

SMARGINATURA {a portfolio}

Kasia Tórz

a documentation of a research at a.pass (September 2019 – December 2020)



Flemish wolf. "Metro" newspaper cutting, September/October 2019

“She used the term: *dissolving boundaries*. It was on that occasion that she resorted to it for the first time; she struggled to elucidate the meaning, she wanted me to understand what the dissolution of boundaries meant and how much it frightened her. She was still holding my hand tight, breathing hard. She said that the outlines of things and people were delicate, that they broke like cotton thread. She whispered that for her it had always been that way, an object lost its edges and poured into another, into a solution of heterogeneous materials, a merging and mixing.

She exclaimed that she had always had to struggle to believe that life had firm boundaries, for she had known since she was a child that it was not like that — *it was absolutely not like that* — and so she couldn’t trust in their resistance to being banged and bumped.”

{Elena Ferrante, *The Story of the Lost Child*}

1.

This document is a written surface that retraces the trajectory of my research at a pass. It's an unfinished and incomplete archive of words, pictures, and moving images that report *smarginatura* (en. dissolving boundaries) – a state described by Elena Ferrante in her Neapolitan Novels (*My Brilliant Friend*, *The Story of a New Name*, *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, *The Story of the Lost Child*). Lila Cerullo, one of the novel's main characters, experiences this *smarginatura* throughout her life. It is when she sees reality in episodes of breaking, losing contours, and stability. This perceptual distortion is not a illusion; rather it is the revelation of a different layer of matter, stitched in a way that connects different parts.

My research began with the question of how we are touched by and through the live act – the act of seeing. What goes through the porous surface of our skin? What kinds of experiences expand our sensitivity? When do we break upon the pressure of impulses, when do we freeze, and when do we burn? What are the politics of seeing that we adapt to and how to alter them?

In this context, I wanted to acknowledge the transformational potential of dissolving boundaries and recognize the trajectory of this movement, piece by piece, almost in slow motion. This process may take different shapes and have both political, aesthetical and existential dimensions, which depend on the individual dispositions of the viewer.

During the time of my research I archived a lot of images. I also include in this pictorial storage bits of text that hold equal weight with the images. Text in an unite of image, image is a story waiting for a reader.

Writing became a practice of composing a fluid representation of what happened to be seen, and because of that it has been engraved in my memory. This was a way to stay in conversation with myself, to cultivate – by daily journaling – a sense of conscious presence amongst things, people and agencies of different dynamics. Now, as I report my research, I also talk to others.

SEPTEMBER 2019

#1

It is going to be a constellation.

The tension between what is inside and what is outside.

Smarginatura describes a state of patency, permeability. It is a quality related to the movement of *going through*, of opening those affective slots where our bodies are interconnected with all the elements of a landscape and open for transformation.

In my application to a.pass I declared:

“One of the goals of my research is to open up new ways of producing knowledge by reflecting on what we see. I want to expand my practice of writing, and figure out how the affective potential of the experience of looking can be transformed into a textual and text-derived work.”

Keywords: MEMBRANE, RESONANCE, SHIVERING, TREMBLING, CONTOUR, MARGINS, EXHAUSTION, PERMEABILITY, MELTING, INTROSPECTION.

#2



A collection, 5 September 2019, a.pass, Brussels

Ingredients: a bottle of still water, a silky black blindfold, a golden notebook, a dried dragonfly framed in glass, an apple, *The Second Body* by Daisy Hildyard, *Austerlitz* by W.G. Sebald, a lipstick, a lip gloss, a pen, a fluorescent highlighter, a perforated sheet of paper, a personal computer, a scotch with racoon motif, a plastic hair pin with horn-shaped appearance, a little plastic box with white confetti, a plastic figurine from an 'Kinder Surprise Egg' representing a monkey with a tiny baby.

OCTOBER 2019

#1 Biennale in Istanbul. I come across this video *O Peixe / The fish* by Jonathas de Andrade.

“Borrowing from storytelling, folklore, ethnography and anthropology, Jonathas de Andrade explores issues surrounding the colonial legacies of Latin America. Its current brutalities and what the artist calls its ‘urgencies and discomforts.’ *O Peixe / The fish* was made with a group of fishermen from Piaçabuçu and Coruripe in Brazil. We see them engaging in a ritual involving catching the fish, then tenderly holding their prey to their chest until they stop breathing. Commenting on human and natural relations, and an entanglement between expressions of care and suffocation. De Andrade also nods to exclusionary systems of narration and documentation that are imbricated in colonialist and ethnographic enterprises”.



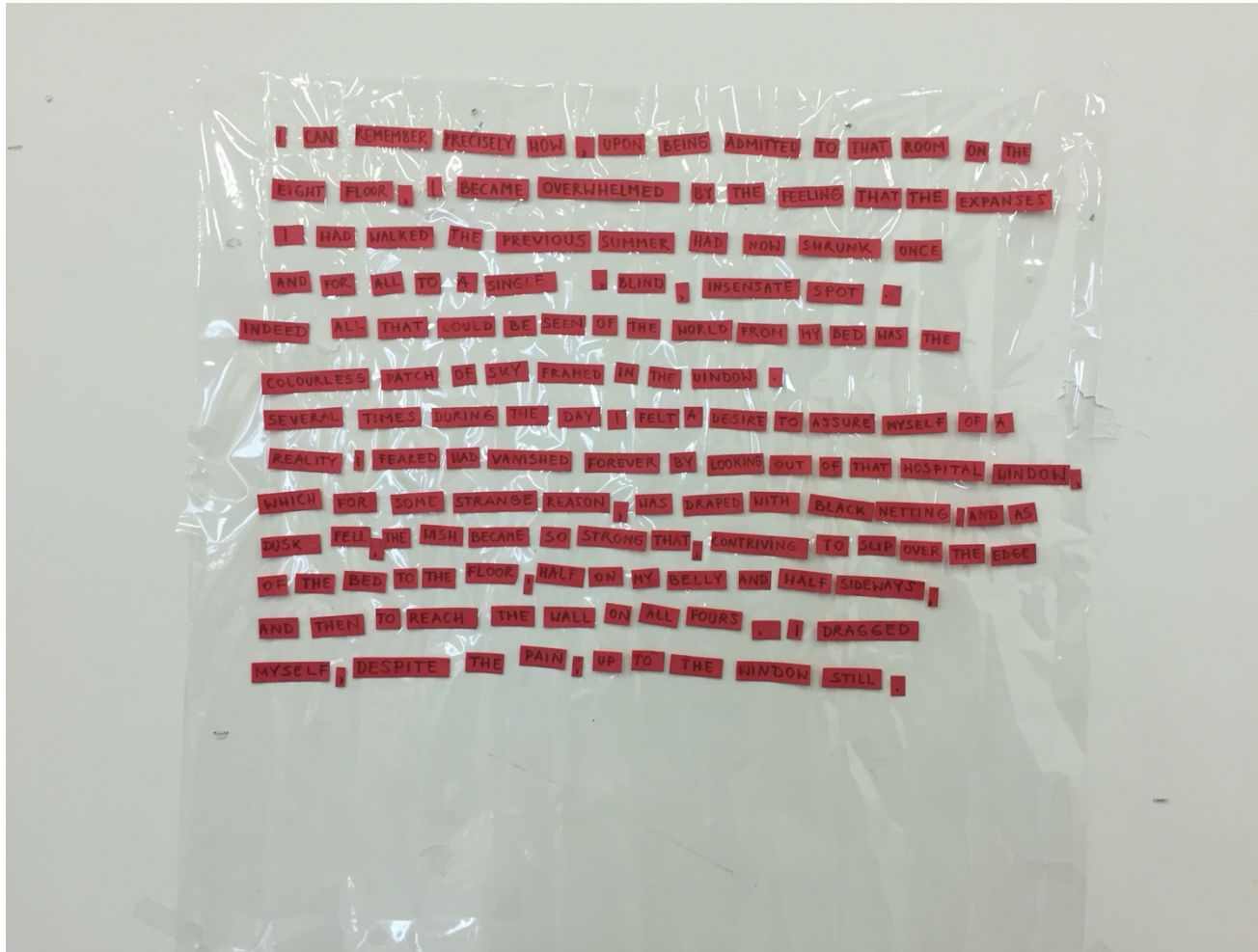
O Peixe / The fish by Jonathas de Andrade, 2016, 23 min

