

Cemetery

Archipelago

research scenario in eight parts

1. exhibition / non-exhibition
2. points of departure
3. necropolis
4. the 1943 Bengal Famine
5. infant wrapping cloth
6. political community with the dead
7. cause of death: WOMAN
8. the coming death

Section 01: Exhibition / Non-Exhibition

Researchers from the University of Gothenburg previously held workshops in this space under the heading “exhibition / non-exhibition”. These discussions took place over four days during May and June of 2015 as part of the first research pavilion. Debate focused on the dynamics of exhibiting—of showing things—and of the possible limits to exhibition. Are there practices of art, practices of thinking-and-making, which cannot be shown, or which are not well-served by exhibition?

This discussion of a contrast between “exhibition” and “non-exhibition” was not set up as a simple “yes” / “no” dichotomy. It was a means to think about the ways in which exhibitions both reveal and conceal, both show and hide, both tell and don’t tell, in the same moment.

These discussions were staged here, within the space that you are now standing in, reading this text. These discussions were also part of an exhibition process.

In these discussions, some people also spoke about the continuous production of new shows and a possible effect of forgetting. “Amnesia” was a way of naming how the cycle of shows—each new exhibition replacing the previous—could erase, or push out of memory and awareness, the work of previous shows.

As a counter to this, some participants spoke about the accumulation and interaction of different shows over time. They argued that successive exhibitions generated layers of experience and meaning.

This talk of memory and amnesia led some speakers to talk about the different times and tempos created through exhibitions. For example, different experiences of time can be produced through the spacing of exhibits to suggest journeys or vistas or montages. Another example is the two-year turn-around logic of a biennial, the exhibition marking time like a metronome.

Works often propose different durations of looking. Consider the different possible tempos and rhythms to viewing paintings, moving image works, audio-loops, models, installations, performances or archives.

Now, consider the time needed to read a text piece like this. Do you wonder just how much longer all this might take?

Section 02: Points of Departure

Cemetery Archipelago begins with death. It gathers together some researchers at the University of Gothenburg who are working on topics that have some connection to questions of death and dying.

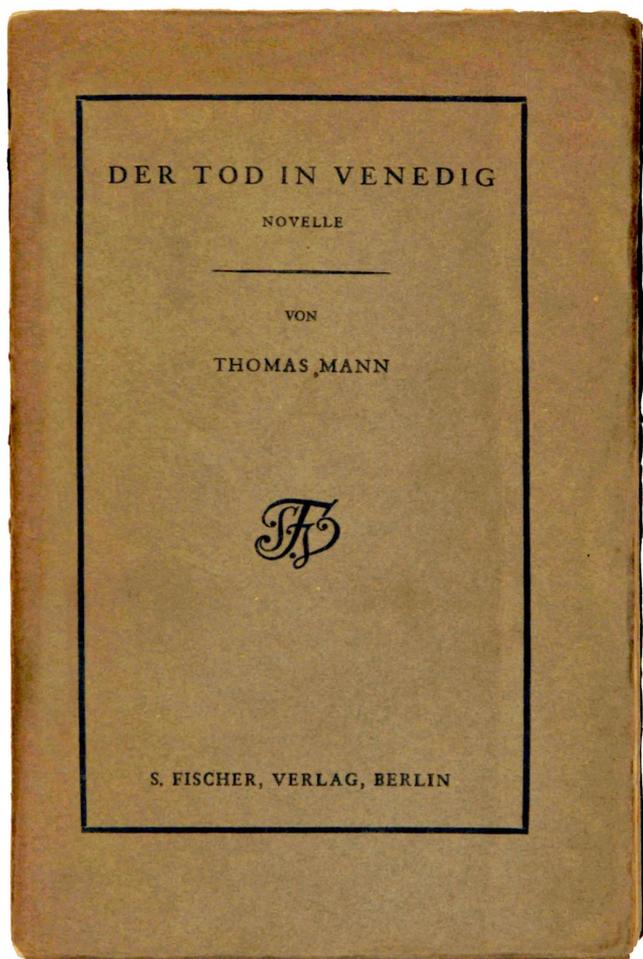
Initially the researchers considered the site of exhibition—Venice and the wider lagoon—and the imaginative connections of this place to different themes of death, as a possible framing device.

Burial of the dead in Venice was historically distributed across both land and sea. Public squares with names like “Campo dei Morti” or “Campo Santo” reference the historic role of these sites as graveyards.

In 1386 the Venetian Republic granted its Jewish community land for a cemetery at San Nicolò on the Lido. Centuries later, in 1807, the island San Cristoforo della Pace became a cemetery when under the Napoleonic occupation of Venice, burial on the the main Venetian islands was thought to be unsanitary. Isola di San Michele was later joined to San Cristoforo della Pace in 1836 by filling the canal between the two.

Bodies were often not permanently interred in their first grave but relocated after several years to the island of Sant' Ariano, known as the island of bones.

Cemetery Archipelago can be thought of as a name for Venice and its themes of death.



From Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* to Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*, Venice is a space that is linked in the cultural imagination with the imagery of death.

One possible source for this imagery of decay and morbidity is suggested in the city's history:

When the Serenissima (the old Venetian republic) after a century of political sickliness, lost her ancient liberty, first to Napoleon in 1797, afterwards to Austria in 1815, there was heard quite a chorus of poetic lamentation and epitaphing.

This is an idea taken from an essay with a title that emphasizes the death theme — “Sunset City / City of the Dead: Venice and the 19th Century Apocalyptic Imagination.”

In another commentary on Venice's symbolism of death and decay, it is claimed that the lagoon's geography makes it a place to picture death:

Venice was a central topos (place) for the nineteenth century Anglo-American imagination, fascinating not only because of the Romantic attraction to "beauty in decay" and the frisson accompanying the possibility that all that faded loveliness yet might slip back beneath the waters ... but also because of the ambiguity and paradox that inform its geographical and as well as its cultural heritage.

