

on being liquid

'what if that solidarity is only
attainable in a street
where you cannot own or control
or manipulate another person
where there's no such thing
as a president
and presence means mutual aid
and what if this street made us
talk in new ways
and our words led to new kinds
of pleasure that we can barely
imagine right now
and someone said i'm searching
for a home that's not just a drug
at sunset'

Ryan Eckes, 'Fantasy' (2018)

1 - - - - The infrastructure of civic control is full of gaps and openings. Plastic orange barriers have sections of negative space that give the appearance of oversized handles; the green netting tied to wire fencing is slashed to allow the fabric to billow in high wind; expandable railings have diamond shaped cut-outs. These structures are flimsy and not. They may seem temporary, flexible and precarious, but this only serves to camouflage their intended purpose: to block, bar and redirect movement, and to point to an authority that is absent. They encourage self-surveillance and social regulation. After a barrier has been put in place, you no longer need the real-life-presence of a figure in charge.

2 - - - - On the steps of Platform 17 at Central Station, two men are arguing. The younger one is holding his phone in his right hand; the older one is on the step below, his right fist raised up at the other man, his left hand holding his backpack over his shoulder. They are arguing because the man on the phone has been walking down the steps on the right side, which, according to the older man, means he is travelling in the wrong direction. (This particular platform does not have barrier fencing to direct commuters, so instead it relies, in good faith, on the black arrows stuck to the floor.) He indicates that the man with the phone should move over to the left. The younger man refuses to change sides, and so the older man becomes angry. He is incensed by this disruption to the flow of traffic; he is

incensed by the distraction of the phone. They continue to argue about the direction of movement, even as they remain immovable: one man declining to change his trajectory, the other insisting he do so.

3 - - - - How do we subvert the civic structures of control? We practice a mode of reversal. We take these structures and turn them upside down / or maybe we turn them inside out / or maybe we steal their designs and turn them into objects that function as openings rather than as strategies for containment. We practice finding ways to get underneath or around barriers. We rely on the bodies that slip *between*.

4 - - - - **Terrance Hayes:** ‘the idea of liquidness (fluidity? liquidity?) is not limited by race, class, or gender—the more oppressed or disenfranchised one is, the more important is one’s liquidness.’¹

5 - - - - Language is a liquid and we disempower the language of the State by translating it into another vocabulary. We take the hard image of the roadblock and evacuate its purpose and intention—transposing it into a whimsical sculpture or translating it directly onto a citizen’s body. Such is the power of the translator that what appears in one realm to be authoritarian becomes playful, comic and superfluous in another. Flags become bunting; hi-vis yellow turns into pale pink.

6 - - - - **Miyó Vestrini on translation:** ‘If we accept that the translation was first and the original came after (read The Old Testament), we must admit that all of civilization depends on translation. We depend, with bound feet, hands and tongue, on that impossible figure of the translator. Dangerous enemy, if they do evil. The best accomplice, if they do well.’²

7 - - - - Why is it that the State insists on controlling the flow of movement, and why is it that the State can decide which bodies will pass freely and which bodies will not? The exertion of control obfuscates the State’s tenuous position. The roadblocks of settlers sit lightly on the surface; the land underneath it knows it has been stolen and greets this new mode of occupation in silence. This makes the State anxious: they excavate, they redevelop, they build tunnels, they tell people to ‘move along’.

8 - - - - Mostly what this is about is a being-in-the-material-world and discovering what can be found there: the systems of control and surveillance but also their opposite—the opportunities for refusal and resistance. If we must seek to be liquid, then we must seek to be liquid bodies moving through space—*not* in the cyber-sphere, but in the space of the world. The body, for the time being, is not digital. The State seeks to pacify this body because it knows it is a tangible thing with which we can work: a body can shrink & skirt & hide / a body can choose when to change direction / & when to sit down / & when to hold the line.

Naomi Riddle

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1. Terrance Hayes, ‘I have the same name: the poetics of liquid’ in *To Float in the Space Between*, (Seattle & New York: Wave Books, 2018), p. 74 / 2. Miyó Vestrini, trans. by Anne Boyer and Cassandra Gillig, *Grenade in Mouth*, (Chicago: Kenning Editions, 2019), np

This exhibition text was commissioned to coincide with two exhibitions by Connie Anthes.

Some Small Fires

18 May - - - 15 June - - - 2019

Darren Knight Gallery

840 Elizabeth Street, Waterloo NSW 2017

Sydney, Australia

Beta Blockers

23 May - - - 22 June - - - 2019

Verge Gallery

Level 2, Jane Foss Russell Plaza

City Road, Darlington,

University of Sydney, NSW, 2006

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