<https://vimeo.com/213283861>

#2

Bringing alive a quote from the writer W. G. Sebald. Years after reading *The Rings of Saturn*, this fragment hung above me and offered a space to hold to.

I want to give that text a body that is alive. I cut out the words, each one on a separate piece of paper. They are attached to a transparent foil and exposed to any external life that might affect them. I use two coloured pens. One serves to write, the other makes the words erased.



A fragment from W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, paper and transparent foil, September 2019

NOVEMBER 2019

In the framework of my research into the notion of *smarginatura*, I signed up for a workshop called FULL DROP, run by a Berlin-based Icelandic choreographer Margrét Sara Guðjónsdóttir.

This is a short description of what I might expect:

“It focuses on deep myofascial release through visualization meditation and verbal dialoguing aiming to guide participants towards a so-called *Full Drop* into the body. Developing heightened inner listening and awareness of the multiple autonomous systems and rhythms of the body and how to be able to be guided and moved by them and experience the various altered physical states that accommodate this type of listening. By fully dropping into the body and entering a meditative space where time ceases to exist, conditions have been created to release self-manipulation and control and allow active intentions to empty out. Through new subjective sensorial experiences unravelling, what was formerly unconscious becomes conscious, increasing awareness of the current as well as immanent inner states of each person. While the practice itself is gentle, the decision to let go of control and enter into the unknown, not yet discovered and subconscious parts of yourself is profound.”

A day before the workshop I ask Margrét Sara for a private session to open up my body and get the most of these two days. Her method, through manual therapy “focuses on releasing emotion and physical blockages, increasing sensorial capacity and intimacy with oneself in order to develop greater personal autonomy. The sessions are very suitable and effective for any type of chronic or recent injuries, emotional collapses, overworked tired bodies that need rest and revitalization, improvement of sleep and of energy flow and balancing of inner systems”.

During the session, I lie on a massage table. My body is covered with a blanket. My eyes are closed. The sense of time quickly disappears, it doesn't matter anymore. I see colours – blue and red. It seems that my body changes shape, relaxes in such a way that its outline becomes arbitrary, very thin. Its form reveals itself as something utterly accidental. My body extracts its layers, as if a solid block of wood became a stack of slim sheets, detaching layer by layer. It is not a hallucination. My body is softening, its boundaries become loose. When Margrét Sara lifts my arm, I'm convinced that it could reach the end of the street with no problems. Her presence is so discreet that at certain moments I forget that she is there. I'm focused on the relation with my skin, muscles, tissues. She is assisting. After the session, I feel different. I start speculating upon my 'real body.' 'Real body' means: the body I am in touch with, that I am in direct contact with.

A morning Full drop meditation takes place in a horizontal position. All participants are advised to get blankets, warm jumpers and hats. During the practice, the rhythm of our bodies gradually slows down and so does our bodies' temperature. At the beginning, I can't focus. The group is quite numerous. Maybe the introduction round was too long and loaded with information. I'm a bit overwhelmed by the content and I feel highly sensitive to noise, slamming doors. Put simply – being present to the fullness of the context.

The aim of this meditation is not wanting too much. Or barely anything. I can neither expect, nor assume that something particular is going to happen. It is about letting go. Following what pulls me, opening unknown doors. The space is held by music and we follow the framework instructions: the meditation focuses on the bones and their ability *to butter* – not to really melt down but to change weight, gravity, to untangle the skeleton as a given structure.

Before the meditation starts the model of a skeleton is presented, almost as an evidence of its existence. During almost two hours of meditation I experience moments of intensity where my boundaries dissolve.

This is something I want, isn't it?

Bones as a building material that connects me to my ancestors. Bones as something that I share with animals, bones as a white and greyish powder that we all turn into.



A skeleton, Berlin, November 2019

Death is very present in my meditation. Persistent thinking about how we are connected bodily, how flexible and fluid the solidness of bones can be. It is very pleasurable to imagine a *buttering effect*. This does not make me anxious, but rather triggers a kind of calm recognition. For example, a picture emerges after the meditation: a part of my body transformed into a lake-waterfall.

Suddenly I see a street full of people with transparent bodies. I can see their vital organs. It is stunning. Then I think about those who don't have real bodies, who are bodily destitute. I feel pain in my back. At some point I have to turn to my side.

Pain can be gravitational or it can result from the position. But often it is also information that a given area in the body is blocked. During afternoon meditation, while sitting on a chair I feel an enormous heat wave, a sort of inner melting of my body. Then I faint. It is at the moment when my eyeballs, feet, knees and hands, which are resting on my thighs, drop down, falling towards the core of the Earth. I can't surf this wave anymore. Is it my second body that decides to switch me off for a short while? I remember only the moment when I think I should leave the room, but don't have time to do it.

When I wake up, I am lying on the ground. I can't tell how long the blackout lasted. It feels like a temporary death. I am surprised to see people surrounding me. I feel moisture in my eye, I think I am crying. I am still lying on the ground. Then I touch my eye, it's blood. I go to the bathroom. I look like I've been beaten-up. I get back to my hostel a bit dizzy. And overtouched. I weep because I don't understand. I sleep nine hours.

DECEMBER 2019

The final of the looming score – a practice proposed by Lilia Mestre during BLOCK 1. Over three months we are weaving together – exchanging our practices through weekly 5 minute presentations structured by a score of posing and answering questions. The constellations given by this protocol are random. Having received our own question, each of us is supposed to answer on somebody else's behalf, and somebody answers for us. Each of us answer and ask freely, in relation to our own research. In that way, we are mutually nourishing our research, while abandoning the comfort zone of our own vocabulary.