Some commentators have pushed even more strongly the claim that Venice is a special place to think about material transformation and mortality.

The author and scholar Margaret Ann Doody describes the relationship of Venice, the city of islands, to its watery world, the lagoon, as one of ongoing adjustment and accommodation.

Venice, in her reading of the place, is not a design fixed upon the matter of the lagoon, a shape carved into the water. It is instead a vibrant tangle of water-land, of culture-nature, of human-non-human.

This tangle of matter is a force of creation, dissolving things into water and emerging things out of this dissolution. An ever-shifting movement of stuff becoming and unbecoming, a tidal rise and fall of matter swelling then fading.

Reading Venice in this way, ideas of decay, dying, and death are seen to insinuate themselves through the unstable constellation of land-and-sea-and-city. It was suggested that the figure of death in Venice was more than a question of Venice as a metaphor. This connection to death was not simply people assigning meanings to things. Death is “in” Venice not as a story imposed upon the city, but as a part of the materiality of the place.

This idea is developed further by the anthropologist Stuart McLean when he describes Venice as a material process of creation—and not as a theatrical space of appearances and representations. McLean attempts to think beyond the traditional distinction between “nature” and “culture.”

He speaks of “the participation of human acts of imagining and fabulation (i.e., story-telling) in the processes shaping and transforming the material universe.” In this way of describing Venice, we are no longer dealing with cultural representations of a separate material nature.

The idea of representation—something standing in the place of something else—is displaced by the idea of expression. So McLean proposes that the stories and symbolic readings of Venice are expressions in language of a dynamic power of “self-differentiation immanent to the material substance of the universe.”

This previous sentence is not an easy one to read. It is probably difficult, perhaps even annoying, to read stuff like this off a wall. Especially so, if English is not your first language. Even native English speakers don't normally say things to each other like: "self-differentiation immanent to the material substance of the universe." It seems highly abstract and not easily grasped. Friends will make fun of you if you post a sentence like this on facebook.

(It might be even more annoying if you feel, reading an essay off the wall is wasting the precious little time you have to see visual art in Venice. But hang in there. Other stuff is coming.)

So why put a sentence like that here, and risk annoying people? The sentence is trying to do some hard work. It's trying to make a claim about how the world operates as a creative process. It's trying to persuade the reader that the world can best be understood without setting up a contrast between *what really is there* and *what is merely represented as being there*.

This also means placing the human making of meaning *inside* the world, not placing human inventions somewhere *outside* things, in some mysterious or magical realm beyond nature. Nature, in this reading, invents and creates, and even tells stories about itself.

Good News! Anyway, as things turned out, we decided not to use the Venice location, and its cultural imaginary of death, to frame our research. So that difficult sentence can be left hanging for now—however, to give fair warning, it may come back to haunt us later.

The proposal to formulate the research agenda in this way was challenged and problematized by members of the group leading us to agree that:

- (i) Venice is merely the site of display, and most of our work is not specific in any way to this site .
- (ii) We should try to frame things in a less clichéd way.

- (iii) Our different research interests overlap in referencing death, but we have different ideas of death, and these should be in tension.

- (iv) There is an important tension between research that uses a “politics of representation” approach and research informed by ideas of “nature-culture,” “expression” and “vibrant matter” (as shown in McLean’s ideas.)

- (v) Against the backdrop of a busy spectacular art world exhibition festival, we should adopt a modest approach to showing and telling, and even slow things down a little.

We kept the title *Cemetery Archipelago* because it did more than link to Venice.

For many decades the metaphor of the archipelago—a constellation of islands surrounded by water—has been used to describe the way disciplines of knowledge gather together in universities, and keep themselves as separate and self-contained worlds.

“Carceral Archipelago” is a term used by Michel Foucault to describe a network of prison sites, of internalised policing and disciplining of bodies. This archipelago is an image of the accumulation of knowledge and of unfreedom made through this knowledge.

There are other uses of the imagery of archipelago. These other images provide an idea of open relations, rather than of the enclosures of island-prisons.

The Martinican poet Edouard Glissant has proposed a form of archipelagic thinking. Glissant's thinking of the Carribean, and the relations of island-sea-island-sea-island moves beyond the simple contrast between land and water, or the simple contrast between the island and the mainland.

Glissant wrote of the Carribean islands that the consequences of European expansion —“extermination of the Pre-Columbians, importation of new populations”—forms the basis for a new relationship with the earth.

The genocide of Caribs and the enslavement of Africans are not memorialised, not made sacred in this way of thinking. These horrors are not erased, or closed off into a remote past. These are the historical present.

For Glissant, these deaths relate those who live after, to the earth, to the ocean, to the island-sea-island-sea-island world.



Section 03: Necropolis



In this 2018 film project, by Daniel Jewesbury, there is an editing together of shots from eleven different cemeteries, burial grounds and graveyards, filmed in Belfast, Berlin and London.

These combine to suggest that we could be looking at one continuous, single space. Long, static takes and slow pans reveal the cemetery space to us.



We track down the long avenues between grave plots and linger on natural features: flowers, bare branches, lichen on stone.

Some shots appear to be framed more as abstract compositions—silhouettes of headstones crowded around the bottom of a grey sky, branches and man-made structures intermingling. The shots combine views from different seasons and different times of day.





The necropolis—the city of the dead—is an active, teeming place, even though we push it to the margins physically and mentally; but our own city, the city where we live and work and love, is moribund, filled with buildings that are the decaying monuments of a dying social order.

