

## Postcards from the Underground

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### Abstract

This article draws lessons from a walkshop organised by the authors to Lithgow, NSW, where participants walked through a park dedicated to former coal-based infrastructures to arrive at the Lithgow mining museum. The aim of the walkshop was to better understand the tensions around groundwater and extraction in Australia. This article focuses on two key elements of the walkshop: (1) First, they interrogate an attempt to engage bodily with an elemental phenomenon—groundwater—that is for the most part inaccessible to human experience. The authors thus draw on the practice of posthuman phenomenology (Neimanis) to explain how bodily attunement to our own wateriness, alongside the “proxy stories” of arts and sciences expertise, can aid in bringing groundwater into lived experience. (2) Second, they ask how walkshopping—as a coming together—can nonetheless hold onto the ambivalences, tensions, and glitches that are part of sharing space in the face of fraught issues such as mining. Here, the authors turn to Lauren Berlant’s recent writing on the commons. They suggest that their walkshop was what Berlant would call ‘training’ in living with the awkward and complicit relations of being in common.

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### Keywords

Groundwater, coal, posthuman phenomenology, commons, art, science

## Introduction: All the Water We Cannot See

On the day before World Water Day 2018, two stories were in the Australian news. The first one was about multinational mining mogul Adani's plan to open up the massive Galilee coal basin in Queensland, and the ways in which this would stress Australia's precious groundwater resources. Diverting the equivalent to 13 Olympic swimming pools of freshwater per day to extract this coal would, among other things, destroy the ancient and unique wetlands of the Doongmabulla Springs Complex. Meanwhile on the same day, in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Canberra, Hobart, and Brisbane, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth activists of [Seed Mob](#) were coordinating a National Day of Action as part of their campaign "[Don't Frack the NT!](#)" Apart from the large amounts of freshwater used in fracking operations, fracking significantly heightens the risk that wastewater containing heavy metals, radioactive materials, volatile organic compounds (VOC's) and high concentrations of salts will re-enter—and destroy—aquifers that communities utterly depend upon.

Both accounts remind us that although oceans or rivers may be the first things we think of in terms of water-related environmental crises, we also need to care for all the water we cannot see. On a continent with no glacial water supply, there is no exaggeration in stating that *groundwater is life* all across Australia. But as with all wicked problems, the issues highlighted in these accounts of groundwater disturbance are part of a complex web of belonging, inheritance, want, and survival for many different groups of humans and non-humans. The desire for healthy Country, the desire for a steady job, the desire for beautiful places to sustain us, the desire of land and water to fulfil their responsibilities to the rest of life, the desire for money, the desire to win an election, the desire for cheap stuff fuelled by coal—all of these wants rub against each other, in the overarching (if often ignored) context of stolen land, and our own complicity in the enjoyment of the very things we may fight against. When situated in the tangle of things (as we always already are), there are no pure solutions (see Shotwell, 2016).

Trying to better understand our fraught implication in environmentally destructive systems, in December 2017, thirty-five artists, academics, scientists and activists boarded the train at Sydney Central for a three-hour journey to Lithgow. Our destination was the [State Mine Heritage Park and Railway](#), but metaphorically, our objective was 'Going Underground'—that is, embarking on a full-day train-and-walkshop to explore matters of concern to the 'subterranean Anthropocene' (Melo Zurita et al., 2018). This walkshop joins a lineage of walking methods that have been the implicit and explicit subject of scholarly literatures for some time—anticipated in traditions as different as the writings of 19<sup>th</sup> century French flâneurs, the songlines of Australia's traditional owners, and in walking artists of modern and contemporary art (e.g. Evans, 2012; Hind & Qualmann, 2015; Solnit, 2000). A recent appraisal of these methods (Springgay & Truman, 2017) suggests that walking can be a mode of "thinking-making-doing" where the creation of knowledge is inseparable from its sharing, dissemination and critical interrogation with the publics it seeks to address and activate. While numerous themes and concerns emerge across scholarship on walking methods, among the most prominent are considerations of *place* and *embodiment* (Springgay & Truman 2018, p. 4-5). These themes are activated in different ways by different scholars and practitioners, but a reasonably common understanding of the relationship between walking and place posits that walking can attune researchers to the place they are thinking *in*, thinking *with*, and thinking *from* (see also Stengers, 2012; Instone & Taylor, 2015). In Springgay and Truman's (2018) words, "walking is a way of becoming responsive to place" (p. 4). An attunement to place, moreover, must be embodied. Sensory ethnographer Sarah Pink (2009)

points out that walking is thus part of the ways in which ethnography (which we would link to a larger group of *in situ* field methods) can experiment in alternative ways of coming to knowledge—that is, through a range of sensory experience.