Here is a list of bits from all the questions that were addressed to my research and that I asked to others (in alphabetical order):

am I more connected or more alone?
a kind of darkness that one can't explore?
a shed snake's skin?
a self-portrait then? of attention?
a sense of fragmentation, body fragmentation
a system of signs destroys the possibility of a sky
and what if, by some miracle, you are not allowed to become a person?
as if it was so easy and unpunished to mangle the complexity of the matter, life, actions and present it like this
bones that are like stones
can one go wherever s/he images and wants to go?
children borderline adult's game
conjunction with the entirety of the universe is one's way to avoid suffering
could speech (or writing) be a proper way of not looking at (some) images?
dissolve time
finding something in the gap
flâneur
frame ordinary duration
framed them with your body
glitches in the code
how passive can be the gaze? the gaze of whom (or what again)?
haunted image

is the documentation about something in the frame... or something around... or something else?
is there any 'the outside'?
i am afraid of the substantiality of the photos on the wall
i am worried what happens to art when art starts to appropriate life without a critical position on its
purpose or transformative capacity
i want more
let us start playing, interpret this in our perspective
something is fuelling the player
the question on abandonees
mutilated and disregarded icon of intimacy and softness devalued into garbage
of melancholy of impossibility
kosmos
many subtle and intimate things
meditation narrative
meditation on time
meditation on some leftovers
meditation on death, stillness, loss?
meditation on the surface
no ambition for coming to know
place touched by a thought
precious
re-enchanted
re-enchanter
re-enchantment
ritual or spiritual spaces
something always unable to see
static - I experience destabilisation
sounds of things out of the frame, but these things belong to that environment
tenderness
the ability of dissolving into sand, these small rocky, glazed molecules that become uncontrolled, free
nomads going through structures, states, materiality of things, entering bodies?

the gaze that pours out of one curious
the image takes you
the impossibility to embody the story
the intentional distance you asked for
the movement of the gaze
the sacred signs
the scene that picked you up
there is a style of everything
the way you filmed (shaking a little bit the camera, trying to get rid of the heads in front of you)
to what degree we need our bodies to communicate?
trance state
uncompromising, but still gentle
under a foreign sky
you can touch them
what do you want to amplify?
what happens when we shut down our eyes?
what is fuelling us, the gamers-spectators
where is the edge / the outline of a stone?
who are the freaks of nature?
what is possible with my gaze, when I see you seeing differently?
who (or what) is recording this scene?

DECEMBER 2019 – FEBRUARY 2020

I'm developing a personal journal. It needs to be shiny, ostentatiously glittery. Thick, fat brocades safeguard the container for notes, drawings and written images, which – in next step – are coupled by the archive of images cut from the daily landscape: pictures and short videos taken with my phone along the way; postcards bought on occasional trips to museums; photographs from the daily newspapers “Metro” and “De Morgen.”

Everyday observations create constellations and pile up into something that I will later call ‘a scandalous archive.’

I find it difficult to talk about this practice while standing on solid ground, as though, once named and described, it would lose its nature, fade away, become vague.

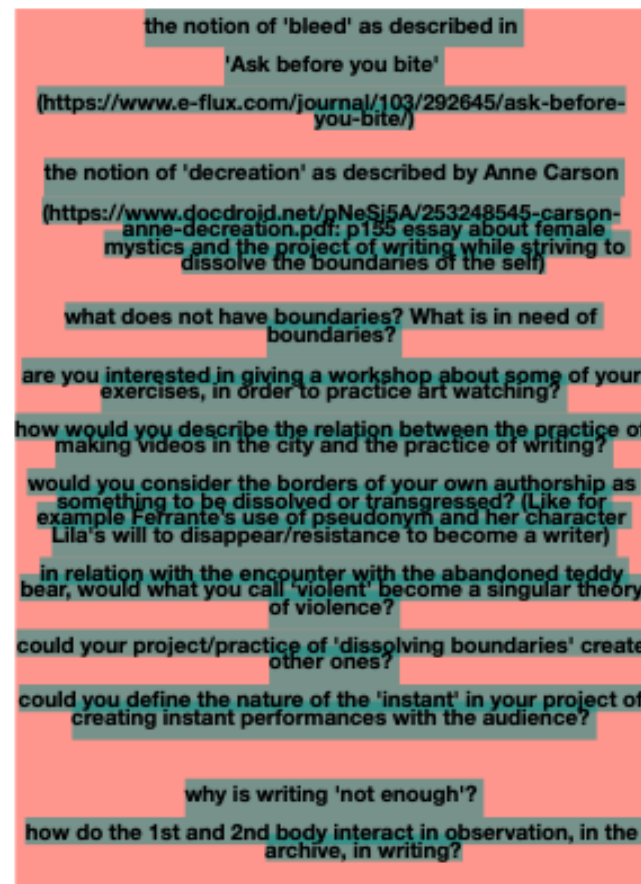
In the frame of BLOCK II, called Zone Public, some questions become clear:

How do I fictionalise my daily reports? Who is the author of this journal? How to talk about your own research? Where should we start? What is the preliminary picture? What is the interface, the software? Why do I need linearity? Can I start with an image? What does "can" mean? What is the subject of my research? How do my own words in my own language reach others?



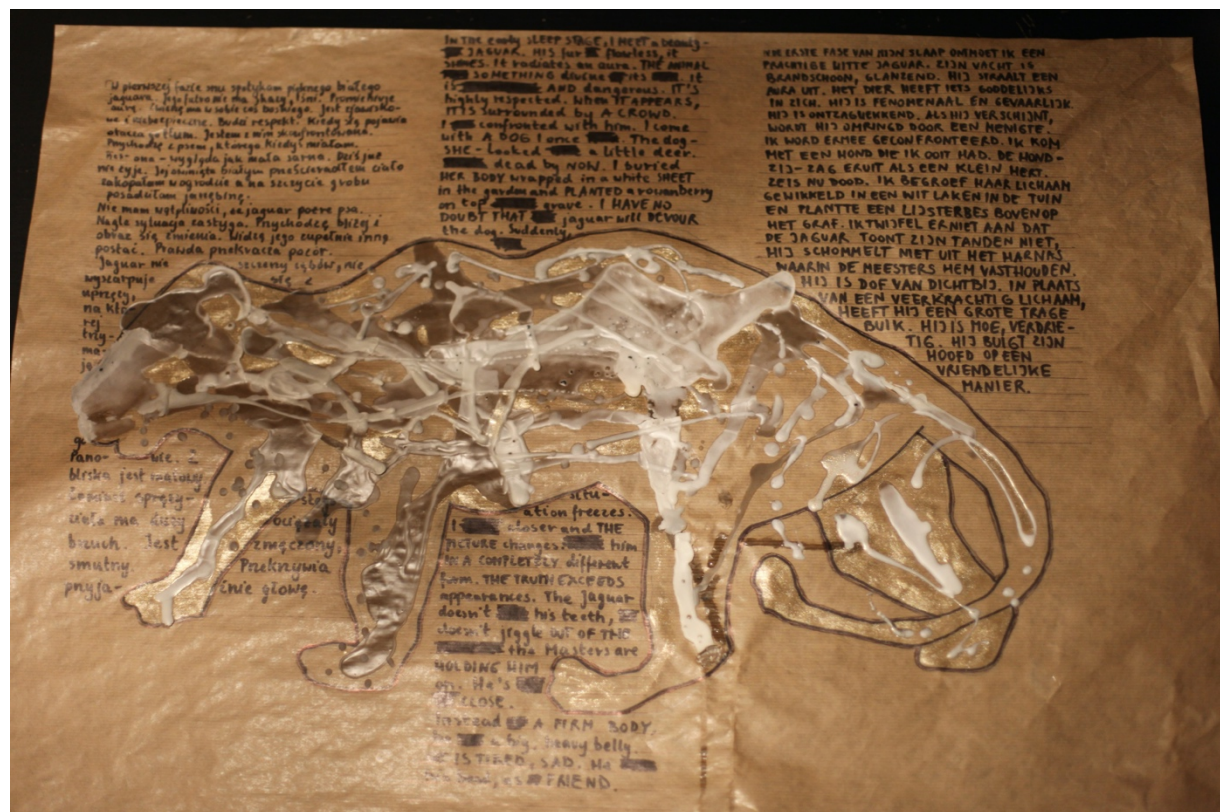
“Metro” newspaper cutting, January 2020

My research is translated in the form of a Rorschach test in words of the participants of Block II.