The voiceover mixes original material with excerpts from existing texts (historical and theoretical pieces on architecture, landscape and art, discussion of our changing attitudes to death and the dead). The texts are run together, so that different elements drawn from many sources merge: Sometimes, they appear to be the spontaneous thoughts of the narrator. A personal dimension enters. The death of the city is the death of a love affair.

Throughout the film, occasional views back to the city centre, in the distance, intrude: The same buildings are seen from different angles and vantage points, but without completely disrupting the scenic, spatial unity that the montage has constructed.

Rather, the 'living', everyday city seems continually to reorient itself in relation to the city of the dead that has been built at its edges.



“I realised that I was seeing everything in opposites. All my life I have been trying to get away from these opposites, to navigate a space in between, and then I found that my mind was still trying to think in opposites. The city and the cemetery. The living world and the dead. The living world dying, and the dead world flourishing, growing. Simplistic paradoxes.

But then I worked backwards to try and unpick this, to introduce some subtlety. What was it about the dead, about death and the city of the dead, and about our parasitic undead city of everyday exploitations and degradations, what was it that was captivating me all this time?”

The work is not designed for gallery viewing on a loop, but for formal screening. It will be screened as part of the conference here at the pavilion on 20 August 2019.

HD video, colour, 24'42"

Written, filmed + edited: Daniel Jewesbury

Narrator / Woman: Abbie McGibbon

Man: Tony Flynn

Music: Liv Ulfsdóttir

Sound mix: Auditory

Produced with assistance from the Bergman Estate on Fårö Foundation; Z/KU (Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik), Berlin; Gothenburg University; and the Centre for Media Research, University of Ulster.

Section 04: The 1943 Bengal Famine

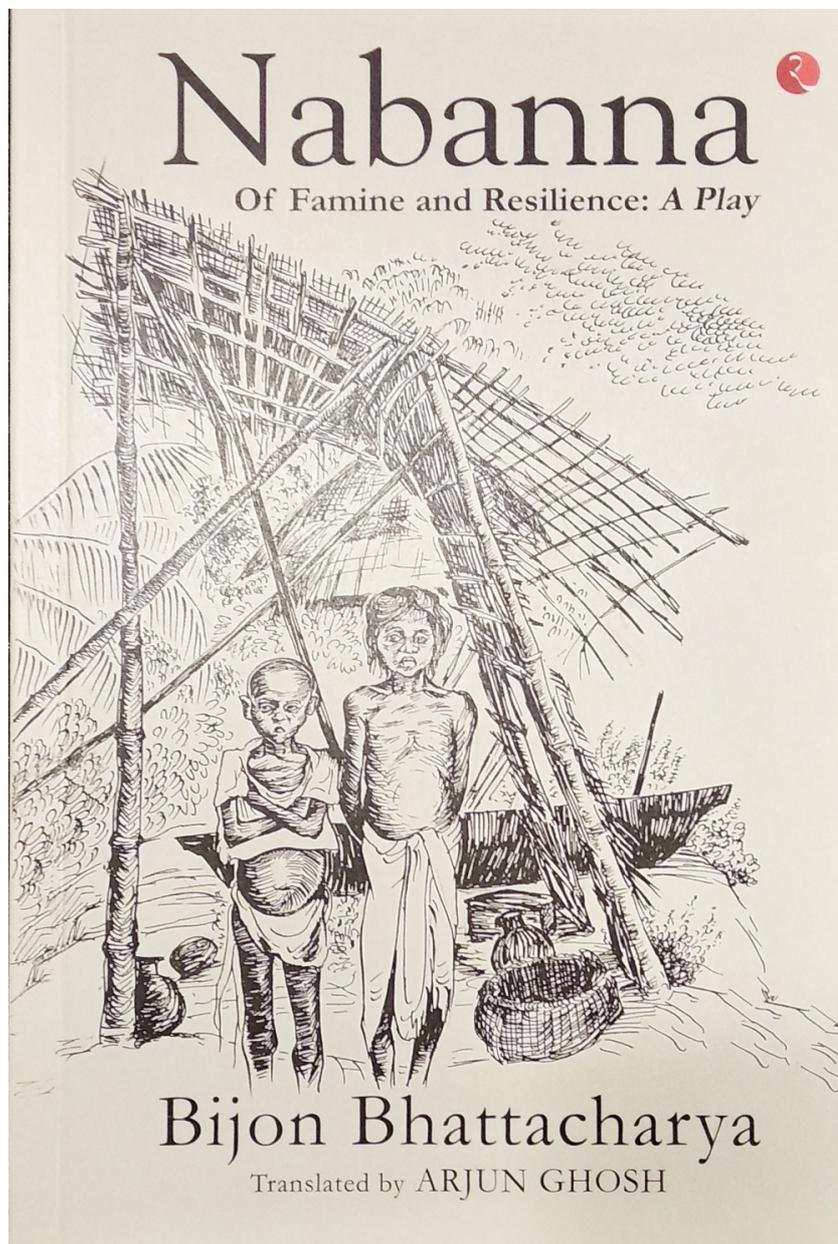
The Bengal Famine of 1943-44, which resulted in nearly four million deaths, is almost universally considered one of the most catastrophic and murderous instances of British colonial rule in India. What makes this famine especially tragic is that it was not the outcome of a natural disaster but of the policies, apathy, and even active hostility of the colonial government.

The colonial government's policy of diverting agricultural land from food crop to cash crops and prioritising food supplies to its troops at the expense of the general public, contributed significantly to the making of this famine.

Fearing a Japanese invasion of Bengal through Burma, the government further exacerbated the matter by removing surplus stocks and curtailing boat transport lines in eastern and coastal Bengal.

The general scarcity and panic also induced private hoarding and profiteering by some Bengali elites.

Even at the height of the famine, the Churchill government continued to prevent food imports. The net result was mass starvation, displacement, death, and chronic disease.



