



Nihiliphobia

[Expeditions into the Unknown # 1-15]

Carla Liesching

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[Expeditions into the Unknown #1 – 15]

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Catalogue no.21

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Carla Liesching
February 2014

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Diving Past the Wreck

What language will we speak in the abyss?

Genna Gardini

If there was a total annihilation of all past structures, what possibilities could arise from the rubble?

(Liesching, personal interview, December 2013)

Understanding is something one does best when one is on the borderline.

(Høeg, 1995:6)

When I was about twenty years old, a friend and I snuck into what we assumed was the closed-up Rhodes Drama Department. It was a mercilessly hot day in Grahamstown, during the purgatorial period just before the institutional year ends, and we were looking for refuge. We decided to steal into the back of the building's largest theatre and lie down on its cool floor. We reasoned that since it was the interim time between practical and theoretical exams, it seemed unlikely that anyone would be around. But we were wrong. After noisily prying open a backstage door, we found ourselves collapsed in the middle of an exhibition of photographs, surrounded by at least twenty people looking at them (and, after that entrance, us). This was my first encounter with Carla Liesching's work.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the hysterical theatricality of our arrival, I felt an immediate affinity with certain aspects of Liesching's photographs. A year ahead of me at Rhodes, the artist was a BFA student who took electives in Drama and intended to become a photographer. I was a Drama student who took electives in Art History and monologued incessantly about becoming a poet. Recently, after being asked to write about Liesching's latest show, I considered my unusual introduction to her photographs and realised that it was her concern around language which, much like the backstage door I had jimmed loose, had allowed me entry to her work. In *Nihiliphobia [Expeditions into the Unknown #1-15]*, her second solo exhibition at BRUNDYN+, Liesching continues to investigate how language can assist in creating, documenting and destroying an understanding of geography. Looking through these pictures, I was reminded of poet Anne Michaels writing that "language took apart landscapes" (1997: 53, line 81).

In conversation around the exhibition, Liesching speaks about her interest in mapping as a means to both control and understand geographical spaces (Liesching, personal interview, December 2013). I found myself intrigued by her assertion that one can use language, or even the discernable absence of a spoken or written language, in mapmaking. Diane Arbus' famous quote, that a picture is a secret about a secret, is often rehashed in writing around the form (Doty, 1974:20). Liesching's work, however, feels like a silence about a sentence. Each image takes place in the moment between the word and the punctuation. It is into

this chasm that Liesching asks her questions.

The title of the exhibition is taken from an episode of the television show *Star Trek: Voyager*. The term 'nihiliphobia' was created for the show to describe the dread fear of nothingness experienced by the ship's Doctor as he travels past a void in space. Discussing the title, Liesching explains that she stumbled across it during a sort of web warp, bored and burrowing her way along the internet. After her discovery, she found herself looking through old notebooks and saw an entry where she had instructed herself to find a word for the fear of the oblivion. In this titling, Liesching is looking at a terrifying proximity to obliteration but also, importantly, the attempt to control that fear by studying it. That the title should come from *Star Trek: Voyager* seems thematically correct. The show was a spin-off from an earlier TV series, referencing a history but alternatively using and deviating from what came before. As part of the science fiction genre, it feels linked to Liesching's vision of an apocalyptic, dystopian future. That Liesching chose a term created during and for the *Voyager* incarnation of the series seems to speak to the exploratory nature of her exhibition. The exhibition is, technically, labelled as showcasing [*Expeditions into the Unknown #1-15*]. By numbering her forays into what is positioned as the border between the physically traversable and the abyss, Liesching implies that there is both a limit and a limitlessness to the journeys.

Speaking about the imagined world created in *Nihiliphobia*, the artist explains that "the framework that I set up is that I am a scientist explorer... I am venturing forth into this unknown space, unknown terrain, and I'm just observing" (Liesching, personal interview, December 2013). In preparation for the series, Liesching investigated various sites in both her native South Africa and adopted home, New York. These sites, although currently abandoned, show discernable signs of human intervention (here a deserted mine collapsing into the Johannesburg horizon, there a tunnel cylindrically ploughed through part of a mountain). After deciding on a space, she introduced her performer (often, it seems, someone with whom she has a personal relationship) into it to create a story. It is out of these experimentations that Liesching establishes both a world and a confrontation between her own character and that of her subjects. "I don't know whether these people I'm encountering are other explorers or whether they are the natives of this place," she says. "I'm just documenting them without knowing, really, who they are" (Liesching, personal interview, December 2013). For Michaels, the discovery of another human makes the artist conscious that landscapes exist both around and inside of her body:

There's another skin inside my skin
that gathers to your touch,
a lake to the light;
that loses its memory, its lost language
into your tongue,
erasing me into newness (1997: 83, lines 1 -6)

