to consult Michel Serres' untimely writings, The Parasite (1980) and The Natural Contract (1992). These texts, which today seem like containers of predictions, are older than the term anthropocene. There we noted that the French language uses the same word le temps for the time that passes and the weather outside, as do other languages; Italian, Serbo-Croatian and more. But then we noticed that, for example, in Lithuanian time and weather are two completely distinct concepts, yet weather and air are contained in the same word, which makes weather breathable instead of durable in Lithuania. This helped us to remember that there is language in between us and Her, which always shapes the ways of knowing.

We decided to merge the discursive knowing with processual or experiential knowing about the weather, time and air. Therefore we consulted our teacher Anna Atkins (1799-1871), an English botanist, who worked with the cyanotype technique to collect and archive the British algae, accidentally becoming the author of the first book of photography. Cyanotype is a printing process that produces cyan blue prints. Placing specimens of ferns, algae and other plants on the coated



Fulgurite or fossilized lightning: sand turned into stone

surface of paper, then exposing it to the sun and washing with water, the silhouette traces of their shadows appear. Borrowing her technique, we recorded the weather on the sheets of cotton. It also guided us when composing this publication — the blue algae colour images function as references, while the full colour images are photographs we took during the research.

Locality and Correlations were important measurements of this project. We worked where we found ourselves and followed those that we encountered. Because if She is round, you can descend towards Her core from any point on the surface. The research that started in our heads situated in Brussels, later travelled to places like the Jurassic coastline and Abbotsbury Swannery in Dorset, Arts Catalyst office in Sheffield, Nikola Tesla Museum in Belgrade, Delfina Foundation residency and Whitechapel Gallery in London, various museums of natural history, zoos and aquariums throughout Europe, mammoth grave in rural Serbia, and Montenegrin mountains. Ethnographic fieldwork methodology was definitely an influence but equally so were associative relations between what is here and now. We threw ourselves into certain time, space and conditions, and learned from there. We ate vigorously, we did not refuse. We allowed research to define itself and to select for us. Its intensity, its velocity was the material for thought, for text, for film, for conversation. Following Bruno Latour, there exists only local and temporal views since no one sees the Earth globally and no one comprehends a system from Nowhere.

Perhaps the most important locality was the Dorset region in the southern coast of England, since that was where our thinking started. 200 million years ago this territory had supported diverse lifeforms. The cliffs in the region date from the late Triassic to early Jurassic periods. Its topography stores evidence of millions of

years of evolution — almost a continuous sequence of rock formations spanning the entire Mesozoic Era, in which the top of the food chain was dominated by what is now called Dinosauria. This is where our teacher Mary Anning (1799-1847) lived and worked, in a village called Lyme Regis. She was 12 when she uncovered the first-ever dinosaur skeleton, followed by numerous others.

For the longest time, we imagined travelling to Dorset and touching different stones there, not in a museum but in a landscape, spending time with the stones. We thought of the landscape as a historical site and tried to train our gaze to observe time in space. Sometimes we can experience this in a city that we are truly familiar with. We can see diverse urban and social strata that are explicit there; historical gothic, baroque and classicist architecture next to Soviet modernism and anonymous glass-metal capitalism, advertisements, multilayered roads, and so on. If we have a trained eye we see the time layered in the streets, like wrinkles on an old person's face. If we knew something about landscape, we could see it in a similar way. But this comes with the decision of what we want to know, how to learn and how to unlearn.

Together with Lygia Clark's Air and Stone (1966), we touched the stone — we were breathing with it, in and out, the stone that represents the process of being brought to life. To experience the movement in the rock is to understand materials, not as solid, but in constant transformation. We exercised reading, listening and observation in parallel. We wanted to describe the history of the stone which meant to tell its stories, as we learned from Tim Ingold in Materials against Materiality (2007). We hoped that this way, our immersed bodies, together with our discursive minds, could acknowledge their relational existence.