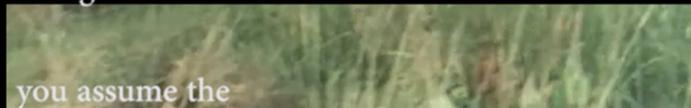
The famine gave rise to much compelling literature and art in Bengal. This response, however, was tinged with anticipation of a post-independence utopia where hunger, suffering, and class conflict would be eradicated. The inequities of caste, class, and gender in victimization by the famine were overtaken by a generalized and increasingly fervent nationalist sentiment and a renewed anti-colonial agenda.

The 'bhadralok' (Bengali elite) were empathetic towards the suffering of the rural peasantry but only from an intellectual distance. The resulting art and literature didn't fully capture the profound sub-narratives and fault lines of caste, class, + gender that famine so brutally exposed.

at times,



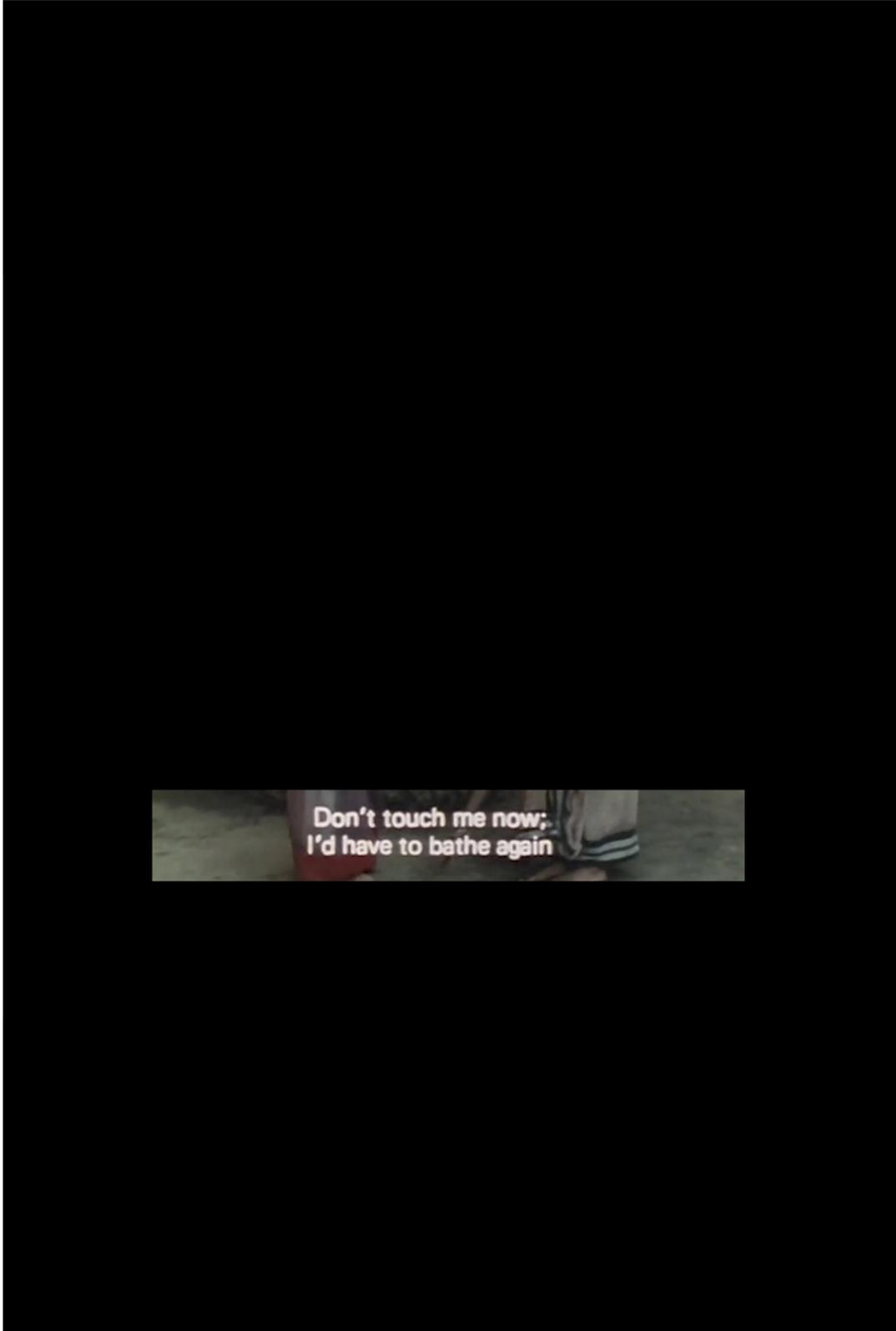
Hunger



you assume the
form of a mouse

As with all man-made atrocities, the question of how the famine is represented has a layered and complex history. It is in this context that Ram Krishna Ranjan has chosen to examine, and make an intervention in, Satyajit Ray's film *Distant Thunder*.