Rorschach test, January 2020

A rescue block. Lock down. What to do? I can't really be on the move. I walk across the empty city centre of Antwerp. My dreams are becoming more and more intense, as if they are about to replace a conscious reality. New practice – writing on the brown paper that arrives home with packages, flowers. Writing by looking for new visual forms. Dreams that become visions that become stories.



JAGUAR, black pen, paper, white wax, golden nail polish, April 2020

A DREAM.

In the early sleep stage, I meet a beautiful white jaguar. His fur is flawless, it shines. It radiates an aura. The animal has something divine of its own. Something phenomenal and dangerous. It is highly respected. When it appears, it is surrounded by a crowd.

I am confronted with him. I come with a dog I once had. The dog, she looked like a little deer. She's dead now. I buried her body wrapped in a white sheet in the garden and planted a rowan berry bush on top of the grave. I have no doubt that the jaguar will devour the dog. The situation freezes. I come closer and the picture changes.

I see him in a completely different form. The truth exceeds appearances. The Jaguar doesn't bare his teeth, he doesn't jiggle out of the harness his Masters are holding him with. He's dull up close. Instead of a firm body, he has a big heavy belly. He is tired, sad. He bows his head, as a friend.



On 27 April I receive a letter from Deborah Birch:

Subject: Deborah asks Kasia

Odpowiedź została wysłana w dniu Wt, 05.01.2021 21:52

Deborah Birch <deborahmaybirch@gmail.com>

Pn, 27.04.2020 08:23

I find it impossible to think of your work without my mind flitting to many images and instances that you bring up for me, in the references you use, the detached yet determined way you present your attachment to things, authors, images. So I immediately thought, the paper is crumpled, from what? Flowers, I guess, it has a bouquet-style of 'folding.' I wonder who gave you flowers, or whether you picked up an old bouquet on the street. I could imagine both with equal clarity. What else I notice is that the flowers would be as important to you in either situation. Attached, detached. Found, written, overwritten. Hierarchies dissolve.

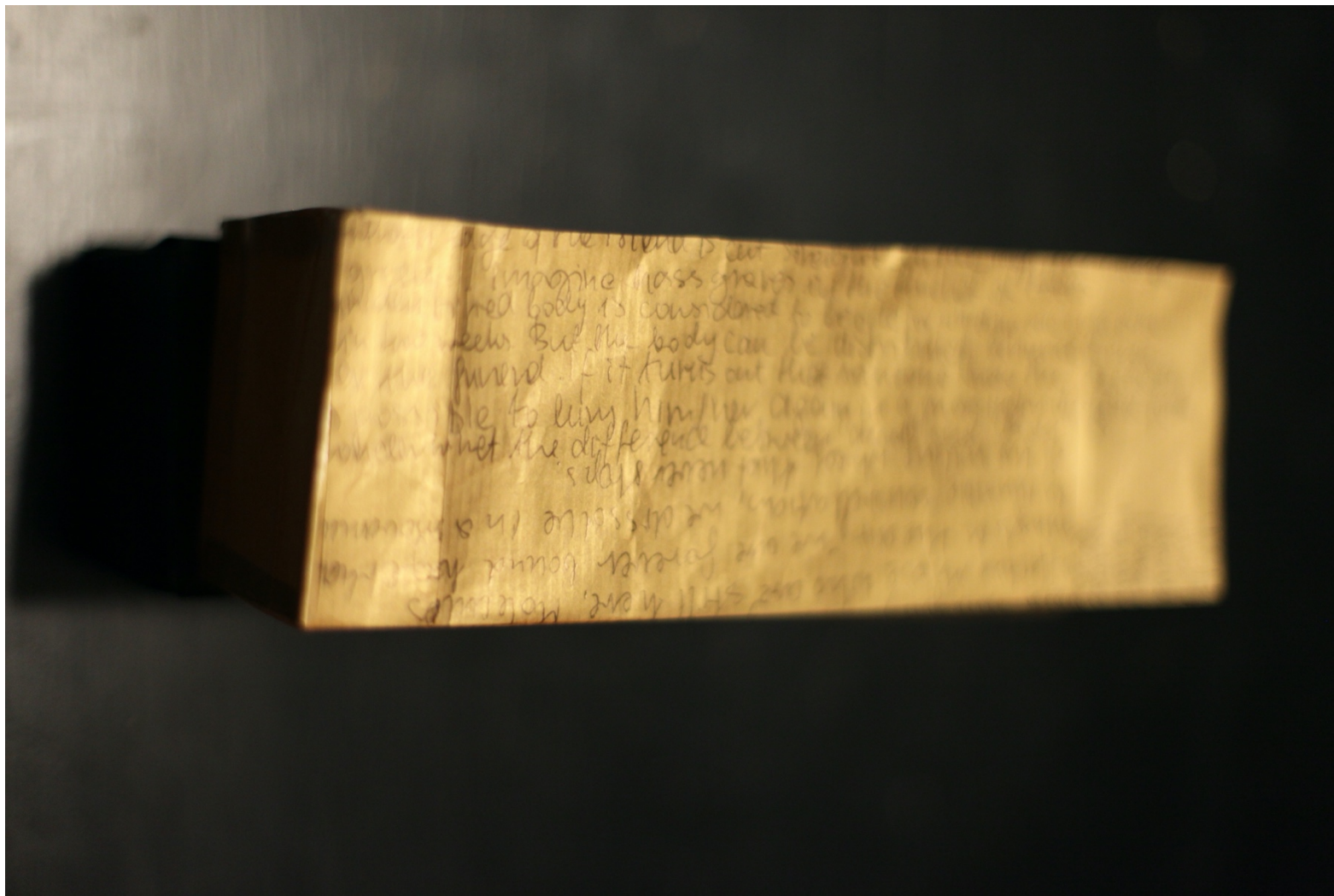
White me down (write me down), black me up (sounds violent - black and blue is a euphemism for bruises). Philip K Dick said there are no gold prisons ("the forests, which Euripides spoke of in the Bacchae ["Will they ever come to me ever again..."]. Each age of rotation retrograde was better; iron to silver to gold").