In planning ‘Going Underground,’ we were particularly attuned to these insights: we explicitly sought to put our bodies in motion—by train to Lithgow, and then by foot from Lithgow station along a walking trail that traversed old coal-related infrastructures now converted into a park, through the suburban sidestreets, and eventually ending at the mining museum complex some 4 kilometers away. We wanted to grapple with questions of belonging and responsibility to groundwater. To do so, we emplaced ourselves within a land-water-scape, where coal had been pulled up from the ground as a practice of place-making and un-making. This was a place in which our bodies were already implicated in so many ways—the railway along which we travelled being but one example.

At the same time, if one of the advantages of walking methods is their ability to put bodies into sensory contact with that which we seek to understand, then our walkshop posed a particular challenge: groundwater, by definition, is mostly inaccessible to direct human experience. Particularly in terms of those waters that filter through karst systems, layers of shale, and other small pockets in the pants of the geos, we cannot live in this water. We cannot immerse ourselves in it. We cannot even measure it or anticipate it with accuracy. It outwits most tools of Western scientific knowledge—how we measure time, space, volume, consistency, depth. Groundwater might give us hints about these measures—allowing snapshots of itself via various estimates, or sometimes bubbling up into the realm of human inhabitation—but it will refuse full and final certainty. By necessity, we mostly experience it at a distance, and without a sense of verticality. We certainly cannot walk through it, or with it, in any conventional way.

In this article, then, we examine the two tensions implied in this introduction. First, we ask: if groundwater is mostly inaccessible to human sensory knowledge, how can a walkshop and its affordances draw us closer to it? Referencing Neimanis’s theories of posthuman phenomenology and bodies of water, we unpack the ways in which walking methods can nonetheless bring us into contact with seemingly distant and abstracted groundwater. One tactic we describe is the use of art and science as ‘proxy stories’ that help bring groundwater into our embodied sensoria. Second, we consider how walkshopping’s affordances can also help us grapple with the political, ethical and moral complexities of building publics, or a commons, around the fraught issues of mining and groundwater. Here, we turn to queer feminist theorist Lauren Berlant. In her recent work on ‘the commons’, Berlant (2016) eschews a conception of the commons where ambivalence or tension might be magically resolved, in favour of “the common of awkwardness, complicity, and intimacy” (p. 407). Heeding Berlant’s call to learn to “live with the messed up yet shared and ongoing infrastructures of experience,” (p. 395-396) we propose walkshops such as ours as an example of “training” in ambivalence. Walkshopping is, as Berlant would say, “a social, but not mutual, movement in practice” (p. 402).

### **Posthuman Phenomenology, Bodies of Water & Proxy Stories**

How might reimagining our own embodiment as watery—leaking and extending beyond the bounds of our own skin—help attune us to all the water we cannot see? And, how can calling on the knowledges and modes of knowing of art and science help us extend our imaginations, and thus our bodily sensoria, to achieve this?

To answer these questions, we turn to the method and practice of ‘posthuman feminist phenomenology,’ as elaborated by Astrida Neimanis (2017). This begins, she suggests, from

embodied phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1968; 2003) understanding of consciousness as embodied. What we know about things, claims Merleau-Ponty, resides neither in a transcendent platonic realm of ideals, nor solely in our solipsistic imaginings; it emerges in the ineluctable imbrications of body and world in a lived experience that is necessarily somewhere, sometime, somehow. But for Merleau-Ponty (1962), the phenomenological body is also "always something other than what it is;" it is "never hermetically sealed" (p. 198). Here, by drawing on the work of feminist theorists of embodiment—from philosophers Luce Irigaray (1991; 1992) and Helene Cixous (1986) to thinkers such as Margrit Shildrick (1997), Karen Barad (2007), Elizabeth A. Wilson (2008), and Stacy Alaimo (2010)—we come to understand bodies as permeable to the world. For feminist posthuman phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty's teachings are extended to suggest that our bodily engagement with the world can teach us about all kinds of worldly phenomena—but from our own situation as *differently* embodied subjects, for whom the world is not evenly accessible.