This mirroring of geography in both the physical body and the writing around it is apparent in Liesching's set of field notes. The photographer creates but also destroys her own maps by positioning images of her

field notes to circle, or gravitate, around each central image. Tasked, by herself or perhaps by an unseen other (although this seems unlikely in the documentation of a world where we are not shown tribes but, rather, a series of individuals reacting to their surroundings), she ‘writes’ notes about the subject and location. These notes are then put through a process of destruction to imitate, in a way, the images they orbit. Like the landscape, the field notes are human-made, a construct forced from and then onto nature. By using materials like paper or glass, Liesching references their origins in nature and the process, facilitated by humans, which moulded them in their current form. Each note is then re-wrecked, if you will, in a method that mimics the landscape and the position of the sitter. The result nullifies whatever might or might not have been recorded in the note. By showing us her damaged field notes Liesching seems to suggest something about the ramifications of attempting to impose meaning through language. That it is difficult to tell whether these notes are written upon or left blank is also important – the content is negated by her manipulation. All that matters is that they could have held written language or the potential for it. If language, or the potential for language, is an imposition, then these notes are further imposed: twisted, exploded and suspended, they reference how humans treat land and their own abandonment, by will or force, of the places they have interceded into.



Carla Liesching
In which Nicole Sends a Signal to the Outside
2014

Two of the strongest photographs in the series, in my opinion, *In which Nicole Sends a Signal to the Outside* and *In which Mmakgosi is the Wreck of Hope*, feel like speeches around the problem of language. In the former, the subject stands surrounded by white sand, clad in clothing that seems to match the environment, a smoke signal puffing besides her. In the latter, the subject is posed against white cardboard structures, denoting wreckage, staring at the camera, impenetrable. This reminded me of the work of poet Adrienne Rich who positions the poet and photographer in the role of the explorer. In “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning”, Rich discusses how language problematizes experience by setting up borders in and around it, making it difficult to negotiate and move through. She sees language as an imposition on both physical and emotional geography, writing:

I want you to see this before I leave
the experience of repetition as death
...the language is a dialect called metaphor...
When I think of a landscape I am thinking of a time.
When I talk of taking a trip I mean forever.
I could say, these mountains have a meaning
but further than that I could not say” (1993:44, lines 6 – 17)

Like Rich, Liesching implicates herself in her work, navigating her way through an uncertain terrain. The construction of each group of images, which include one of the subject in the landscape surrounded by photographs of Liesching’s field notes, self-consciously speak to the artist’s understanding that the tools used to comprehend or translate are also the tools used to harm. Margaret Atwood writes that “as explorer she is detached; she carries a knife to cut her way in, cut structures apart; a camera to record; and the book of myths itself” (1974:281). Liesching seems aware that her tools for understanding a landscape are also the tools



Carla Liesching
In which Mmakgosi is the Wreck of Hope
2014

which construct the dividing of that landscape. “The moment we created a language, we started to create a map,” she says (Liesching, personal interview, December 2013). Here, it felt like Liesching was channelling Rich, whose poem ‘Diving into the Wreck’ reads, “I came to explore the wreck./The words are purposes./ The words are maps” (1993:54, lines 52 – 54).

Much has been written about the relationship between poetry and photography. The notoriously cantankerous Philip Larkin both congratulated and derided the form for being “as no art is,/ faithful and disappointing! that records/ dull days as dull” (2004:41). Although Larkin’s summation feels difficult to take seriously in an age where Instagram filters can de-dullify any image, his positioning of photography in opposition to other creative forms is of interest. If he believes that photography can capture and transmit a moment in all of its tedious familiarity, he seems to lump his own art, poetry, in with those which do not and perhaps cannot. The poem’s title ‘Lines on a Young Lady’s Photography Album’ implies that words function as a tool which irreparably divides as it attempts to define (2004:41). Like Rich, Michaels, when considering photography, understands it to be the way in which (some) travellers decode and interpret a landscape which is foreign to them. For Michaels, the camera is a device which simultaneously translates, stakes a claim over and escapes the unknown. Unlike Larkin, she considers the camera and the photograph as a metaphor for the mind and the word: one is used to produce the other (1997:24).

In one of the *Nihiliphobia* photographs, titled *In which Candy Faces an Abyss*, Candy is posed on a rock, just above a body of questionably murky water. One of her hands holds a string connected to a complicated, geometrical assortment of white paper shapes assembled on the land behind her. The other is angled towards the lake, which lies flat and uninterrupted. If language is the complicated construction placed on top of an existing landscape, mimicking its shape as if it is trying to be a part of it, then silence is the abyss. On the day I broke into the Rhodes theatre and first discovered Liesching’s work, I was eventually shuttled off to my friend’s childhood home, abandoned for the holidays. Standing on the hot, chalky cement outside, we stared the pool before us, so thick and green with algae that it seemed almost impossible to determine what lay beneath. I took a breath and then I dove.