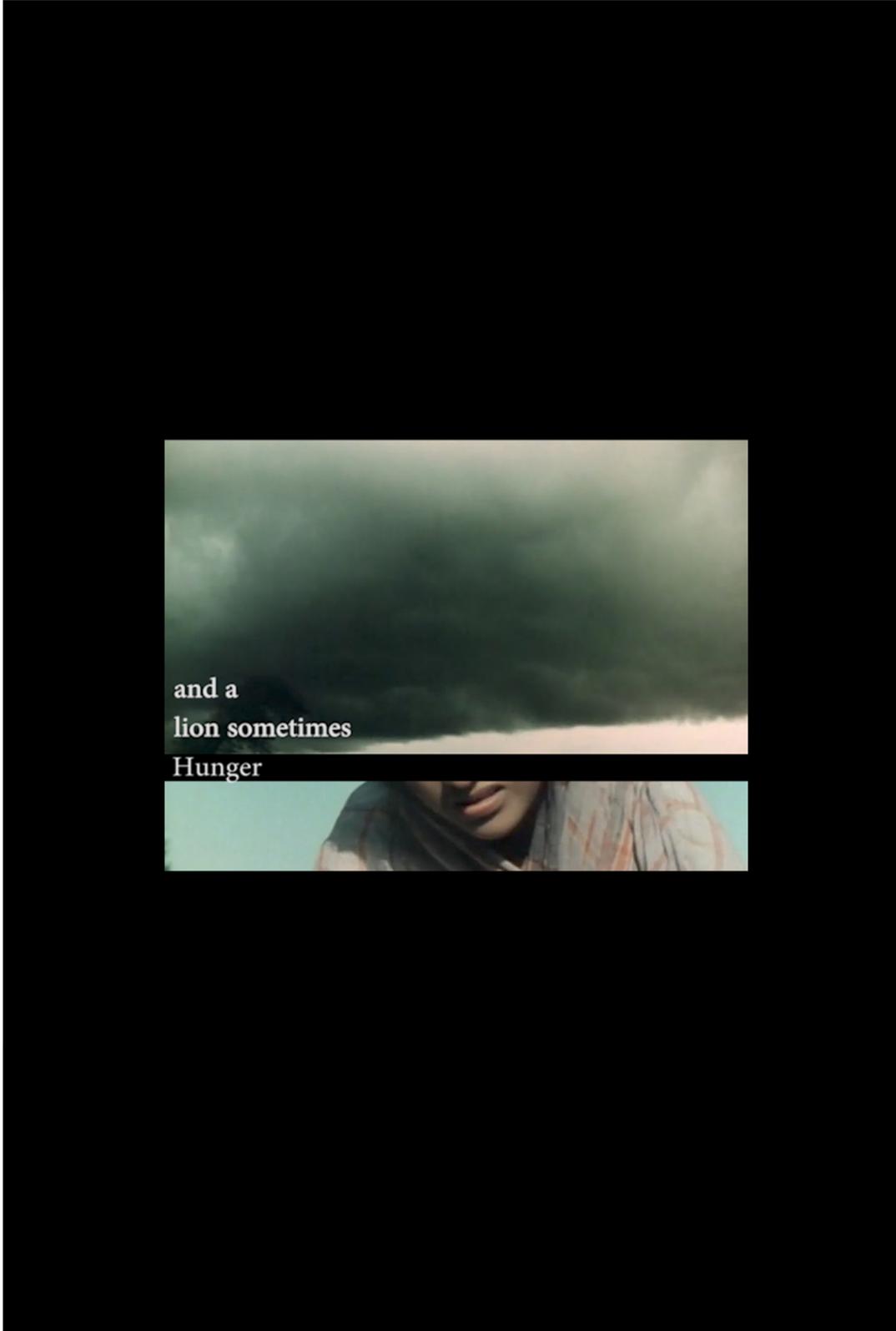
The film *Distant Thunder* is made by an elite, upper-caste filmmaker of international renown. It is based on a novel by an elite, upper-caste, novelist of great popularity within Bengal. In so far as its depiction of the tragic Bengal Famine goes, both the novel and the story are narrated by centering the life experiences of a young Brahmin couple (upper-caste).



Dalits (those without standing in the caste system, “the lowest of the low”) enter this narrative very briefly, and only as strategic props, to emphasize the humanistic conflicts that its central characters navigate and resolve.

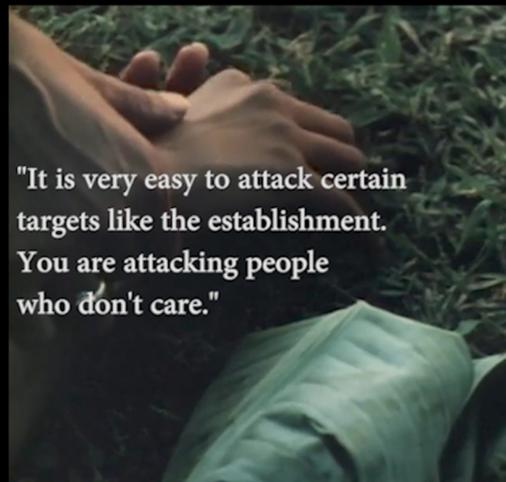
Caste, therefore, is reduced to an inconvenient (and albeit) unpleasant fact of life, rather than a systemic mode of oppression that mediates all life experiences including that of the famine.

In the narrative intervention, footage from the film is inter-cut, contrasted, and disrupted by lesser-known and lesser-celebrated texts from Dalit authors.



One of the texts is the poem “Hunger” by Marathi Dalit poet Namdeo Dhasal. The other is the poem “Portrait of My Village” by Tamil Dalit poet Sukirtharani. Both poets were contemporaneous to Ray and belong to a tradition of Dalit writing that emerged in the 1970s as a vehicle of self-representation and resistance against the opportunistic appropriation of Dalit experiences by upper-caste authors.