The first way in which this can happen is by attuning to transcorporeal vectors (to use Alaimo's concept) that extend and amplify our specific lived experience and politics of location as bodies (see Rich, 1986; Neimanis, 2017) through time and space. Neimanis demonstrates how this is particularly the case for our bodies of water. We all know the cliché that our bodies are mostly water. The planet, we also know, is mostly wet and blue—80% of it is covered by water. Yet a Western humanist imaginary has trouble putting these two things—"bodies" and "water"—together. We tend to think of our own bodily waters (and matters) as separate from the places in which we live—and especially from those places in which we *don't* live. Yet, as part of a more-than-human hydrological cycle, "our" water is not contained by us; it moves on and *becomes differently embodied*. Our bodies thus dissolve and extend beyond our "selves" into a watery world that may seem to reside below or beyond our direct sensory perception, but to which we are nonetheless connected. Posthuman phenomenology attunes us to the connections between our own bodies and these other waters—for example, aquifers.

Neimanis suggests several practical tactics for facilitating this attunement. Two of these were co-activated as part of our walkshop. The first includes the practice of 'body hermeneutics' developed by Samuel Mallin (1996). Body hermeneutics hone attunement to the world and our own bodies, according to the bodily modalities of cognition, perception, affect, and motility. It asks you to consider, in the presence of something you are trying to understand: how does this taste, smell, sound? What does it make me think—how do I categorise it, or with what do I associate it? How does it ask my body to move, or feel? While in a classroom setting, tasks involving body hermeneutics can be explicitly set: on a walkshop, our bodies are already in the mix. On the train, we are moving fast, thanks to fossil fuel: mining (and the water it uses) brings our bodies to places that would be otherwise difficult to access. Walking through Blast Furnace park, even in the absence of the now-defunct furnace, the park's name seems to amplify our thirst and our sweat, in this hot and dry landscape—the rhythm of the walk is even shaped by thirst (see Phillips, 2012). Stopping by Lake Pillans, the shade provides a cooling respite, but the water is only there because it was once called upon to cool that long-gone furnace. And, while our bodies may crave immersion, the waters are now too heavily contaminated by those long-gone smelters. And still: life teems in Lake Pillans in its rehabilitated state. Fish, birds and algae dwell in the water quality standards that humans defer to.

In short, our bodies and their various sensory faculties tell us about the importance of water in this place—both for the sustenance of life and the progress of industry. We also take the time to attune to particular senses. Visual artist Louise Boscacci invites us to sit in the

shade at the lake to sketch, prompted by fragments of text to help us attune to what we are seeing, and cast it through an amplified lens. After departing from Lake Pillans, artist Perdita Phillips asks us to walk silently to the next stop. What do we hear? What sounds complement our own bodily rhythms? Which are jarring? Do we notice any sounds *because of their absence*? Partly through the simple experience of being in the landscape, on a hot December day, as Stengers (2012) would say, “in the presence of others,” and partly by amplifying specific senses, this walk foregrounds our multimodal embodiment as making relations with place.

But again: if we hear the water in the creek under the bridge, how does that attune us to all the water we cannot see? How can we connect the parchedness of our own bodies to the mounting thirst of the subterranean realm, as aquifer levels fall lower and lower due to extraction? Thinking in the presence of others can be hard when you can't quite know, or see, or feel, who those “others” are. While body hermeneutics gives us a valuable toolbox for understanding how our sensory bodies understand the ecologies around us, to get at what we cannot immediately see or sense, we need to amplify and extend our bodily sensation. This happens through the second attunement tactic of posthuman phenomenology—what Neimanis (2017) calls ‘proxy stories.’ This involves bringing other specialised knowledges and modes of knowing into the conversation. These stories cannot substitute for embodied experience; they are its *amplifiers* and *sensitizers*. Scientific knowledge, for example, can be an important proxy story. As Ulrich Beck notes, many of our contemporary embodied experiences “require ...the ‘sensory organs’ of science – theories, experiments, measuring instruments – in order to become visible or interpretable” (cited in Alaimo, 2010, p. 19). Alaimo (2010), drawing on Beck's work, suggests that “syncretic assemblages” of knowledge are needed to understand the ways in which our bodily matter is implicated in a world that cannot be adequately grasped through one mode of inquiry alone (p. 19). In posthuman phenomenology, our bodies parse the findings of scientific knowledge through their various sensory apparatuses. Because scientific accounts either stretch or shrink our human proximal relation to certain matters or forces, by grappling with such accounts we can nudge ourselves closer to appreciating those dimensions of experiencing the world that do not easily conform to a human-centric perspective. In this way, science can also give us resources that help us access phenomena that are *connected* to us, but which are difficult to sense directly. Scientific explanation does not *invent* this knowledge; it just uses different tools to extend sensory experiences of the world in certain ways. Scientific understanding can reach out, condense part of it which may seem inaccessible, and offer it back up to our bodies to experience anew.