What if there is no conflict in understanding science as magic? What if spirituality is what guides scientific thinking and the other way around? Then our beliefs and most intimate experiences should be regarded as equally important creators of knowledge. The most magical destructive force that manifests itself in a dramatic effect of lightning is what can revive the dead. What we mentioned above as touch can be described also as an interaction of the electric fields on the atomic scale. Early scientists that worked with electricity, like our teacher Nikola Tesla (1856-1943), were conceived as magicians. Today science proposes what philosophies proposed long ago — that our physical environment is not really physical because the physical structure of all beings and things, on their subatomic level it is not matter, but energy.

In scientific museums and museums of natural history we recognised something else besides knowledge. We have felt what we might have already known before. To be in the museum was similar to what one often experiences at the zoo; suspension, anxiety and even horror. It was this incomprehensible abyss between the human and the other — taxidermy animal, bones, rocks — something that once was alive and was captured, tortured and murdered in the display of a museum, in a wooden frame, behind a glass. Besides being brutally extracted and estranged from their environments, most of the specimens in the museums have been obtained through dispossession. Even further, most of them are gendered — the animal taxidermies we see in these museum are almost always of male specimens.

Trying to capture the problem of non-human as the other, we consulted John Berger, especially his seminal essay Why Look at Animals (1977). The encounter between animal and human gaze is grounded in the impossibility to understand each other, in the

recognition of yourself through the other, and when not in fear, then in dominance. The animal can be tamed, captured, killed and eaten, but cannot be understood. It is possible that in the development of language, the first metaphor was to describe human relationship with animals, just like the first paintings were paintings of animals. Their silence, the lack of common language, guarantees their distance and their exclusion. Or, as in many cultures, it is human who lacks the capacity to speak with animals and hence there appear exceptional beings like, for example, Orpheus who could talk with animals in their own

Research trip in Dorset: Triasic rock as a path (2021)

language. We decided to film our encounters with dead and alive animals and plants as a mode of contemplation, where the camera functions like a mirror of the gaze that creates an abyss of non-comprehension. Human incapacity to approach their environment forthrightly and, instead, tendency to experience reality through systems of signs, such as language, is another trouble that we wanted to explore by writing nine semi-fictional stories.

Where there is horror there is some humour as well, just like the horror movies with animals are traditionally absurd, artificial, exaggerated (Jaws, Jurassic Park, The Birds) — they are playful. The logic proposed in Anthropomorphic Trouble is inspired by one more of our teachers, Lady Margaret Lucas Cavendish (1623-1673). Now known as a famous writer and public figure of Baroque England, she was self-educated through listening to conversations and gossip among writers, natural philosophers and other intellectuals of her day. It inspired her to write freely, wildly connecting the natural sciences of the 17th century with philosophy, speculative reasoning and fantasy, without complying to any rules, not even grammar. Beyond the hierarchy led by anthropos, her characters are half-human, half-animal creatures, the main protagonists are women, and life is not constrained in one world.

Anthropomorphic Trouble wants to tackle the complexity of the entanglements between the humans and the Earth. Without solving the trouble, by importing cosmologies, technologies and practices from other times, it searches for the associative joints between different modes of knowing. The perception of time is in motion — it transforms through encounters with texts, stones, animals and humans. In this way, Anthropomorphic Trouble proposes its own learning structure and involvement with the environment that accounts not only for historical, scientific and cultural, but also personal experiences.

Goda Palekaitė & Adrijana Gvozdenović

(pg. 16 - 17) Research trip in Dorset: Cretaceous cliffs (2021)

(pg. 18 - 19) Research trip in London: The Crystal Palace Park (2021)