You're doing something else than iron>gold hierarchies. White/black/gold, down/up/over. Your relation to words and things seems nonchalant, distant, as though you're touching them very lightly. Then pulling them together and deciding upon them has a certain insistence, almost a violence. You make them take positions. I think you enjoy these boundaries, and those between the abandoned and the found, the careful and the distracted. As though they are connected by a bridge. And you are slowly building a series of bridges so that one abandoned thing is connected to a found thing, connected to a discarded thing, etc. Is there a sense that you can't find something unless it has previously been lost? So that the joy in a thing being found is dependent on the pathos of a thing being discarded? And it doesn't matter which way or in what order?

xx

hope you're well kasia

i'm reading ferrante, i remembered you reading the smarginatura passage when i came across it



BODY BOX. Golden and black paper, black pen, glue. April 2020

Hart Island. Body Box

On 10th April in Flemish newspaper De Standaard I read about the mass graves in New York. The graveyard can contain up to 25 coffins every day – simple boxes in which corpses are placed – bodies of people of unknown identity, and those too poor to afford private burials. I wonder how much identity can cost. And whether it can be easily lost or gained with a lot of money.

This community is put on the margins even after death. The graves are located on Hart Island, where a graveyard for the poor has operated since the nineteenth century. I check Hart Island. It's near the Bronx. It has the shape of a leg – for example, a muscular leg of a dog or cat, from the thigh to a fairly massive paw. The northern edge of the island is cut straight. On the map, the island is green. I'm imagining mass graves in the thicket of trees.

An unidentified body is considered to be one for which no one comes in within two weeks. But the body can be disturbed, exhumed even after the funeral. If it turns out that someone knew the deceased, it's possible to bury him/her again in a more individualized form. I wonder what the difference between "dead" and "body" is.

Hart Island is an island experienced in death. 35 years ago, the funerals of thousands of people who had died from AIDS were held there, at first in a remote part of the island. As if the dead could still affect the living. I imagine the human bones in the graves turn into gold, that they are radioactive, affecting those who are still here. Molecules mingle in the air, we are forever bound together by invisible constellations, we dissolve in movement of a rolling wheel that never stops.

MAY 2020

On Sunday, 17th May 2020, I take part in Full drop meditation.

I notice my experience:

- a returning point on the horizon, a flash, a crevice, an opening
- expansion of the body, of the bones, where is the border with the outside? If I shrink, everything will end up on the skeleton, and what if I expand? Do I grow?
- feeling pressure in my skull. This always happens when I have a fever, it signals something beyond.
- darkness, darkness, darkness
- we touch ourselves and others as we see them, so we are always dealing with the picture-object; we do not see others as they are 'really,' but as they appear

Meditation can liberate images – various images, brutal images, historical images. In meditation we can meet our ancestors.

During body scans I can focus on only a few bones and their consistency. Then the experience will be stronger.

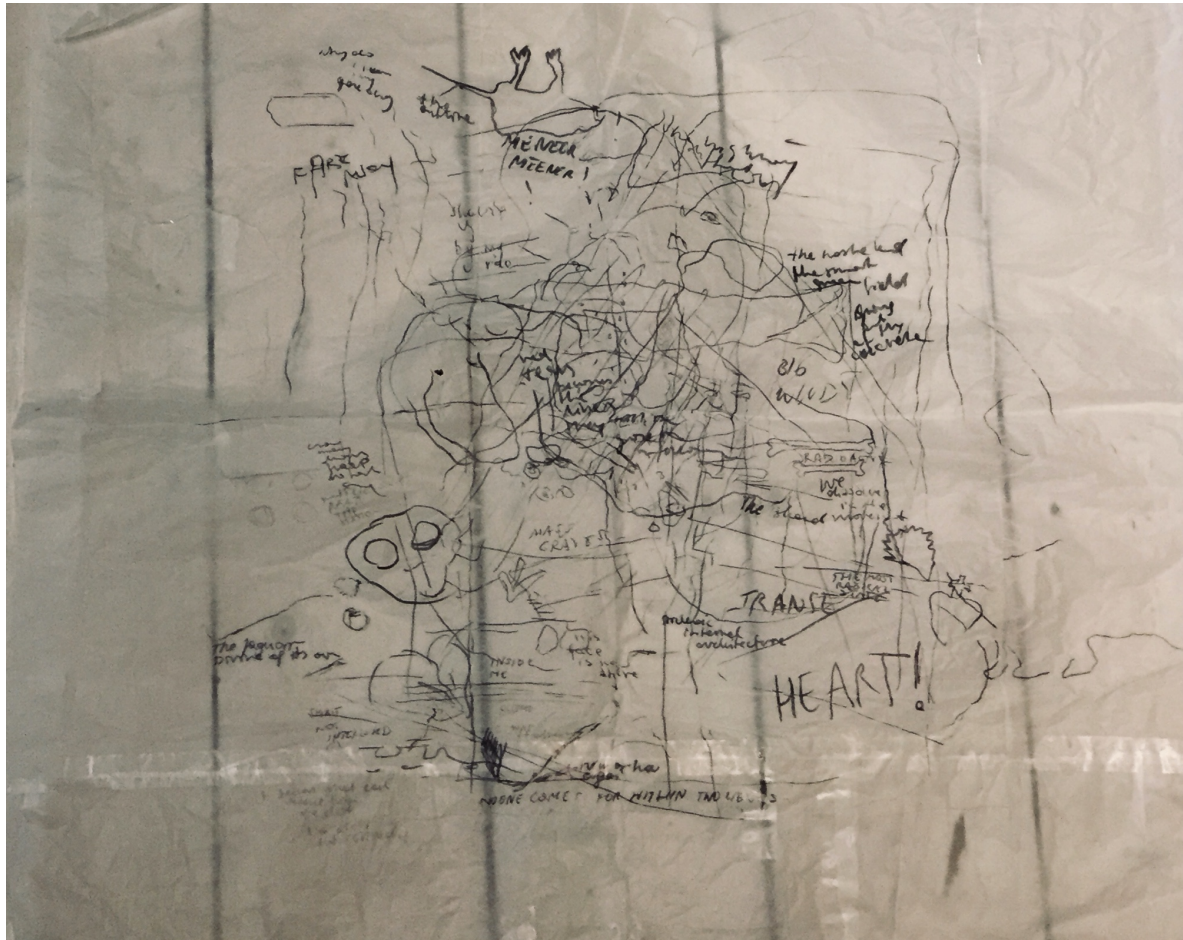
There is nothing to judge. Sometimes it's good that the body doesn't allow it, that body knows how to protect.

Too much meditation can sometimes be counterproductive, because the previous one still works.

JULY 2020

End week at PAF (Performing Arts Forum). Summer. I work with layers: images from my archive screened on the wall triggers a gesture of re-drawing, remembering what I saw.

It's a ceremony of stripping off surfaces, as long as I get to an image I can contemplate.



A MAP, white tissue paper, black pen, July 2020

AUGUST 2020

Cafuné ritual. I'm burying some words written in April (Body Box) at a private mourning ceremony on the beach.

Writing that is doomed to dissolve in sand, water, sun and wind.



Ostend, August 2020

SEPTEMBER 2020

Start of BLOCK III, titled Settlement.

I experience the impossibility to settle (down), to be in the space and use it. Together with Steven we make a table in the a.pass wood workshop. I'm happy about it but it doesn't help to write. As if writing needed to happen always on the move, in-between.