Our walkshop thus opened with exposing participants to different expert modes of knowing about groundwater and the underground. Settling into our purple upholstered seats as we hurtled by train up into the Blue Mountains, we listened. To begin, Dr. Marilu Melo Zurita shared with us her passion for subterranean geographies. As she aptly reminded us, via her research on cenotes and other karst systems, “the underground brings the assumption that it is there to receive all our waste.” By telling us tales of groundwater sirens, and maps of vast cenote systems, underground water became not only an object of study but a lure, an affect, a dream. Following Marilu, Professor Linda Connor spoke about her work with coal-affected communities in NSW. As Linda revealed, mining is really about water—and who gets to use it. The difficulty of measuring aquifers, and their unpredictability, are just two reasons why they are a poor fit with commodification, and why they demand intense consideration in any plan to extract resources from the earth. Linda's knowledge of farmers amplified groundwater as a value. The mobile seminar drew thirdly on the expertise of Dr Bill Humphreys and his world-renowned knowledge on stygofauna. Stygofauna—endearingly

described by Bill as “blind white cockroaches which get in the way of mines” (see also Humphreys, 2012)—are tiny (mostly) crustaceans who live their entire lives underground. These denizens-of-the-dark are vital for keeping groundwater—and thus surface water—healthy. While Australia was long thought to be very poor in terms of stygobiology, in large part thanks to Bill’s research we now know it harbours some of the richest groundwater biodiversity in the world. These critters are very old (they have been here for 5 million years) and very narrowly endemic—which means communities of unrelated species live in close proximity, in very localised ways. And because their environments are largely inaccessible to us, we still do not fully grasp their diversity.

Giving the floor over to these experts may seem rather ‘unphenomenological.’ For a posthuman phenomenology, however, scientific knowledge (both social sciences and natural sciences) is not elevated above what our bodies know. Science gives us another way of knowing the world, through additional prostheses—a microscope, or scuba gear, or even conversation ethnographically multiplied across many bodies: all of these extend what and how our bodies know, in multiple directions. After all, as Donna Haraway (1988) taught us many decades ago, all vision is prosthetic; all knowledge is mediated. We only know the world through the mediation of prosthetics—there is no ‘pre-mediated’ state to get back to. In this sense, no less than the specific powers of our primate retinas and optic nerves mediate what we can perceive, so too do microscopes, or qualitative interviews serve as mediating prostheses that open certain experiences for us (while restraining others). All such apparatuses create an interface of experience and extend how and what our bodies can sense. None are complete, and none is *a priori* more valid. Together, they form a syncretic understanding of the world. So, although the subterranean dimension did not seem overtly accessible to us, arts and sciences proxy stories activated and extended our sensory attunement as a way of ‘walking with’ groundwater. Through a posthuman phenomenology, we also came to understand certain phenomena (e.g. drinkable water, mining, healthy groundwater) as *both here and not here* at the same time. As we will see next, learning to move with these contradictions or ambivalences was the walkshop’s other important lesson.

### “Open-plan Fieldwork” and “Everyone With [and without] Lungs”

In preparation for the walk, our invited experts provided readings to get us thinking (and the first hour of the train ride was devoted to quiet reading). One of the articles that Louise asked us to look at was a short text by Krista Geneviève Lynes, in which she discusses planetary aesthetics (Lynes & World of Matter, 2016). The concept of planetarity was developed by Gayatri Spivak (2003) to suggest that the planet “is in the species of alterity”—its phenomena are not exchangeable, fully knowable (p. 72). We are of the planet, argues Spivak, but we cannot and will not master it (see also Neimanis, 2016). Lynes draws on Spivak’s concomitant method of “open-plan fieldwork” as a way of thinking about knowledge-making under the conditions of planetarity. Open-plan fieldwork refuses to know the boundaries of its investigation in advance. “If globalisation consists in the attempt to create generalisation, abstraction, and commensurability,” writes Lynes (2016), then “open-plan fieldwork works to keep that generalisation under erasure” (p. 112). She continues: “Open-plan fieldwork is [...] about identifying the shifting territories and borders that define a field within a play of forces” (p. 112).