Carla Liesching
In which Candy Faces an Abyss
2014

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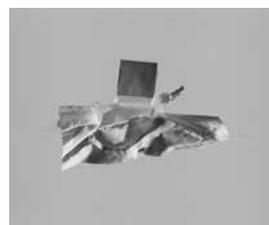
Nihiliphobia

[Expeditions into the Unknown #1 – 15]

Image Plates



(Above)
In which Candy Faces an Abyss
2014



(Above, Top)
Field Note #17: Crevice
2014

(Above, Middle)
Field Note #15: Floating Island, Side View
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #16: Floating Island, Front View
2014



(Above, Top)
Field Note #29: Globe Dissection, Day 3
2014

(Above, Middle)
Field Note #30: Paint Sphere
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #31: Paint Brush
2014



(Above)
In which Nicole Sends a Signal to the Outside
2014

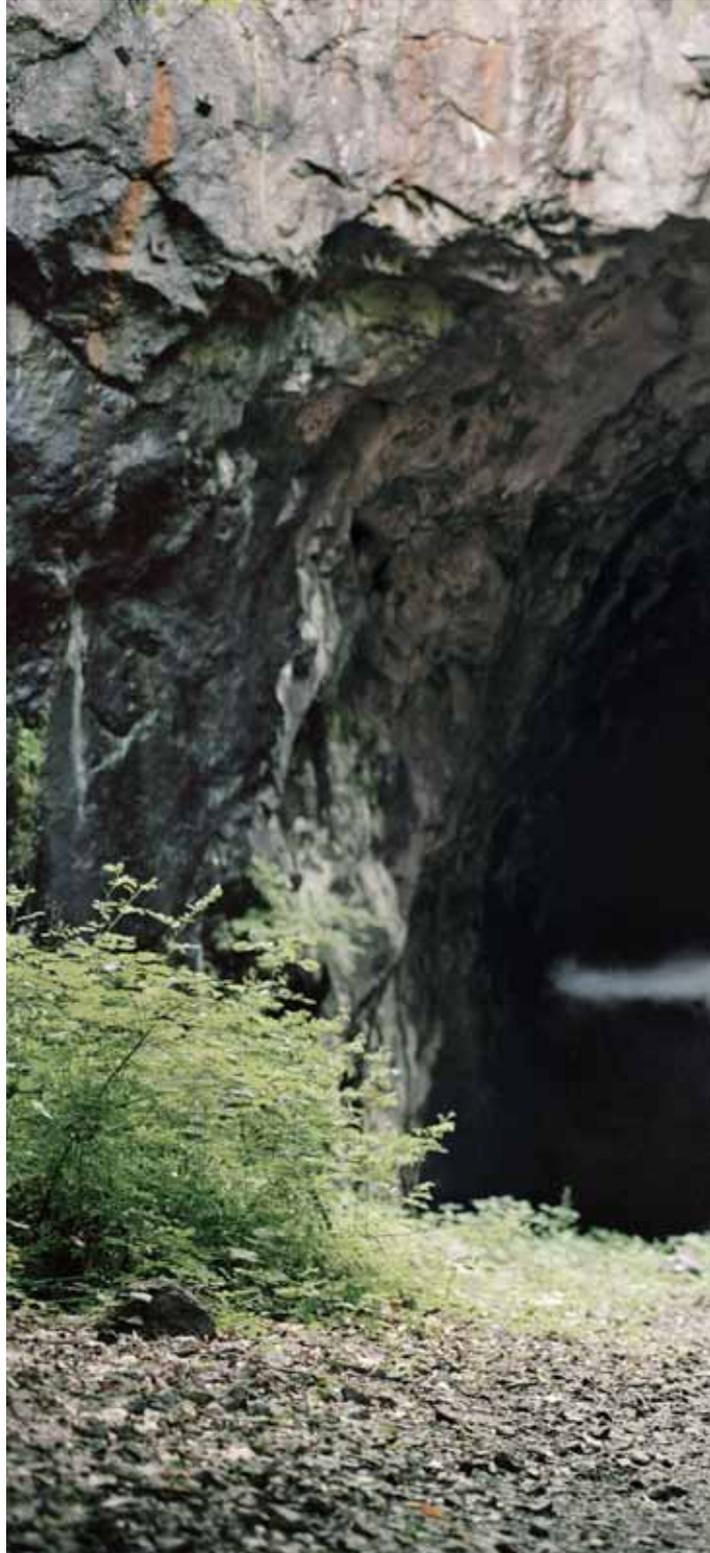


(Above)
In which Lauren Braves an Unknown Peril
2014



(Above, Top)
Field Note #32: Raft
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #33: Raft, Detail
2014



(Above, Top)
Field Note #21: Tool
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #20: Collision
2014



(Above)
*In which Tinkabell Discovers the Shortest
Distance between Two Points*
2012



(Above)
*In which Jens is Marooned due to Stormy
Weather*
2014



(Above, Top)

Field Note #34: Wave
2014

(Above, Top Middle)

Field Note #35: Boat in Wave
2014

(Above, Bottom Middle)

Field Note #36: Cloud
2014

(Above, Bottom)

Field Note #37: Wreck
2014



(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #25: Tunnel
2014



(Above)
*In which Ritchie Journeys to the Center of the
Earth*
2014

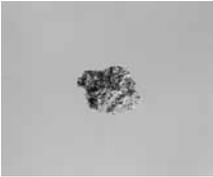


(Above)
In which Kate Finds Water
2014



(Above, Top)
Field Note #18: Oracle Rock, Day 1
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #19: Oracle Rock, Day 2
2014



(Above, Top)

Field Note #6: Mine
2014

(Above, Middle Left)