(pg. 20) Sheffield in the 1960's by anonymous photographer

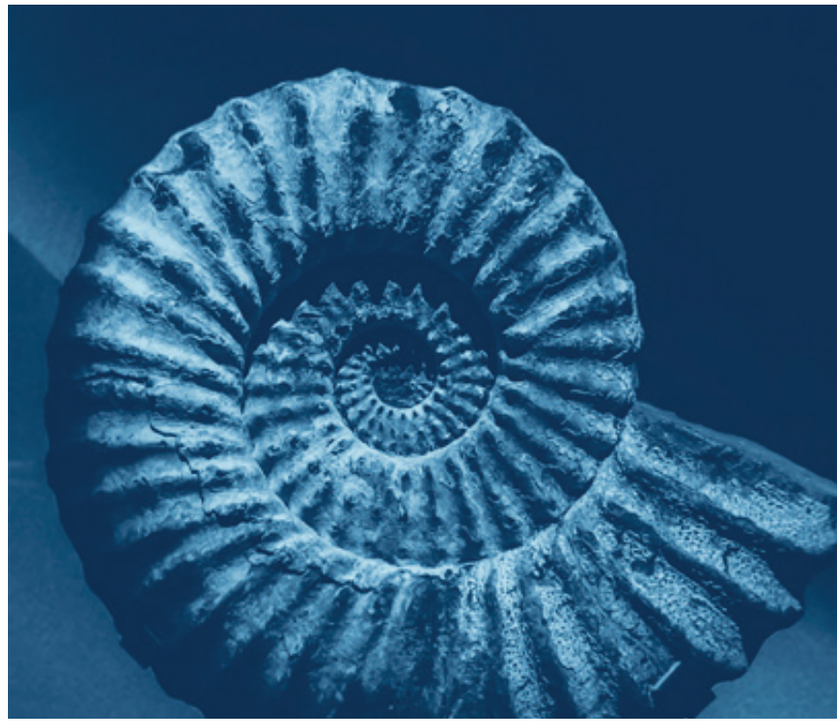
(pg. 21) Power plant near Mammoth park in Kostolac (2021)

Ammonite (409-66 million years BP[1]) is an extinct mollusc species, today the most commonly found fossil on the Jurassic coast in Lyme Regis, south England. These spiral-shelled animals dominated the marine environment and became extinct with dinosaurs. Throughout history, the mysterious origin of ammonite fossils had various explanations, for example, they were believed to be snakes turned into stone by St. Hilda. To prove this hypothesis, snake heads were carved into the fossils. Today palaeontologists speculate that contemporary nautilus could be the descendant of the ammonite. Nautilus was the first to make his way into popular culture — most famously as an inspiration source for a fictional submarine in Jules Vernes' 19th century novels Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea and The Mysterious Island. Recently, ammonite received international recognition in the 2020 romantic film Ammonite starring Kate Winslet.

Nautilus

1 Before Present (BP) years, or 'years before present' is a time scale used mainly in archaeology, geology, and other scientific disciplines.

Mary Anning (1799–1847) was a self-taught palaeontologist, geologist, anatomist and scientific illustrator from Lyme Regis, Dorset. She was the first person to unearth an intact skeleton of a dinosaur, Ichthyosaurus, after which she continued her fossil discoveries on the Jurassic Coast, including Plesiosaurus, Hybodus and Pterosaurus. Being a woman from an impoverished family, marginalised by her dialect and adherence to the protestant dissenter faith, she could not pursue education after elementary school. Her findings were widely studied and foundational for the scientific discourse but her name



Ammonite

was neglected until recently. In 2010 Anning was recognised by the Royal Society as one of the most influential scientists in British history.

Dinosaurs of the Crystal Palace Park (1854) are the first ever made life-size sculptures representing dinosaurs, which were accurately based on the scientific knowledge of the 19th century. Accompanying the Great Expo, they were placed next to the famous Crystal Palace building in London, in their natural habitat. Now they are famous for scientific inaccuracy and cute looks. They have determined the whole genre of life-size dinosaur models (e.g., moving T-Rex), that are now popular in scientific museums worldwide.

Mute Swans (13.000 BP — still around) are members of the waterflow family Anatidae. Despite the name, they are not at all mute as they snort, hiss and make various grunting sounds reminiscent of those of pigs. They are usually intensely territorial, therefore it is unusual to see many couples in proximity to each other. The closeness of the nests can lead to family problems as newly hatched cygnets often become attached to the wrong parent bird. Yet, Abbotsbury Swannery in

Anatomical drawing of Plesiosaurus by Mary Anning (1823)

Research trip in Dorset: Abbotsbury Swannery (2021)

Dorset hosts the world's largest nesting Mute Swans colony, numbering over 600 individuals and 120 couples. Although they are believed to have always lived in the area, most of the British swan population is derived from semidomesticated stock since the Benedictine monks of Abbotsbury started farming them for food in the 11th century.