Spivak, via Lynes, provides a good hinge for thinking about how the practice of our walkshop (its form, structure, activities, movements, distances, modalities) is integrally connected to the fraught ethics and politics swirling in the topic of mining and groundwater. If planetarity is a refusal to reduce *what is* to *what can be known*—fit into a grid or a pattern, to

what is commensurable—and open-plan fieldwork is about a mode of work that can attune to shifting, unstable relations, then our workshop also asked: what modes of “thinking-making-doing” together can hold onto the awkwardness, incommensurability, ambivalence, and complicity in which groundwater politics and mining are steeped?



Figure 1: *Lake Pillans/How can you map what you do not know?* from the artwork *Postcards from the Underground* (© Perdita Phillips and Astrida Neimanis) utilising a Lithgow postcard from 1911. Limited edition digitally printed postcards 14.8 x 10.5 cm

Figure 2: *The weather underground* from the artwork *Postcards from the Underground* (© Perdita Phillips and Astrida Neimanis) showing coal and stygofauna (Chiltoniidae). Limited edition digitally printed postcards 14.8 x 10.5 cm.

These colour postcards use an optical masking technique that can be decoded with a red filter (similar to cellophane) that is held up to the eye. The previously invisible cyan images are then revealed from beneath — alluding to the layers of concern in the project and the double state of both/and.

For, while the descriptions of the activities above may seem as though they would tend toward the consolidation of a public—where we all come to be “in common” through a shared acquisition of facts, perspectives, and tools gifted to us through the labours of experts and the sensoria of our bodies—the workshop also included specific moments or underlying conditions where this becoming-in-common was “glitched.” On the train ride to Lithgow, for example, more than one passenger did not appreciate our use of public space to conduct seminars on mining and stygofauna. When we arrived at the mining museum, our knowledgeable and very helpful tour guides added their expertise on the mining industry to our set of proxy stories. At one point, however, when discussing environmentalist attitudes toward mining, one of the guides looked out at the members of our group seated around him and paused: “*You’re not greenies, are you?*” Nor is our relationship to stygofauna simple. Many stygofauna species are threatened and endangered—most notably at the hands of extraction. But this concern is complicated by the fact that most of what we know about stygofauna is

*because of* mining. Environmental assessment requirements have engendered a wealth of knowledge about stygofauna that we might not otherwise have. In this way our very knowledge is complicit in that which this knowledge may lead us to disavow. The things we want to protect and the things we want to protest can be tangled up in complex and uncomfortable ways. Other glitches were banal: the coffee truck didn't arrive when expected, the walk took longer than we hoped. The perimeter of the old blast furnace was closed off; we couldn't get close to it. Not everything fits together, always, or well.

How are we to understand these glitches? Are these problems that our walking together was incapable of solving? To move these questions forward, we turn to a recent essay by Lauren Berlant (2016), *The Commons: Infrastructure for Troubling Times*. Berlant's key quarry here is a celebratory notion of the commons as too often hoping for resolution and easy togetherness; instead, she wants to think with the concept as a way of "losing good life fantasies that equate frictionlessness with justice and satisfaction with the absence of frustration" (p. 396). Her project is based on attention to what she calls "nonsovereign relationality"—a kind of relation that notes "just because we are in a room together does not mean that we belong to the room or to each other" (p. 395). She is interested in a concept of commons that is "derived from scenes of ambivalence" (p. 395) rather than working to vanquish them. The other operative term in her essay is infrastructure. Unlike *structure* or *institution*, which solidify relations into some static form, infrastructures are "relational and ecological processes of sustaining worlds" (p. 402) determined by movement. Institutions "enclose and congeal power" while infrastructure is forged from "patterns, habits, norms, and scenes of assemblage and use" (p. 403). Infrastructures, of course, are not just pipes and wires; they are social forms of being in the world. They bring bodies together in movement. But while togetherness can be a form of comfort, it is also "an exposure" (p. 404). It is in this exposure to one another that Berlant finds the value of the commons. And it is infrastructure's very 'glitches,' she tells us, in which the possibility of transformation, of shifting, of moving differently, presents itself.