Field Note #8: Minerals
2014

(Above, Middle Right)

Field Note #7: Stake
2014

(Above, Bottom)

Field Note #9: Minerals
2014



(Above)
In which Natasha Stakes a Claim
2014



(Above)
*In which Shibe-Jane is an Impenetrable
Fortress*
2014



(Above, Top)
Field Note #12: Fort
2014

(Above, Middle)
Field Note #13: Fire
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #14: Remains
2014



(Above, Top)
Field Note #2: Book Island
2014

(Above, Middle)
Field Note #10: Rock Marking
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #11: Rock Piles
2014

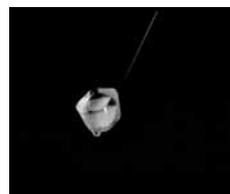




(Above)
In which Sebastian Conquers an Island
2014



(Above)
In which Edward Melts the Ice
2014



(Above, Top)
Field Note #38: Iceberg
2014

(Above, Top Middle)
Field Note #40: Solid, Day 1
2014

(Above, Bottom Middle)
Field Note #41: Liquid, Day 2
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #39: Iceberg Dissection
2014



(Above, Top)
Field Note #42: Preserved Artifact
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #43: Preserved Remains
2014





(Above)
*In which Peter Jhon Leaves his Shelter and
Embarks on a Great Adventure
2014*



(Above)
In which Sophie Lets Go of the Rope
2012



(Above, Top)
Field Note #22: Explosion
2014

(Above, Middle)
Field Note #23: Black Hole
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #24: Strange New Form
2014



(Above, Top)
Field Note #26: Globe
2014

(Above, Middle)
Field Note #27: Globe Dissection, Day 1
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #28: Globe Dissection, Day 2
2014





(Above)
In which John Keeps an Eye on the Horizon
2014



(Above)
In which Mmakgosi is the Wreck of Hope
2014



(Above, Top)
Field Note #1: Blank Book
2014

(Above, Top Middle)
Field Note #3: Curious Transition
2014

(Above, Bottom Middle)
Field Note #4: Mountain
2014

(Above, Bottom)
Field Note #5: Peak
2014



(Above)
Lauren Study
2014



(Above)
Kate Study
2014



(Above)
Shibe-Jane Study
2014



(Above)
Edward Study
2014

The Site of Loss

A transcription of a conversation between Kate Arthur, Jacqueline Nurse and Carla Liesching

KA – Whenever you speak about your work, ideas related to geography come up. Would you say that geography is your muse?

CL – Ha! Yes. I like that: Geography reclining on a couch in my studio! If I have to get to the heart of it though, in this body of work I'm looking at human relationship to structure and order, in a broad sense. I'm interested in why we need to map everything out, and that's where geography comes in. I've always had an interest in the social ordering of space, how the setting up of boundaries and borders affects us – our identity, society...

JN – It affects language, politics...

CL – It affects everything. I *am* interested in an *actual*, physical geography, but I'm also interested in geography as a metaphor for all sorts of systems and structures.

JN – Do you think your interest is primarily in the idea of geography post-Imperialism? Of course before Imperialism there were structures – tribal, territorial and so on. But Imperialism brought a very different kind of mapping with it, the development of nation states enclosed by quite arbitrary borders.

CL – I think my interest is primarily what lies underneath that. I'm more interested in the desire, or drive – what is it in human psychology that drove us toward Imperialism, for example? But Imperialism is only one extreme example of that kind of mapping. I've spoken about geography as a metaphor for the self, and what I mean is that we do it in our everyday lives, in our understanding of ourselves. The moment we created a language, we created a map, and that was way before Imperialism. The moment we name ourselves, we're creating a separate state. We're saying: *I am separate from you*. It happens on the smallest level in yourself, and then it gets bigger and bigger. But yes, I do have a preoccupation with colonial exploration and navigation, and I have quite a weird ambivalent relationship to those explorers. I admire them but also don't, when I think about the consequences of their enterprise.

JN – If you look at that process of exploration, and the fact that it's always problematic and complicated anyway, it's quite a fabulous metaphor for the way that we build ourselves, map our relationships to ourselves, to other people, to our own landscapes, to where we 'belong.' I suppose that is some of what [your earlier body of work] *The Swimmers* was about – where you belong and how you overcome the sense of not belonging in a particular place. This is now looking underneath what you were looking at then. This work has in itself been an exploratory process.

CL – Yes. During that time, I think I was so affected by that feeling of homelessness, needing to belong somewhere, I dreamed up a category for my

own tribe: a group of humans who live in a post-national, post-territory, post-home world; or a world where we are beyond that conception of “home”.

JN – “Fluid” is a word you’ve used before, which I find interesting, it makes so much sense. You’ve spoken about the inherent contradictions in *The Swimmers*...

CL – There was an interesting contradiction. While making it I felt quite grand: ‘*We are a new band of wanderers!*’ – we exist in fluidity, we are not static, this is who we are! Over time and in reflection, I realised I had set up a category again, a closed system. I’d closed the borders; there was an inside and an outside; we were defined by who we are not.

KA – But it’s really difficult *not* to categorise.