Anna (Children) Atkins (1799-1871) was an English botanist, now also known as the first woman photographer. As her father was a chemist, mineralogist and zoologist, she received an unusual scientific education for a woman in her time. She became a member of

London Botanical Society in 1841. Also, she married a London West India merchant, who later became sheriff of Kent. Moving within influential circles of that time, she was directly learning about the new scientific inventions. In that time, photography was developing close to science, as it was considered to be a more objective annotation and representation of the living world than hand drawing. She pursued her interests in botany by collecting dried plants, which she archived through photogram techniques. Today, her self-published installments of photograms `Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions` (first published in 1843) are artistically admired and considered to be the first photobook.

Research trip in Belgrade: Nikola Tesla Museum (2021)

`Nikola Tesla` (1856-1943) was an electrical engineer and futurist, who lived in the United States, where he was known for his inventions. He had an eidetic memory and creative abilities (that he credited to his mother's genetics and influence). Tesla was noted for his showmanship at public lectures and scientific demonstrations he would make to impress celebrities and wealthy patrons. Throughout the 1890's, Tesla pursued his ideas for wireless lighting and worldwide wireless electric power distribution in his high voltage, high-frequency power experiments in New York and Colorado Springs. The mysteries relating to his personal life and the controversial public statements are not less spectacular than his scientific predictions and experiments. He could memorise complete books, spoke eight languages, and was able to develop a special love for pigeons — "as a man can love a woman", which he claimed was mutual.

Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions, by Anna Atkins (1843)

`Mammoth Vika` (1.000.000-400.000 BP) was living in the `Middle Pleistocene` era. Her ancestors originally came from Africa, inhabiting the European continent in search of food. What we know today about her kind and the time she lived in, we learnt from her skeleton that was found near an open mine area of Drmno, in northeastern Serbia. She was 60 years old, 4.5m high, and five meters long, weighing 10 tons. Posthumously, she was named Vika, not after a modern pagan religion (Wicca) but after Viminacium — today an archaeological park where once stood the provincial capital and military camp of the Roman province of Moesia (today's Serbia) — as she was found in close by. Her skeleton was

uncovered in 2009, in its entirety and in an anatomical position, as she was most probably stuck in the sand and mud on the shore where there used to be the last lakes of the drying Pannonian Sea.

Research trip to Mammoth Park in Kostolac (2021)

`Cyanobacteria` (3.5 billion years BP — still around) is responsible for the origin of Earth's Oxygen Atmosphere and therefore the origin of life on Earth. Famously, they learnt how to make food by photosynthesis, using chlorophyll; they absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and use the energy from the sun to build it into complex energy containing sugars, while releasing oxygen. The oldest fossils from colonies of `cyanobacteria` are found in a set of rocks in Greenland, forming layered structures called stromatolites. Stromatolites appear to be the ultimate `living fossils`, life forms that have survived for 3.5 billion years with virtually no modifications of their form or mode of surviving.