As a way of getting at what it means to be both together and not necessarily belonging to one another, Berlant discusses a poem by US poet Juliana Spahr (2005), *The connection of everyone with lungs*. It was written in New York City in the aftermath of 9/11, where all bodies still alive in its wake are described as breathing in the spaces between what is left—between hands, rooms, buildings, cities... A simple reading of the poem is one of togetherness—whether corporate banker or street cleaner—everyone in New York was breathing in the same residue of the disaster. This might be understood as a version of Alaimo's transcorporeality, but Alaimo herself would likely say it is then a naïve one that pays no attention to a politics of location—to the *differences* of breathing. Berlant (2016) also points out, "the point is not to homogenise the world as disaster" (p. 406); the point is rather to consider what being together, without recourse to refuge, might push us to become, and how it might push us to relate. For Spahr's poetic infrastructure is glitchy too. As Berlant (2016) argues, "Spahr turns everything into a holding environment that articulates the commons in common but reshapes it too" (p. 405). The poem produces a space of collective encounter, but as Berlant reminds us "to take something in is to be nonsovereign in relation to it"—that is, we are connected and complicit in one another—"but that's not equal to being destroyed by it" (p. 406).

In Lithgow, we too might be "everyone with lungs"—breathing together, but in this glitchy way. Walking through the mining museum territory, looking at the sepia photos and reading old news articles of labouring bodies, we are reminded of how breathing in the shadow of extraction is not experienced evenly: some lungs breathe with coal dust, blackening



those lungs to death. As Timothy Choy (2016) writes, “breathing together rarely means breathing the same” (para. 7). But we also extend Spahr’s poetics in an important multi-species way. Here we are also walking with grasses (breathing through stomata), rocks (breathing through their fissures and their pores), as well as the tiny groundwater-dwelling stygofauna (many of whom breathe through gills). Lungs are not necessarily a prerequisite for the bodies implicated in groundwater and mining to breathe together. So here, on this walkshop, we are “everybody with—and without—lungs” breathing together and differently. This is what *both* brings us together *and* what pulls us apart.

Not everything fits together, always, or well—but that does not mean that change will not emerge from this mess of things. As Berlant (2016) says, if scenes of collective being are “graceless, absurd, or wilful, the risk of not trying for the common of awkwardness, complicity and intimacy would be even more ridiculous and deadly” (p. 407). Sometimes complicity just *is*, and that can still be part of resistance and change. In the welcome offered to us by Auntie Helen of the Mingaan Wiradjuri Aboriginal Corporation, she spoke of taking donations from industries her community also disagrees with. And sometimes awkwardness is precisely what is called for—such as in the pleasures some queer feminists can get from staging a “beefcake” photoshoot, hardhats and all, amongst historic heavy mining vehicles. Or in the delight of collectively singing *both* miners’ ballads *and* protest songs on the train home.



Figure 3: *Lungs/I can't breathe* from the artwork *Postcards from the Underground* (© Perdita Phillips and Astrida Neimanis) revealing lungs in the coal. Limited edition digitally printed postcards 14.8 x 10.5 cm.

Figure 4: *Uncommon Planetary/Cleaving* from the artwork *Postcards from the Underground* (© Perdita Phillips and Astrida Neimanis) where a coal mine leaks through. Limited edition digitally printed postcards 14.8 x 10.5 cm.

The walkshop, like Spahr's poem, is a specific holding space. The specific public it gathers—in all of its specific ambivalences—will not be sustained. At the end of the day, we return to our niches (the university office, the art studio, the protest picket line, the mine). But for the suspended and ephemeral timespace of the walkshop we taste what it means to all breathe together—to find commonality in the fact that we are “everyone with—and without—lungs,”—“moving towards each other to make new forms of approach from difference and distance” (Berlant, 2016, p. 408).

### Conclusion: Both/And, Cleaving

What kinds of publics and commons are brought into relation—necessarily ephemerally and temporarily—through this walking methodology? Those with whom we already agree, or those against whose views and practices we struggle? Those with whom we find any easy kinship, or those whose existence we may not easily register? Our response: both/and. This is the space of “ambivalence” and of “awkwardness, complicity, and intimacy” that we want to cultivate, because “either/or” hasn't got us very far in terms of collectively addressing the fate of our planet, and all of the messy ecologies that are implicated in that question. We think of this practice of “both/and” as a cleaving—one of those delightful and vexing words that means both a thing and its opposite. In this walkshop we are cleaving: both the act of splitting or severing and the act of sticking fast, of becoming emotionally involved or attached.