JN – Well, it’s ingrained in our language.

CL – That realisation was a turning point. It was a real crisis! I began to question whether it is even possible to exist fluidly. I don’t know! And that’s where this work began, with the question of possibilities...

KA – Although, I remember the work looking quite different when it started out.

CL – It started as a ‘tent series’. The idea was to build child-like, makeshift home structures out of blankets, sheets and cardboard in various landscapes, which I then documented. That’s where the white structures in the final works come from. I was in the process of moving continents, I think I was just trying to make safe places for myself, as though I could close the door and live in there for a while.

KA – The white structures, as they are now, are certainly a progression from those initial tents – they’re no longer specifically home structures, but they’re still flimsy, temporary constructions...

CL – I see them as fragments of those little tents I needed in the beginning. But they’ve come to mean many things now, fragments of all sorts of systems and narratives...

JN – And that brings us back to the question of possibility. It’s not implausible to imagine that at some point, the way things work could change completely, especially because we sense the instability already. I think most generations see grave, vast differences between theirs and the previous one. But what’s happening with ours is that, where our parents and grandparents might have rebelled against the structures of previous generations by taking a reactionary stance, ours isn’t really doing that, because we can’t, it doesn’t work anymore. We’ve tried – we do, we flail around and we try – but we are getting to a point where we are able to take bits and pieces. I feel like it’s a serious process of recognising the narrative in our everyday lives. Realising that these things are relative and moveable... It doesn’t mean there’s no structure whatsoever, it’s just not linear anymore.

CL – The recognition of fiction is vital. And it’s so pertinent to the framework

of how I'm exploring these questions. It's liberating to recognise that the map you've drawn of yourself is a narrative, a story, theatre you play out every day, it becomes a lot easier to let go of... it's more malleable. The idea of a single 'truth' is what's problematic.

JN – It's fundamentalism. Letting go of fundamentals. I think we probably need some of them. To let go of them all seems nihilistic, beyond any real purpose that's really going to get us anywhere new.

CL – But the danger is that we tend to get too caught up in believing them, so much so that we fight wars over them. This project has been helpful for me in learning to be open. I try not to think in terms of hierarchies and divisions, right/wrong, good/bad etc. I do find myself doing it anyway though.

JN – The 'field-notes' in this body of work: why faux-science - the reference to journals or textbooks? Is it because, historically, those are the kinds of places where you find the positing of that kind of fundamental this-is-the-truth?

CL – Exactly. By 'systematically' documenting both the inhabitants and artifacts of an imaginary place, I'm trying to use role-play as a tool to parody these ontological structures that we have created over the centuries. But it's not only parody. There's sincerity too in that it's an exercise in earnestly trying to understand the mechanics of those kinds of systems, to pick things apart. Role-play allows me to look at things from different angles.

KA – Can you speak about your process? I'm interested in the theatrical aspect. What types of narratives were you playing out?

CL - The portraits on location were quite cathartic exercises because we were actually, I mean, physically, traversing unknown terrain - sometimes quite treacherous terrain in fact, especially with an old medium-format camera in tow. So there was something quite fanciful about it. The field-notes were quieter. I imagined that I was an explorer at the end of a hard day's exploring, sitting around a campfire jotting notes in my journal about the specimens and artifacts I had 'collected' during the day. Under the light cast by my camp-fire/studio, I could study, dissect, distill and explode these things. I could set them on fire to see their reactions; I could measure or preserve the remains. I was really trying to look at processes of construction and deconstruction. Also, by making something only to destroy it, I was practicing the act of letting go. The task itself was allegorical? It wasn't destruction for destruction's sake, but about the possibilities... What can grow on this site of loss?

KA – So you're playing the role of the anthropologist, the ethnographer, studying and documenting imaginary uncharted territory. Destroying something in order to make other kinds of knowledge possible.

JN - The parody really shakes the certainty of the records we have.

CL – You know, the first atlas was called 'The Theatrum'. Those cartographers called it 'theatre': the theatre of the world. They were aware of the invented nature of such a thing as a country, but over time we've forgotten that they're manmade inventions.

JN – And now the lines are there, it's difficult to move them.

KA – The absurdity of the lines is profound though. They're an illusion, but also very real. You're not allowed to cross certain boundaries unless you have a piece of paper, but there's nothing on the surface of the actual land...it's so extreme... to say this is "X" and one step forward it's an entirely different nation. There's literally a footstep between being South African and Namibian, for instance.

CL – It indicates our deep-seated fear of... What is it? And that's my question, actually. What are we so afraid of? Why is it so difficult to erase that map, in all its literal and metaphorical manifestations? I suppose part of it is simply the familiarity. To move away from the familiar is to dive into an abyss...it's terrifying. If we annihilate everything we know, then we don't have any more signposts. How do we go on from there? That's the crisis.

KA – Are these characters grappling with that?

CL – Yes, absolutely. They're simultaneously grasping for and letting go of phantom structures. They want a different future, a radical cut from the existing order, but they are terrified of the blank space, the nothingness that might come after...

JN – Tell me about the title.