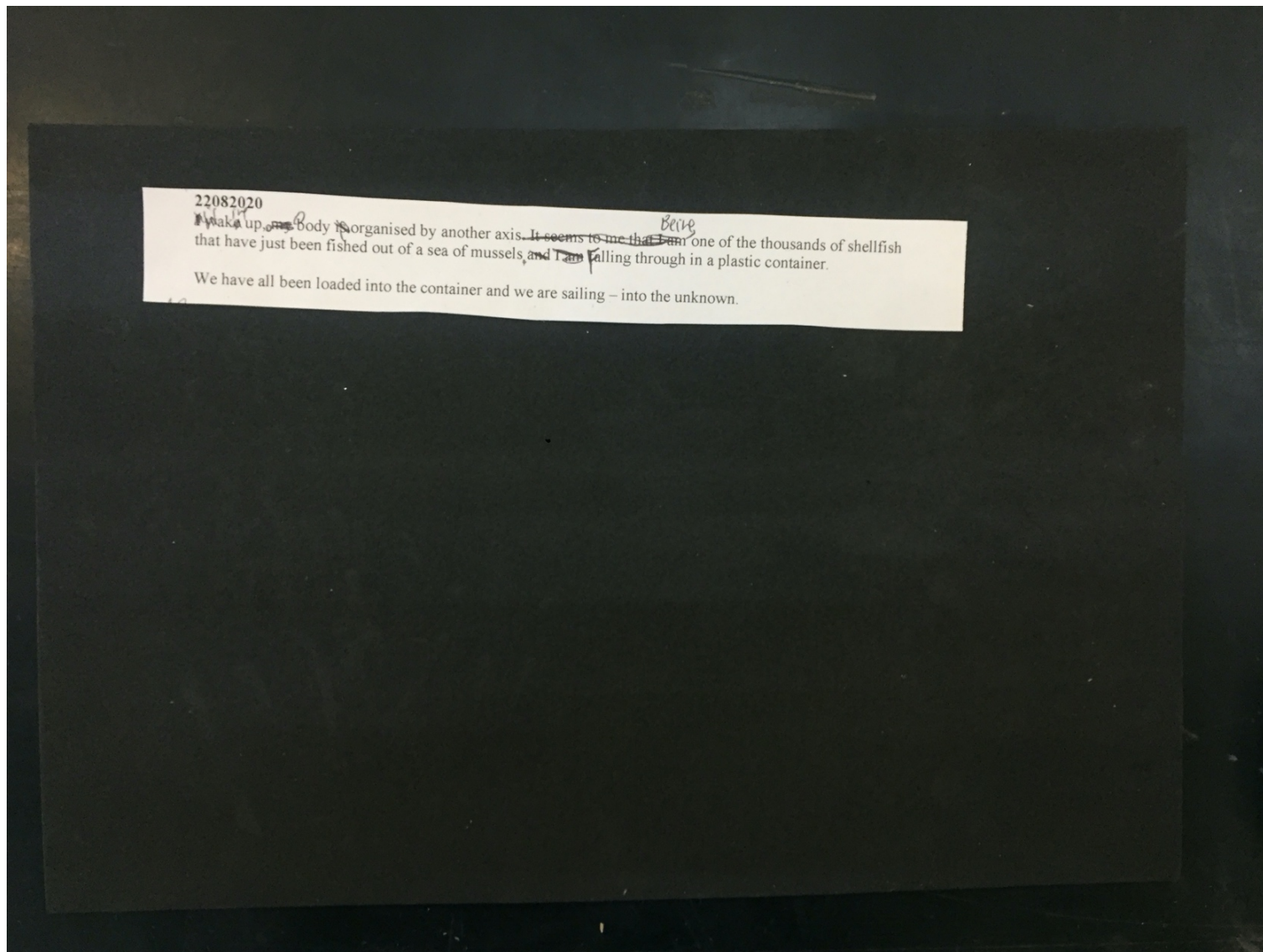


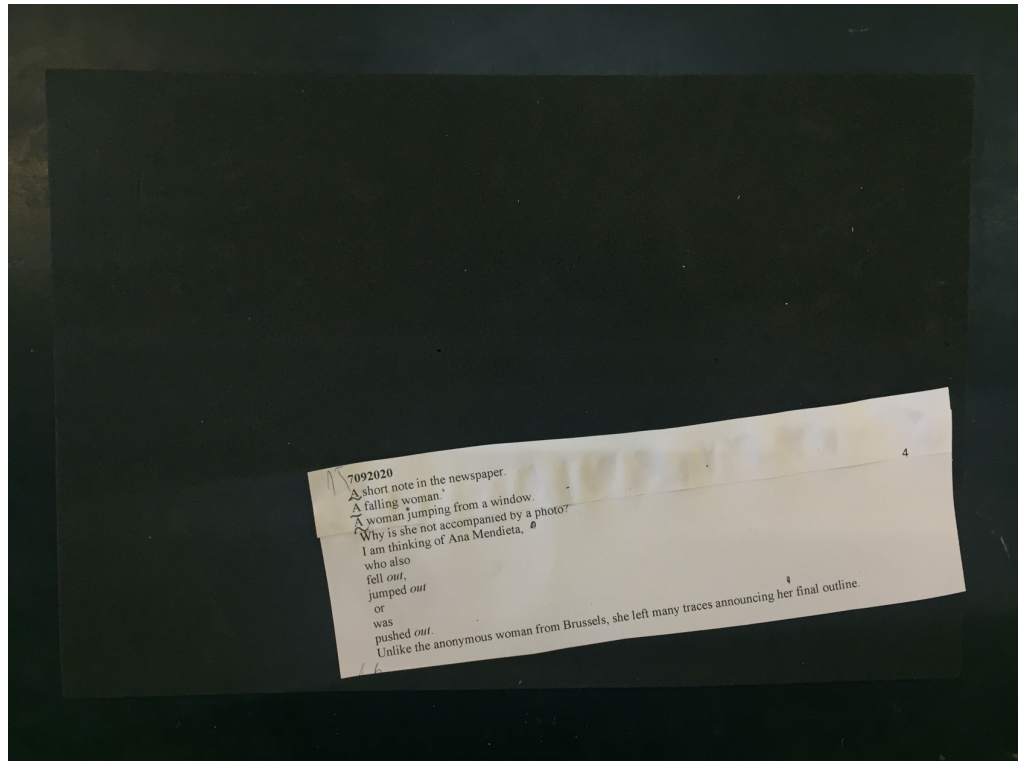
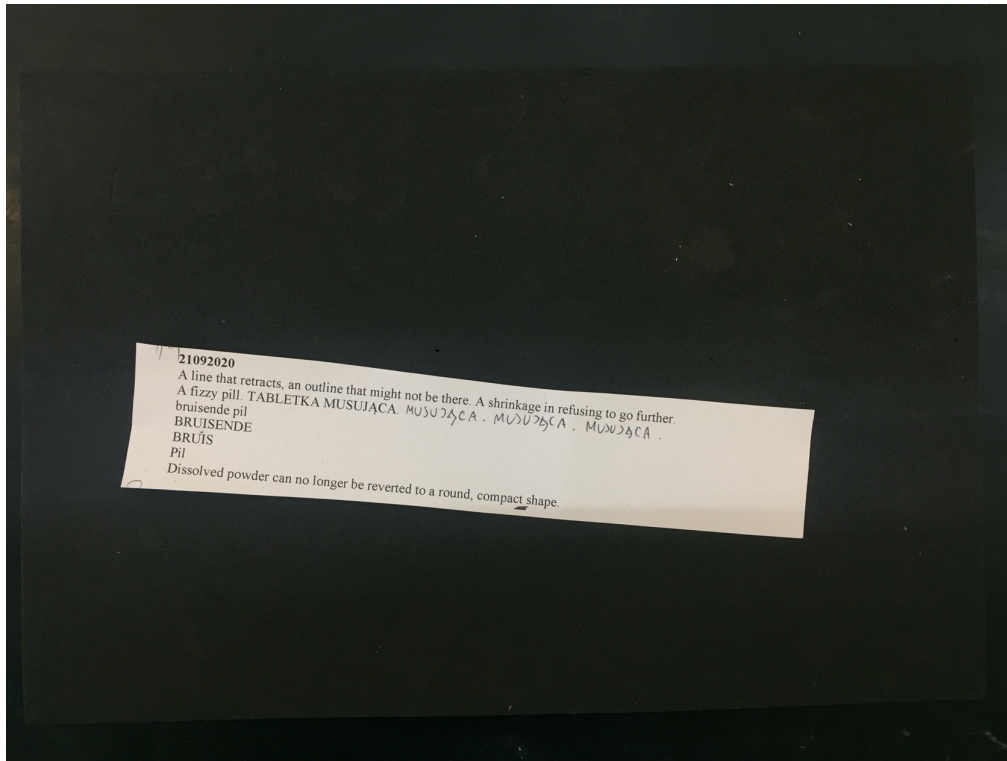
IMAGES SEWN TOGETHER, a.pass, September 2020