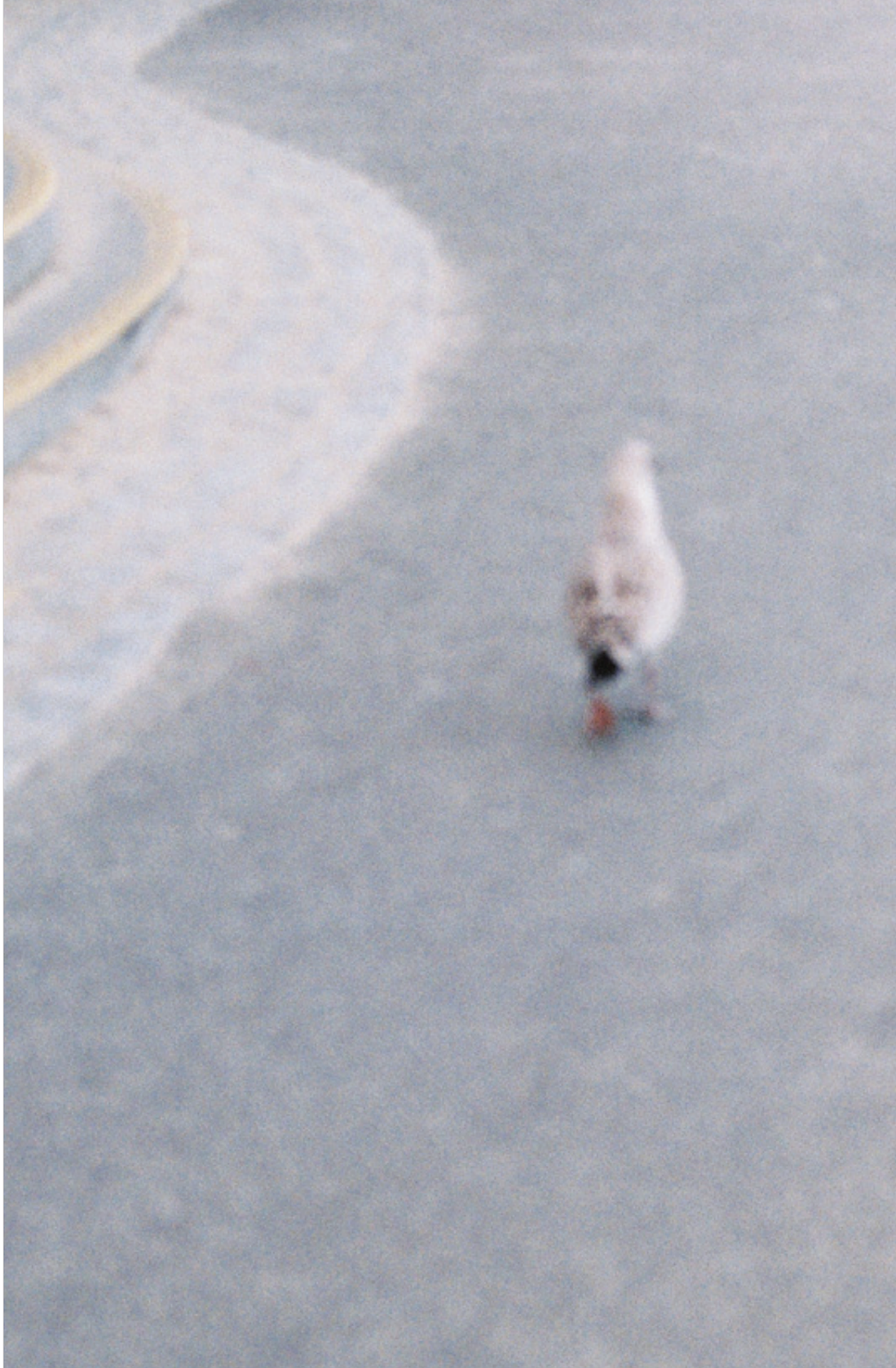
`Horseshoe Crab` (480 million years BP — still around) is not a crab. In the genetical classification she has a group of her own, which is related to scorpions and spiders. She lives in shallow coastal waters on soft, muddy bottoms and comes to the beach to lay eggs, like a turtle. `Horseshoe Crab` has been around since the dinosaur times, therefore, she is considered a living fossil. There are only four species throughout the world: three around Asia and one at the coast of Florida. Her blood is blue, of a milky kind, and has remarkable qualities for medical improvements for humans. It contains an enzyme which is efficient in testing meningitis, detecting purity of medicaments, and so on. Today, she is being hunted for blood and drained in labs for a variety of experiments (you hardly hear animal rights activists talking against this, perhaps because a white mouse is cuter to a human eye than this strange animal). `Horseshoe Crab` also has nine eyes on the shell and on the tail.