CL – 'Nihiliphobia' means the fear of nothingness. It's a fictional phobia from a *Star Trek* episode. One of the characters is travelling through a part of space called The Void, and he has a panic attack because he has 'nihiliphobia.'

KA - I love that it comes from *Star Trek*, the reference to science fiction.

CL - This work is very influenced by sci-fi and fantasy. I've been reading a lot of Jules Verne, so it's old science fiction, but still, fantasies of how the world could be in the future.

JN – And how the unmapped, unexplored territories of the world could be – how it could be under the ground, on the other side of the world, in all these places that we don't have access to and don't necessarily know that much about. What is it like underneath the sea...?

CL – Twenty thousand leagues under the sea! I added 'Expeditions into the Unknown #1-15' because, aside from the fact that it speaks to the Jules Verne/ Faux-Scientist aspect, 'Nihiliphobia' on its own doesn't indicate that I am seeking it out. My characters are active in their desire for movement and growth.

KA – What types of locations were you looking for, for these narratives to play themselves out?

CL – The portraits were staged in places where humans have made an intervention into the natural or existing landscape, mostly in abandoned mines and quarries. The first thing that attracted me to these spaces was the evidence of destruction, explosions, things crumbling – they indicated a feeling of apocalypse. But I began to realise that one of the most interesting aspects of these spaces was that they are literal sites of meaning-creation. In these sites,

we have mined the earth in order to obtain raw materials to build both our physical and social structures. Ritchie, for example, was shot in *The Widow Jane Mine*, where they excavated the cement used to build the Brooklyn Bridge and the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. A few of them were iron mines, used to make cannons in the American Civil War. And of course, there's a gold mine in Johannesburg. Tinkabell was shot in an abandoned railway tunnel. The tunnel was blasted in 1910 to make a pathway through a mountain, but for some reason it was never finished...so now there's this mountain with a random hole in the middle. It's a strange sight, if you're walking through the forest and suddenly there's a giant black hole in your path.

JN – You've also presented them as fantasy spaces, and that really opens them up so they can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

CL – It's important to me, in terms of the visual reading of the work, that the borders of the meaning remain as open as possible, just in the same way as I am trying to keep the borders of my self as open as possible.

JN – Trying to fix it would go against what you're trying to do.

CL – Meaning is never fixed, but it's tempting to try to fix it anyway. Of course I'm trying to communicate something, but I don't want to hold onto my meaning and my articulation. I don't want to draw too specific a map for how to navigate these images and the relationships between them. I just want to offer up a few possibilities; a few imaginary places...and the borders need to stay open.

Extractions

#I -28

1.

I thought only of Earth. It was Earth that caused each of us to be that someone he was rather than someone else; up there, [on the moon] wrested from the Earth, it was as if I were no longer that I... I was eager to return to the Earth, and I trembled at the fear of having lost it. ...Torn from its earthly soil, my love now knew only this heart-rending nostalgia for what it lacked: a where, a surrounding, a before, an after.

- Italo Calvino, *The Distance of The Moon*, 1976 in *Cosmicomics* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 7

2.

Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is build up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.

- Simon Schama, 1995, *Introduction to Landscape and Memory*, (Vintage Edition, 1996) 6-7

3.

The scientific attitude, understood as the application of ‘epistemological’ thinking to acquired knowledge, is assumed to be “structurally” linked to the spatial sphere.’

- Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1974 (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991), 3

4.

To be a subject in this regime is to be located, to have an orientation. To speak is to speak from, to or in. To know something is to have ‘mapped’ its discursive operation as a function of the juxtaposed, the in-between, the liminal, the outside, the inside, the series and the site.

- Con Coroneos, *Space, Conrad and Modernity*, 2002 (Oxford University Press Inc., 2008), 3

5.

The infinite world has been destroyed. In its place is a new form of closed space: the space of the site. According to Foucault, this is the ‘anxiety of our age.’

- Con Coroneos, *Space, Conrad and Modernity*, 2002 (Oxford University Press Inc., 2008), 32

6.

Over the centuries, space has been many things - a container, a thing contained;

a void; a plenum; a category of perception or its medium; the Cartesian res extensa and the Klein bottle or torus of Lacanian subjectivity. To go deeply in to space is to risk vertigo, an aboriginal horror of void, an encounter with slumbering unreason. To master such terrors, indeed it is necessary to regain control of space.

- Con Coronos, *Space, Conrad and Modernity*, 2002 (Oxford University Press Inc., 2008), 5

7.

The eternal silence of infinite spaces terrifies me.

- Pascal, Libertin, *Pensees* 1656-7, (published 1670), 201

8.

What is vertigo? Fear of falling? [...] No, vertigo is something other than the fear of falling. It is the voice of the emptiness below us, which tempts and lures us, it is the desire to fall, against which, terrified, we defend ourselves.

- Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 1984, (Faber and Faber Ltd., 1991), 58

9.

At the tip

Of the always dark

Of new beginnings.

- A.H.Reynolds – poetry reading at the Bronx County Hall, NY, Spring 1990; quoted by Iain Chambers in “Migrant Landscapes,” in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, 1994 (Routledge, 1994), 9

10.