OCTOBER 2020

Halfway days. Black dancefloor becomes a sheet of paper. The black obscure living room of my research. I'm displaying myself as a body that is operating within this never-ending archive.







Text boards, Halfway days presentation, a.pass, October 2020

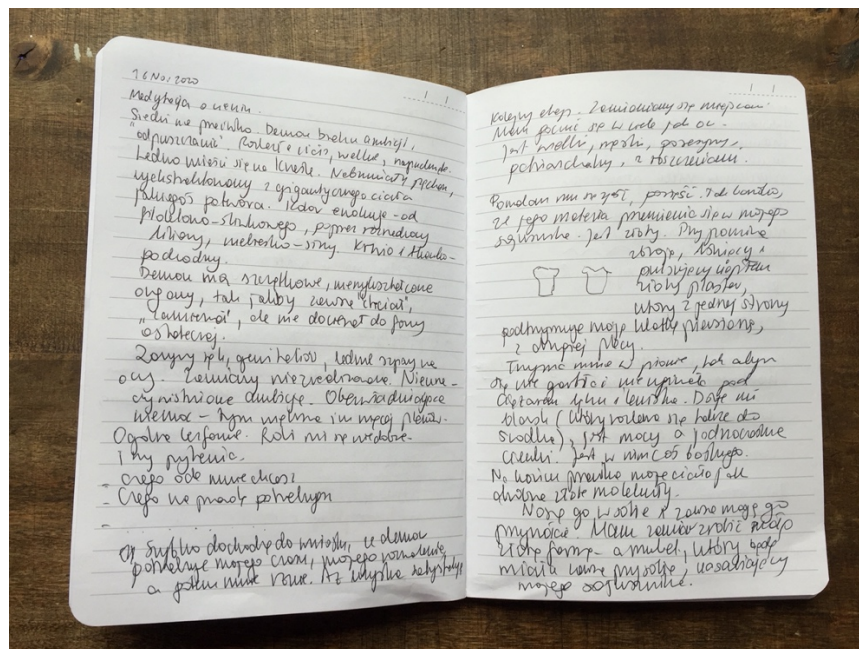
NOVEMBER 2020

Elke van Campenhout introduces her workshop *Debunking the myth*.

What is at stake:

- how to become naked together?
- how to be naïve and because of that less normative?
- what are we doing and why are we doing it?
- how do we develop a language that is more open?
- not knowing as a form of nakedness
- being vulnerable by showing the underlayers of the work

The clothes of the emperor = exoskeleton of contemporary artist.