Horseshoe crab

Lady Margaret Lucas Cavendish (1623-1673), the Duchess of Newcastle, English baroque writer, natural philosopher and public figure. Having had no formal education (predetermined by her gender), Margaret still had a privileged status in the society by being married to a wealthy duke. Their house was a common place for thinkers, writers and scientists, and in this way Cavendish educated herself — by listening to the discussions, opinions, gossip — and she started to write. Her novel The Blazing World (1666) is now often considered the first written work of science fiction. Her work is doubtlessly avant-garde and visionary: in rather hard to read texts, she wildly connects natural philosophy, sciences, speculative reasoning and fantasy, without any rules, not even grammar. With excessive language she addresses issues that today are seen as feminist and posthumanist ideas. Her drama The Convent of Pleasure (1688) pictures a group of unmarried women who choose to avoid the pains and displeasures of the male-dominated world and create their own community or "convent". Cavendish was one of the first women writers to sign her works with her real name.

Research trip in Dorset: Abbotsbury Swannery (2021)

Research trip in London: The Crystal Palace Park (2021)



Research trip in Dorset: Lyme Regis (2021)

Goda Palekaitė (Lithuania) is an artist working in the intersection of contemporary art, performance, artistic research, literature, and anthropology. Her practice evolves around projects exploring the politics of historical narratives, the agency of dreams and imagination, and social conditions of creativity. Her recent solo shows were opened at Kunsthal Gent in Ghent and Editorial in Vilnius ("The Strongest Muscle in the Human Body is the Tongue" 2021), Centre Tour à Plomb in Brussels ("Architecture of Heaven" 2020), Konstepidemin in Gothenburg ("Liminal Minds" 2019) and RawArt Gallery in Tel Aviv ("Legal Implications of a Dream" 2018). In the last years, her performances and installations have been presented at BOZAR Brussels, The Biennale Architettura 2018 in Venice, Georg Kargl Fine Arts in Vienna, CAC Vilnius, The Institute of Things to Come in Turin, Vilnius international theatre festival "Sirenos", among others. In 2019 Palekaitė received The Golden Stage Cross and the Young Artist's Prize from the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture. In 2020 she published her first book of fiction "Schismatics" (LAPAS books) and started an artistic Ph.D. position at Hasselt University. Goda is based in Brussels.
www.palekaite.space

Adrijana Gvozdenović (Montenegro) is an artist interested in artists' motivation and ways of resisting (self) institutionalised structures. Her work often develops through collaborations with other artists and researchers. With her research project Archiving Artistic Anxieties, Adrijana has been an associate researcher at a.pass (advanced performance and scenography studies in Brussels) and at Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. The project explored formats of publicness as research methods resulting in publications, workshops and performances. Some of them were presented and performed within the "FairShare: self-publishing as an artistic practice" (CIAP Hasselt 2019), "The Hub - Between the iliac crest & the pubic bone" (GMK Zagreb 2019) and "victories over the suns" (Brussels 2019). More recently she presented her work for the exhibition "This situation has developed over a long time" (ŠKUC gallery, Ljubljana 2021) and co-curated the block "Not in the mood" for the postgraduate program of a.pass (2021).
www.gadi.me

Goda and Adrijana met in 2018 while participating in the program of a.pass in Brussels. In this collective research environment, they had a deep insight into each other's practices, which created a bond based on the similar ways of approaching knowledge production through arts.

Arts Catalyst (since 1993) is a Sheffield-based contemporary arts organisation, known for commissioning artists' projects and research at the intersections of art, science and technology. It programmes exhibitions, events, residencies, performances and publications, often working in collaboration with national and international partner organisations from the fields of art, health, ecology and economics. Its public programme focuses on ambitious new projects that critically engage with our changing world and aims to create space for conversation, debate and fresh thinking.
www.artscatalyst.org

Anthropomorphic Trouble project was commissioned by Arts Catalyst, produced by Schizma and developed in collaboration with Delfina Foundation and Whitechapel Gallery. It was presented in November 2021 at Whitechapel Gallery in a form of video, performance and this publication.

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