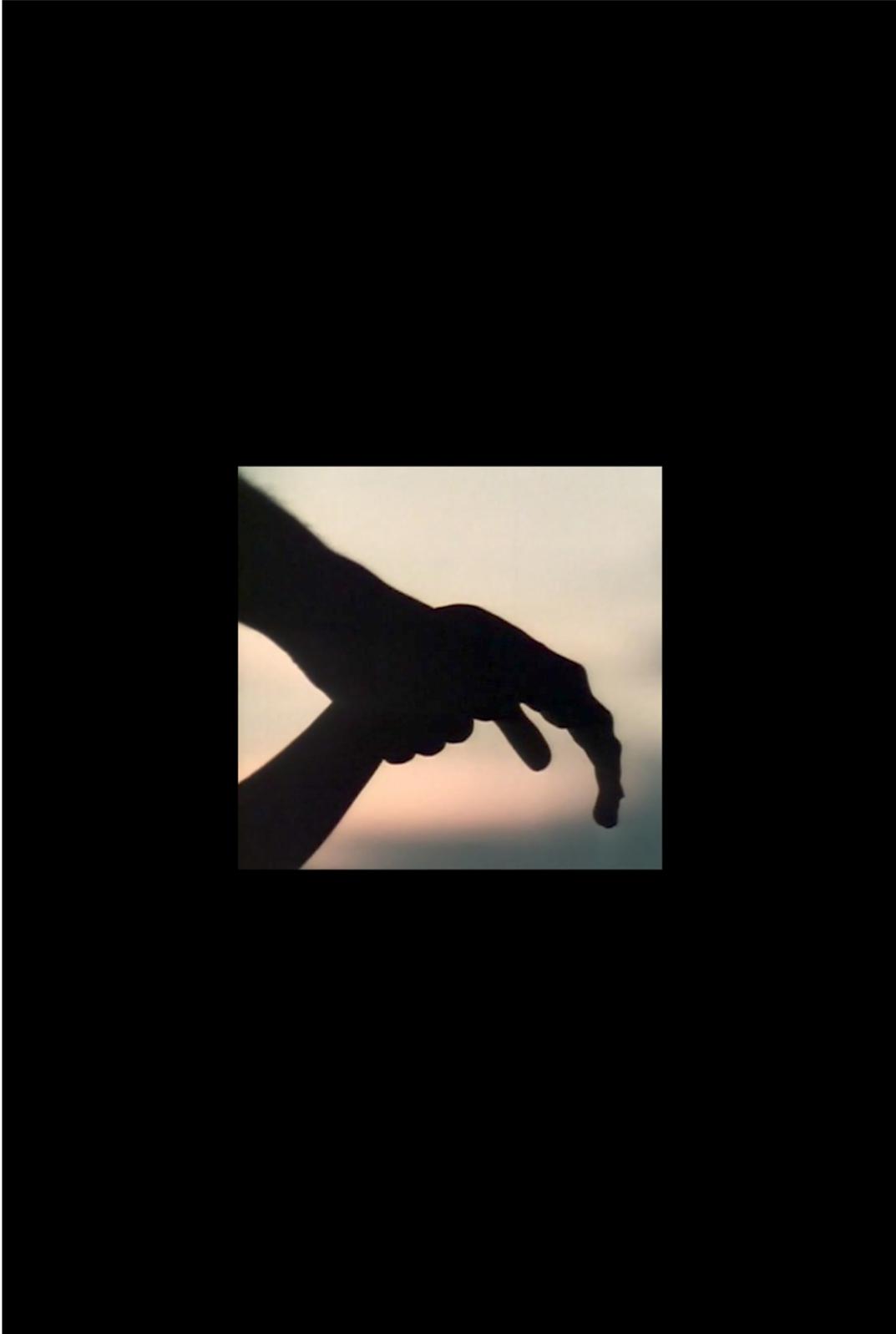
Ray has discussed his artistic choices—such as the use of colour in a film about a famine that has largely been represented through black and white images—in terms of the appeal to a universal humanity.



"It is very easy to attack certain targets like the establishment. You are attacking people who don't care."

This is intended to elicit sympathy for the victims of the famine who are embodied by Brahmins but must be presented as casteless. With sympathy and humanism being the driving emotion and logic behind the representation of Dalits in upper-caste art, Ranjan's intervention seeks to unsettle sympathy.

In the film, Ray posits Gangacharan and other Brahmin characters as the primary recipients of audience sympathy. Dalit suffering itself is never allowed to hold centre-stage. Thus, in foregrounding his Brahmin protagonists, Ray lets them stand in for the primary witnesses.



In doing so, he erases the distinction between the sufferer and the witnesses, rendering the latter more deserving of sympathy than the former.

This appeal to sympathy is disrupted by the video intervention through textual commentary that names and labels this crisis of witnessing in the contracts of making, viewing and listening, as they occur on screen.

This enquiry into the oral, textual and filmic representation of the famine and the question of caste, is an example of work on the politics of representation. There is a double sense of representation here: How is the famine told? Who is telling?

When the single measure of paddy -
flung to us for carrying away and burying



Section 05: Infant Wrapping Cloth

Birgitta Nordström is a weaver and textile artist who has been researching the use of textiles—blankets, shrouds, funeral palls – in situations of death, especially perinatal death. With a wide community of midwives and clinicians, and a weaving research team, she has developed extensive field studies with respect to radically early death /end of life.

The research is centered on the ways in which the dead body is covered, wrapped, supported, held, and dressed by specifically designed textiles, in cases of miscarriage, infant death, and late term abortion.

The enquiry is anchored in lived processes of navigating death in spaces of loss that are not always marked as grievable.

These different forms of perinatal death are not treated as a single common death, but rather as a differentiated field. Personhood is not necessarily invoked in the idea of death, but rather it is often a matter of the death that comes to the *not yet*: the not yet born; the not yet person; the not yet lived.

This is an enquiry through material making.

"I am speaking, acting, researching and writing from a maker's—from a weaver's—perspective. I often think of my loom as the point of departure. In my studio, thoughts and threads are linked together in the form of small-scale samples, or full lengths of fabric. When thinking of the outcome of my weaving, that is, in the making of textiles related to the death process, I place the crafting process and myself in a world of references that are situated between weaving and thoughts of time, or sometimes even a lack of time, a time limit."