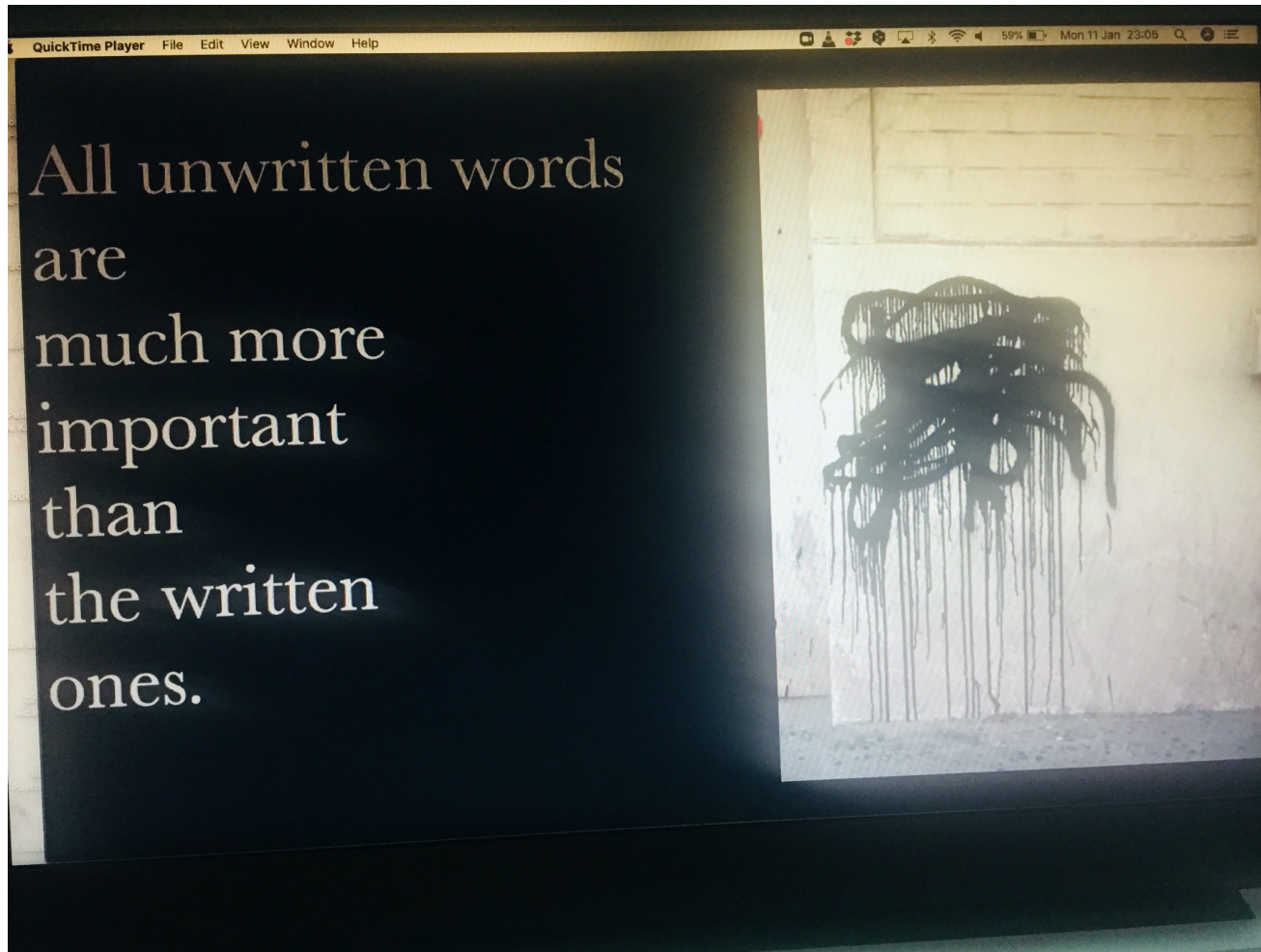


A double page from my notebook, November 2020

Meditation about the shadow. The demon is sitting opposite. Barely fits on a chair. Swollen bladder, extracted from the giant body of some monster. The colour evolves from violet-plum, through to diluted lilac and bruise-blue. Blood and tissue derivative. The demon has a residue, undeveloped body parts, as if it always "wanted," "intended," but did not reach its final form. The outlines of the hands, of the genitals, barely developed eye slits. A representation of unrealised intentions. Unfulfilled ambitions. General formlessness. She is getting sick. They switch places so that she can better understand what he wants from her. He is great, masculine, possessive. He has claims. She lets him eat her. So much so that his matter will turn into her ally who resembles an armour. It is golden, shiny. It has the form of a flat shirt. It sticks to her body like a patch – pulsating with warmth. In the front it supports the chest, in the back, the back. The armour holds her vertically. It is strong, although as thin as skin. The glow is shining and pouring in. Finally his glitter molecules fall into the bloodstream of her vein.

NOVEMBER 2020

END WEEK



A screenshot from a Nocturnal session, presented on zoom during End week, November 2020

Writing that starts in the gap. Where it shouldn't be.
There is no place for a plant, and that plant is a weed.
This is not a book, a script, a manuscript, a publishing house, or even a website.

What is it that we see at intervals, in places far apart, uncoordinated? What falls in us? What sinks into us?

Shattered writing – diluted, coming out of its own pots and beds. Opaque writing, giving an account of death, of prediction, of what has been abandoned and wiped away.

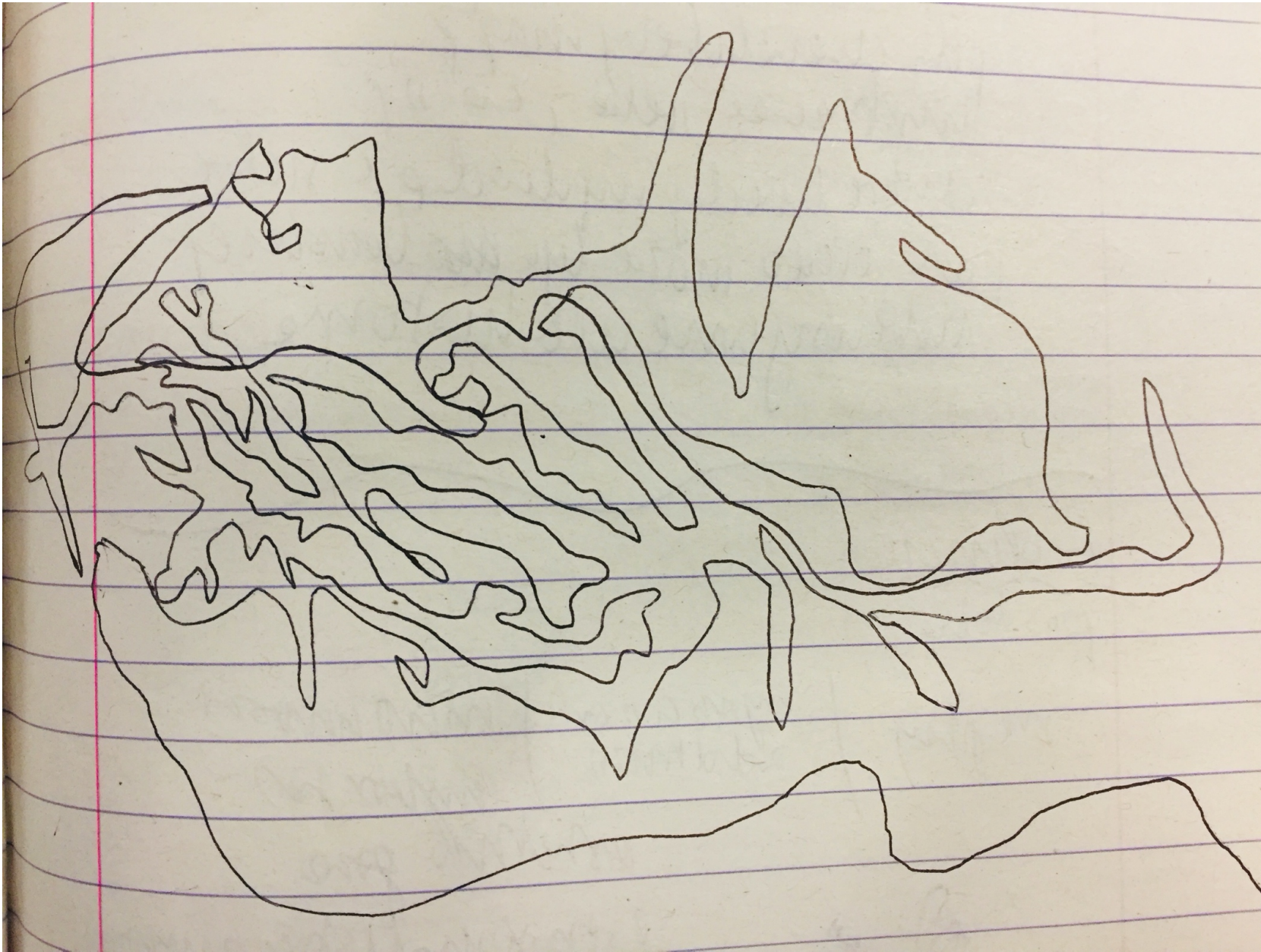
Writing on receipts, envelopes, margins, the back of notebooks, newspaper margins, worn tickets.

Over time, these reports, traces have become a scandalous archive for me, where the grains of the image mix with the sand I stumble over in the street.

Writing shattered, diluted. Avulsed bones of text, geometric words standing across the current.

“There are layers of images (...). There is thickness. Vision is multidimensional and simultaneous. You can think, see, see beyond: you can do all these things at the same time. Your psyche, your brain catches up. Some people today say that an image is not necessarily a clear figuration of something; it could be like a blurred abstract drawing, like a sliding door.”

{Etel Adnan}



SMARGINATURA, a page from my notebook

THANK YOU FOR THIS JOURNEY TO:

{first and foremost to my a.pass companions, who taught me how to get lost, to take risk and to embrace whatever comes with openness and curiosity}

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Vera Sofia Mota
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