

// mapping fragments towards an impossible whole
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To map an impossible origin point, one might start with a fragment.

The writing that follows is one little piece of many shattered halves.

I always find myself writing in an emergency. In persistent times of social and political upheaval. Hortense Spillers notes we are already up into our necks in crises.¹

So we make little selves from shattered fragments.²

Within a fragment, one cannot attempt to map anything whole. But I suppose that is the point. We need not aspire towards an arbitrary whole to begin with.

Fragments that tend to a series of crises appear in this group exhibition in different forms.

Precarious Joy (2021), a group exhibition of nine multidisciplinary artists/artist groups based out of what is currently called Toronto, offers a disjointed map of little fragments at the close of a six-year (2015-2021) literary and arts publication run of Looseleaf Magazine by Project 40 Collective. From glaze sculpture, ropes of words, mark making on paper, digital media, weaving, mending and photogrammetry — the little fragments are never still.

Housed in Hearth Garage, the three white walls are not the white wall model of an institutional museum but a garage space in response to the enclosure of a city increasingly predatory to its living peoples, with less public space to gather in an already fragmented and uneven sea of tall glass condos, and empty words pitting people against one another.

Toni Morrison writes that sometimes you do not survive whole.³ The different artistic practices in this exhibition tell us this too. Creation in parts and splinters. What are we left with? Fragments in the city. Fragments at Hearth.

Fragments within the precarious. Fragments of the precarious. Fragments within the joy. Fragments of joy.

Yet I am reminded that one can never be too still within any range of particular feelings. Not in precarity. Nor in joy. Neither too long. Neither too still.

Through the group exhibition, how can we weave together this little life of ours?

How do we seekers of spatial justice respond?

There are many blood poems yet to come.

¹Critical Theory in Times of Crisis by Hortense Spillers (2020).

²It does not escape me that we are writing, making and exhibiting from the geography of the North Atlantic [Toronto] where many of us live unevenly privileged and politically detached lives. Hence, we live quite small lives within a much bigger world. The struggle is in coming together.

³Toni Morrison on Trauma, Survival and Finding Meaning (2001).

The exhibition gestures out of stillness. In the coming wars, we cannot be still forever. Not when the land beneath us moves. We will have fragments to make. We will have to work with those fragments in the end. With joy in the end, even if death does us apart.

To write of a precarious joy is an impossibility. Both precarity and joy are lived material conditions. At times “I think I want to scream too” and at other times I want to “recover moments of force”. There is a consistent period of waiting required in this little world.

Paper cuts through which to write ourselves anew - towards deeper shades of Earth.

Within our thoughts of precarity and joy, I think of moments where we disappear. There is no perfection to find here. Maybe we need to stop looking. I wonder what I will wear to my funeral? How will I labour to be remembered (if at all)?

Precarious / Joy as they tumble over and around each other.⁴

We will be required to move after time in stillness, unravelling to weave new threads.

We cannot run forever. We will need a new map. A new kind of breath.

A kind of ghost geography that we might not have seen before. Follow the lead of the living. Tangerine. Apple. Daisy. Mushroom.

The struggle for joy is a long one in this lifetime. But by these nine works I am told that we will live again. In fragments but even still; continue.

⁴ Jasmine Gui (2021).