It is also a collaborative enquiry that draws upon the different experiences and perspectives of different roles. A recent phase of the research (2017-2018) has been an open multicentre study, conducted in five obstetrics departments and one gynaecology clinic. This study examined the role of the textile objects within the different processes around wrapping, viewing and final farewell in different cases of perinatal death.

The outcomes of this strand of the research will be published shortly within the professional clinical peer review literature. Previously the research process has been communicated through exhibition and publishing in a number of different artistic and academic contexts.

The infant shrouds are often displayed as artefacts inviting the viewer to touch and understand the material qualities of the cloth. They are also represented in photographs that try to indicate the different textures and sizes of the cloth. We have combined both modes of display here.

What is not shown, however, is the material practice of wrapping a small dead body. The display of these images, texts and objects proposes an imaginative projection to another site, that is not here. The ways in which this other site is imagined can range from clinical abstraction to ritual; from sentimentality to dignity; from identification in personal memory to empathy from safe distance. This is a surface of contact with the dead body.





Section 06: Political Community with the Dead

I set out on this ground,
which I suppose to be self
evident, 'that the earth
belongs ... to the living':
that the dead have neither
powers nor rights over it ...
The earth belongs always to
the living generation.
(Thomas Jefferson,
letter to James Madison, 1789)

The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. (Karl Marx, 1852)

In these quotations, the 18th century American slave-owner and jurist and the 19th century European philosopher of capital appear to find agreement on one thing: the dead are dead, and they have no claim upon the political affairs of the living.

But what if we were to disagree? What if the dead do have a stake and claim upon community with the living?

This is not a question about old ghosts, revenants and spirits. The enquiry remains fixed in its attention upon material processes. If we give up the ghost, how do the dead make their claims?

It may at first, seem hard to even imagine what such a question—political community with the dead—could possibly mean, as a material practice.



This is an aerial image of Lampedusa island, Italy, part of the Pelagie Islands located in the central part of the Mediterranean between Europe and Africa. In October 2013 hundreds of asylum seekers were killed after a smugglers' boat thought to be carrying more than 500 people capsized.

Most of the passengers on the boat were Eritrean asylum seekers, fleeing from violent conflict and un-liveable lives. On the day after the mass drowning, the then Italian Premier Enrico Letta is reported to have announced to a British Council conference that: “The hundreds who lost their lives off Lampedusa yesterday are Italian citizens as of today.” It appears, that this rhetorical act of inclusion of the dead as Italian citizens, was translated in the end to the granting of a state funeral for the drowned.

This small story about the failures of European talk of human rights, can perhaps suggest something of the political inclusion / exclusion of the dead, if only by calling attention to the question of where the dead bodies go.

The philosopher Denise Ferreira Da Silva provides another image of the material inclusion of the dead within the world of the living. Discussing her collaboration with the artist-film maker Arjuna Neuman and the (2016) video *Serpent Rain* she reflects:

this "vital space" actually becomes ... what ... it is now, because it is constituted by these dead people who did not complete the voyage between the West African coast and the Americas or Europe. And not only the dead ones: those who completed the crossing to be sold as slaves also left traces of their bodies, as sweat, blood, urine, spit in the waters along the way ... traces of the flesh of the dead slaves remain here/now as part of the composition that is the Atlantic Ocean.

In these two citations – Letta’s dead of Lampedusa, and Da Silva’s vital space constituted by the dead – we might not yet have a full realisation of political community with the dead, but the question starts to become a little more concrete.

These two fragments of stories of brown and black bodies, of journeys over water, of people whose lives and deaths are structured by political exclusion, have a common focus on the human dead. The material continuity of the human body after death is key. But more than humans die: living things die; species die; whole ecologies die; languages die.

So who or what count as “the dead”?

Is political community asked exclusively as a question of the human dead?

For some, this talk of the “human” is a problem, or at least needs to be re-thought. Frantz Fanon, as he was dying, wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth* of a “Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them.” Fanon connects talk of humanity with killing, noting that when we search for the human “in the technique and the style of European thought,” we see only a succession of negations of the human, and “an avalanche of murders.”

Ewa Domanska notes that “dehumanisation in the symbolic world of culture” is part of this genocidal process. However, in the decomposition of the human body, another dehumanisation is activated as the cadaver rots. The dehumanisation of the dead body is its decomposition into “an organic multispecies environment.”

Writing from a different perspective, Rosi Braidotti, also challenges us not to centre our attention on human death:

Death is overrated ... (it) is after all only another phase in a generative process. Too bad that the ... powers of death require the suppression of that which is the nearest and dearest to me, namely myself, my own vital being-there. For the narcissistic human subject ... it is unthinkable that Life should go on without my being there. The process of confronting the thinkability of a Life that may not have 'me' or any 'human' at the centre is actually a sobering and instructive process.

For some, the dead become non-human "vital" matter, and the idea of political community loses its human-centric focus.