[...] Now when I was little [...] I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours [...] and lose myself in the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the Earth [...] scattered about the Equator and in every sort of latitude all over the two hemispheres. [...] But there was one yet - the biggest, the most blank, so to speak, that I had a hankering after.

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1899 (London, Penguin Ltd., 1995), 21-22

11.

There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I've met in my life. We were German, English, Hungarian, African – all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states.

The desert could not be claimed or owned – it was a piece of cloth carried by

winds, never held down by stones and given a hundred shifting names...All of us... wished to remove the clothing of our countries...We disappeared into landscape...

Still, some wanted their mark there. On that dry water-course, on this shingled knoll...But I wanted to erase my name...After ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation.”

- Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 1992 (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), 148

12.

Individual or group, we are traversed by lines, meridians, geodesics, tropics and zones, marching to different beats and differing in nature.

- Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1988 (The Athlone Press, 1988), 7

13.

Language is not primarily a means of communication; it is, above all, a means of cultural construction in which our very selves and sense are constituted.

- Iain Chambers, “Migrant Landscapes,” in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, 1994 (Routledge, 1994), 22

14.

“Yet these roaring waters” said Neville, “upon which we build our crazy platforms are more stable than the wild, the weak and the inconsequent cries that we utter when, trying to speak, we rise; when we reason and jerk out these false sayings, ‘I am this; I am that!’ Speech is false.”

- Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, 1931 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 113

15.

This fictive whole, this ‘I’, is, as Nietzsche would have it, a life-preserving fiction, one that conserves us, and saves us from the discontinuities of the unconscious, from schizophrenia, self-destruction and the entropy of madness. It is this knot, the interminable tying together of the stories across the ‘resistance to identity at the very heart of the psychic life’, that holds us together...Such a construction, however imaginary and fictive the apparent resolution it offers – the whole, the full and complete ‘I’ – is also a his-story, a her-story, a cultural narrative, a fabricated reality like any other... If we here recall Nietzsche’s insistence on the fictive character of the world, we are invariably reminded of the mutability of our construction.

- Iain Chambers, “Migrant Landscapes,” in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, 1994 (Routledge, 1994), 26

16.

Parmenides posed this very question in the sixth century... He saw the world divided in pairs of opposites: light/darkness, fineness/coarseness, warmth/cold, being/non-being. One half of the opposition he called positive (light, fineness, warmth, being), the other negative. We might find this division into positive and negative poles childishly simple except for one difficulty: which one is positive, weight or lightness? Parmenides responded: lightness is positive, weight negative. Was he correct or not? This is the question.

- Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 1984, (Faber and Faber Ltd., 1991), 58

17.

Increasingly, I think one of the main functions of concepts is that they give us a good night's rest. Because what they tell us is that there is a kind of stable, only very slow-changing ground inside the hectic upsets, discontinuities and ruptures of history. Around us, history is constantly breaking in unpredictable ways but we, somehow, go on being the same... That logic of identity is, for good or ill, finished.

- Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" in Anthony D. King (ed.) *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, 1991

18.

Philosophy is really homesickness. It is the urge to be at home everywhere...

- Novalis Quoted by John Berger in *And Our Faces, My heart, Brief as Photos*, 1984 (Vintage International, 1991), 54

19.

Originally home meant the center of the world - not in a geographical, but in an ontological sense. Mircea Eliade has demonstrated how home was the first place from which the world could be founded. A home was established, as he says, 'at the heart of the real.' In traditional societies, everything that made sense of the world was real; the surrounding chaos existed and was threatening, but it was threatening because it was unreal. Without a home at the center of the real, one was not only shelterless, but also lost in non-being, in unreality. Without a home everything was fragmentation.

Emigration does not only involve leaving behind, crossing water, living amongst strangers, but also, undoing the very meaning of the world and - at it's most extreme - abandoning oneself to the unreal which is the absurd... To emigrate is always to dismantle the center of the world, and so to move in to a lost, disoriented one of fragments.

- John Berger in *And Our Faces, My heart, Brief as Photos*, 1984 (Vintage International, 1991), 55-57

20.

The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience.

- Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 1990, (Harvard University Press) 365

21.

The displacement, the homeless, the abandonment lived by a migrant is the extreme form of a more general widespread experience. The term “alienation” confesses it all. (It would even be possible to talk of the ‘homelessness’ of the bourgeoisie).

- John Berger in *And Our Faces, My heart, Brief as Photos*, 1984 (Vintage International, 1991), 65

22.

For recent apertures in critical thought instigated by certain internal displacements in the hearth of the West (feminism, deconstructionism, psychoanalysis, post-metaphysical thought) have been increasingly augmented by the persistent question of a presence that no longer lies elsewhere... Such a highly charged punctuation of the cosmopolitan script compels us to recognize the need for a mode of thinking that is neither fixed nor stable, but is one that is open to the prospect of a continual return to events, to their re-elaboration and revision. This retelling, re-citing and re-siting of what passes for historical and cultural knowledge depend upon the recalling of earlier fragments and traces that flare up and flash in our present ‘moment of danger’ as they come to live on in new constellations.

- Ian Chambers, “The Impossible Homecoming” in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, 1994 (Routledge, 1994), 3

23.