By drawing on the proxy knowledges of both art and science in the context of walking, we amplified our connection to all the water we cannot see, and the more-than-human ecologies harboured there. These proxies also attuned us to the ways in which subterranean waters and bodies, although invisible and inaccessible, are hardly cordoned off from the messy social, cultural, economic, and scientific ecologies that shape the vertical third dimension from *above* ground. The tensions and incommensurabilities that swirl in the politics of mining and groundwater were also experienced at various points during the walkshop itself—leading us to suggest that the temporary public or “commons” that the walkshop activates must eschew, as Berlant (2016) suggests, the promise of belonging, and instead take up the task of providing a “training ground” in ambivalence, awkwardness and complicity. Again, this is the work of the “both/and”—not a choosing-between two mutually exclusive options, but staying with the sweaty labour of holding on to more than one possibility, more than one scale or perspective, more than one experience, more than one response or solution, at the same time.

In thinking of how to extend the temporary public that assembled in Lithgow beyond the walkshop's temporal and spatial boundaries, we decided to extend the amplification work of arts and sciences proxies to create an artwork. The artwork that emerged is a set of postcards, primarily designed by Perdita Philips, with textual contributions from Astrida Neimanis. The postcards act as “lines of flight”—unpredictable, entering into and generating new assemblages of publics—beyond the spacetime of the walkshop. Identifying points of intensity that emerged over the day, Phillips drew on both scientific knowledge and artistic practice to create images that reflect the structure of “both/and” publics or commons: a massive hunk of slag rock as a mining by-product sits like an Anthropocene inselberg in the mining park, which *both* completely overpowers *and* is poignantly overshadowed by the life of a small, white, blind crustacean; the hard, black endurance of coal is *both* in inorganic apposition to *and* rendered kin with the organic lifeworld of a breathing lung; the handwritten message to a son describes *both* the tense labour relations that led up to the 1911 Lithgow Riot that pitted the Blast Furnace workers against its owner, *and* the quotidian ba-

nality of listening to a band in the park; the momentary ebullient celebration of 1960's science, industry and progress in Australia seems *both* insignificant in the face of the deep-time *geos* of which this country is made, *and* poised to be a deciding hand in determining the fate of this ancient landmass into the deep future. As printed cards, these sets of images are superimposed upon one another using a red reveal process, where a red filter unlocks a cyan image hidden within overlaying patterns. They are caught up in *both* the noticing *and* not-noticing of each other. Like Berlant's complicated commons, they dwell together, even if their belonging to one another is tense, fraught, and seemingly impossible.

We—the authors of this paper—still support a ban on fracking, and we are still against Adani. But we are not against the body who toils underground, from whose labours we benefit immensely—whether that body is a miner or a 'greenie.' Or, a tiny translucent crustacean, performing vital "ecological services" for all of us aboveground, from its home in the not-so-safe harbours, of all the water we cannot see.

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Astrida Neimanis is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney, on Gadigal land, in Australia. Often in collaboration with other artists, writers, and makers, her work examines water, weather, and bodies, from intersectional feminist perspectives. She is co-editor of *Thinking with Water* (MQUP, 2013) and author of *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (Bloomsbury, 2017). She is also a Key Researcher with the Sydney Environment Institute, Associate Editor of *Environmental Humanities* and with Jennifer Mae Hamilton, co-organiser of the COMPOSTING feminisms and environmental humanities reading and research group.

Perdita Phillips is an Australian artist primarily interested in the environment who often refers to scientific understanding in her work. At the same time, she is interested in things that aren't explained by science which might be about what is not seen or logically sensible. After years of wrestling with the ideas of beauty and wildness she has decided that things are not simple: they are complex and contested and worth fighting for. Phillips has used many different media including walking, mapping, drawing, sculpture, digital art, installations, ephemeral outdoor works/situations (eclogues), photographs, videos, book art, sound installations and spatial sound, found objects and collage. Her work is marked by a continuing interest in the relationships between humans and nonhuman others (rocks, plants, animals, ecosystem processes). Underlying her practice is a general concern with imagining environmental futures.