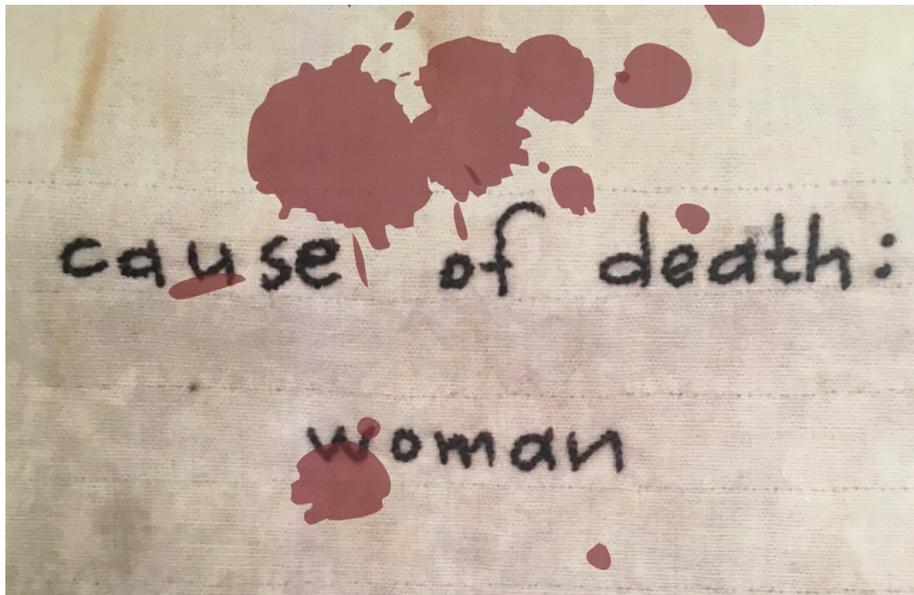
Tangled into the materiality of the dead, there is the question of the temporality of the dead: the newly dead; the dying; the ancient dead. We, the living generation will become the future dead. (And, as the saying goes, we will be a long time dead.)

How long does it take for something to show itself?



The room where they go to see the dead body before burial.

Section 07: Cause of death: WOMAN



In 2016 Jyoti Mistry worked with the EYE film museum archive in Amsterdam. She worked on an examination of the Dutch colonial period. The result was a diptych titled *When I grow up I want to be a Black Man* (2017) focusing on the connection between violence and freedom.

One screen works through an alphabet of violence. The second screen evokes potential, possibility, aspirations and ambitions for a future where the value of the black man in society is revitalised through a lexicon of freedom.

Through this research, I discovered images, impressions and film sequences which remained unresolved or required further interrogation. In the current work, I return to the archive in order to explore their possibilities and to work through the images from the perspective of addressing women's experiences and the multiple (de)values placed on women's bodies.

While the earlier work uses the image and body of a black man, the current project *Cause of Death: WOMAN* works as a compendium piece. It interrogates the historical, political and cultural currency placed on the lives and bodies of women.

Bare life (*homo sacer*) is a way of describing the power of the sovereign state (through law) over the life of persons.

For women this relationship to bare life is experienced not just through the law but through a matrix of socio-cultural contracts, (at times) through religious affiliations and through the embodied experiences of the economy of morality.

Case No.

OFFICE OF MEDICAL EXAMINER

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION BY MEDICAL EXAMINER

DECEDENT First Name Middle Name Last Name RACE SEX AGE

HOME ADDRESS M W S D OCCUPATION:

TYPE OF DEATH: Violent Casualty Suicide Suddenly when in apparent health Found Dead In Prison Suspicious, unusual or unnatural Cremation

Comment

If Motor Vehicle Accident Check One: Driver Passenger Pedestrian Unknown

Notification by Address

Investigating Agency

Description of Body Clothed Unclothed Partly Clothed

Eyes Hair Mustache Beard

Weight Pounds Length Feet Inches Body Temp Farenheit Date and Time

Rigor: Yes No Lysed Liver Color Fixed Non-Fixed

Marks and Wounds

[Dotted lines for notes]

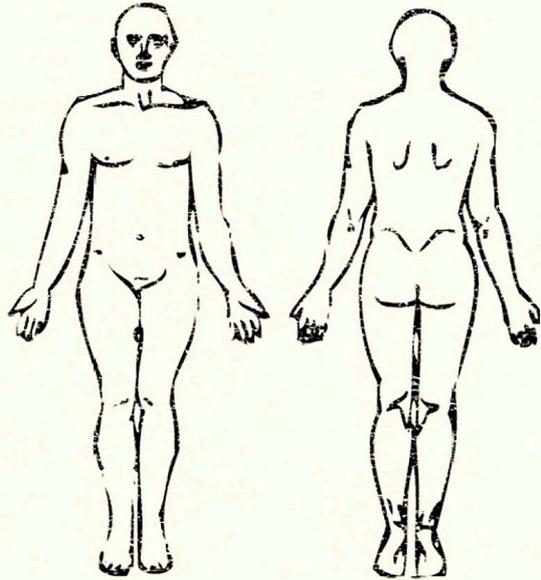


Table with 3 columns: CAUSE OF DEATH, MANNER OF DEATH (check one only), DISPOSITION OF CASE (1. Not a medical examiner case, 2. Autopsy requested, Autopsy ordered, Pathologist)

I hereby declare that after receiving notice of the death described herein I took charge of the body and made inquiries regarding the cause of death in accordance with Section 21-830-33-69(b) Massachusetts Code Annotated and that the information contained herein regarding such death is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Date Place of Investigation

The deeply entrenched understanding of the self (gender biopolitics) is informed by the psychosocial context which has determined the inherent value that women themselves attach to their own lives and their bodies.

Cause of Death: WOMAN shifts the statistics of the body-count to provide a forensic analysis of the social, cultural and legal conditions that structure the dispensability of women in life and in death.

Section 08: the coming death

These different scenes of research—each touching upon questions of death in different ways—are rehearsed here together in simple form. The larger research scenario that they comprise exists in an outline and provisional form at this point. Over the course of this summer, researchers and students will consider some of the possible co-habitations of death that these different enquiries may suggest in their encounter and disagreement with each other, a research micro-ecology of sorts.

This work will be developed both here in the pavilion, and elsewhere. (In matters of exhibition, there seems always to be a relay to another site.)

Please join us for a workshop with students on “necropolitics” in the pavilion on Monday 5th and Tuesday 6th of August.

There will also be a conference on “material encounters” in the pavilion on Tuesday 20th and Wednesday 21st of August. See the research pavilion website for more details.