It is scarcely any longer possible to tell a straight story sequentially unfolding in time. And this is because we are too aware of what is continually traversing the storyline laterally. That is to say, instead of being aware of a point as an infinitely small part of straight line, we are aware of it as an infinitely small part of an infinite number of lines, as the centre of a star of lines. Such awareness is the result of our constantly having to take into account the simultaneity and extension of events and possibilities.

- John Berger, *The Look of Things*, 1974 (The Viking Press, 1974), 40

24.

All the modern historians from Marx to Spengler have identified the

contemporary phenomenon of emigration. Why add more words? To whisper for that which has been lost. Not out of nostalgia, but because it is on the site of loss that hopes are born...

- John Berger in *And Our Faces, My heart, Brief as Photos*, 1984 (Vintage International, 1991), 55

25.

For me this space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a 'safe' place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance.

- bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", 1989 in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (South End Press, 1990), 9

26.

The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: Clearing away... The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenate, because it clears away the traces of our own age; it cheers, because everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed a rooting out, out of his own condition... The destructive character obliterates even the traces of destruction... The destructive character sees nothing permanent. For this very reason he sees ways everywhere. Where others encounter walls or mountains, there too he sees a way. But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere. Because he sees ways everywhere, he always stands at a crossroads. No moment can no what the next will bring. What exists he reduces to rubble – not for the sake of rubble, but for that of the way leading through it.

- Walter Benjamin, "The Destructive Character", 1931, Text published originally in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 20th November 1931.

27.

Benjamin seeks to initiate... a blank space in which solutions to the 'antinomies' of society could be worked out. Where familiar notions have almost disappeared from the face of the earth...

The destructive character has the task of rescuing a still bleaker situation by dismantling the subject. The analogue brittleness of Benjamin's post-heroic hero is heroically denied by the contrary assertion of his unshakeable strength. But his robust doings remain a fragile fiction and his realism magical... 'Tomorrow', he predicted, 'may bring disasters of such colossal dimensions that we can imagine ourselves separated from the texts of yesterday as if by centuries.'

- Irving Wohlforth, "No-Man's Land: On Walter Benjamin's The Destructive Character", in *Diacritics*, 1978 (The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 61-65

28.

For, in breaking in to my own body of speech, opening up the gaps and listening to the silences in my own inheritance, I perhaps learn to tread lightly along the limits of where I am speaking from. I begin to comprehend that where there are limits there also exist other voices, bodies, worlds on the other side, beyond my particular boundaries. For in the pursuit of my desires across such frontiers I am paradoxically forced to face my confines, together with that excess that seeks to sustain dialogues across them. Transported some way in to the border country, I look in to a potentially further space: the possibility of another place, another world, another future.

- Iain Chambers, "The Impossible Homecoming", in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, 1994 (Routledge, 1994), 5

Carla Liesching

Curriculum Vitae

Born 1985, Cape Town

EDUCATION

2008 Digital Imaging Master class certificate, Africa Media Online
Imaging Master class

2007 BFA (Photography & video; Art History & Visual Culture),
cum laude, Rhodes University, Grahamstown

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2011 *The Swimmers*, iArt Gallery (now BRUNDYN+) Cape Town,
South Africa

2008 *Masked portraits*, Gordart Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
A bear in the woods, Momo Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2013 *Garden*, Julia Meintjes Fine Art, Stellenbosch
Portfolio Invitado, Foto Museo, Bogota, Colombia
Benediction of Shade, David Krut, Cape Town
Material/Representation, BRUNDYN + GONSALVES, Cape
Town
John Liebenburg Photography Auction, Stephan Welz & Co.,
Johannesburg

2012 FNB Joburg Art Fair, BRUNDYN + GONSALVES,
Johannesburg
Cross Currents, David Krut Projects, Cape Town
Summer Salon, BRUNDYN + GONSALVES, Cape Town
Africa Number Two, Recycleart, Brussels.
MOP5: Cape Town month of photography, Cape Town

2011 *Lens: fragments of contemporary photography and video in
South Africa*, US Gallery, Stellenbosch
Infecting the City, Public Arts Festival, Cape Town
FNB Joburg Art Fair, BRUNDYN + GONSALVES,
Johannesburg
The Swimmers, Wembley Project Space, Cape Town

- The Swimmers*, South Africa National Arts Festival, Grahamstown
- 2010 *I am Solitary I am an Army*, Surface Gallery, Nottingham, UK
Colours, curated by Zach Taljaard, Albany History Museum, Grahamstown
MAD ART, Spier Contemporary Biennial, iArt Gallery (now BRUNDYN + GONSALVES), Cape Town
- 2008 *The Trinity Sessions* Launch, Joburg Art Fair, Johannesburg
Art from the Ground Up, South African National Arts Festival, Grahamstown
An animal collective tea party, Johannesburg
- 2007 *Art from the Ground Up*, Germany
ABSA L'Atelier (finalist), Johannesburg
Rhodes University Graduate Show, Grahamstown
National Arts Festival, Grahamstown
- 2006 National Arts Festival, Grahamstown



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For Edward.

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