

FURNISHING POSITIONS 04

PEOPLE | THINGS

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KAREN HOULE | KIKA THORNE

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Great Lakes, photograph by Hannah Minett, 2014

SHADOWY PARTICIPANTS IN THE JUS PUBLICUM EUROPAEUM¹

KAREN HOULE

Paradox:

- A statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses a possible truth.*
- Any person, thing, or situation exhibiting an apparently contradictory nature.²*

Stagger-start Boeing 747s

Westward over the Japan Sea
To China, Russia, & then the European Union—

Jet contrails knit a nest above the shipping channel. Aluminum wing-shadow passes over a thousand Lego-sized container ships. Propellers. Froth: I am nursing a child in the air with body temperature human milk. Thin cold rivets keep us from fall-through-empty sky. Weightlessness, calming down: *absurd...*

...but in reality expresses a possible truth.

As do those whale-shaped shadows below the boats below. Glimpsed. Momentarily visible masses: Following or leading or chasing or being chased out of contested waters?

Whales *in-and-of-themselves* vs. steamships (oil or wood)? Sea Shepard vs. blood-red blubber chews? (bait or fertilizer³)? Dutch East India Co. (Hirado Station, 1609) + Hiroshima (1945) + Fukushima (2011) and-or: Indonesia vs. Occupied Japan, and then the West =

Bones of mammals occupy every wet, dry or empty square inch

Unfathomable.

overboard and never surfaced. Houde or Houle landed at Québec, bought some arable land in the seigneurie of St. Antoine-de-Lotbinière-de-Tilly, married a girl named Marie-Françoise and had fourteen children.⁵ The boys got sections up the St. Lawrence: furrow tracks stopping at the water's edge; whale families sliding by at all hours, out of sight. Their children had more children, and their children's children used the Ottawa River, then the Great Lake's catapult, to spread out into Northern Ontario and Michigan: A mammal story turns into a tree.

The Champlain Sea invaded the Ottawa Valley area 10,000-15,000 years ago and left marine deposits of silts and clays. One or two whale skeletons have been excavated.

Quebec City. Cap Diamant. Les Ursulines. Ici vécu René Lévesque. Rue de la Couronne. Rue Jean Charest. La Grande Allée takes you to The Plains of Abraham, which my father's family refuses to speak about, especially when he married my English mother. The Irish cemetery on Saint Jean; outside the ramparts, please. Tombs eaten by tree roots. Trees eaten by sidewalks. You can cross la Ville de Québec by bus or foot or car even in February with four feet of new snow, fishtailing.

Except during the Third Summit of the Americas (2001). A fifteen-foot-high perimeter fence sawed public squares in half, made cages of les ruelles dont les enfants jouent. Metal dug into the oldest colonial buildings in all of the Americas. No commercial activity.

"Anti-globalization protests were divided into three classes: 'green zone,' being legal protests with no risk of arrest; 'yellow zone,' peaceful, unsanctioned protests with some risk of arrest or confrontation with police; and 'red zone,' being direct acts of civil disobedience carrying a high risk of arrest."⁶

Yes, I was tear-gassed. Yes, I was hit by rubber bullets. But what I remember, in my lower legs, is not being able to flow like people love to do, through train stations + parcs + campuses + legislature grounds + the backyards of relatives and old friends. The masses (I and my name among them) were marched into the sea below the Cap, nicely reversing Houde or Houle's historic landing from the other direction.

"The Declaration of Quebec City" includes the quotation: "We, the democratically elected Heads of State and Government of the Americas, have met in Quebec City at our Third Summit, to renew our commitment to hemispheric integration."⁷ In fact, many multinational corporations, who are not democratically elected by the citizens of any country, were also in attendance:

...a situation exhibiting an apparently contradictory nature...

The St. Lawrence's gargling throat of sea-water swallows everything: all beings seen and unseen must participate in its ways. Entre Tadoussac and wherever Brian Mulroney is from, whales pinch krill against the Canadian Shield, which gouges vertically 150 feet. I camped on a pink granite outcrop at the edge of that cetacean food trap. Les Escoumins. The sun was setting. Pitching the tent. Trying to build a fire for dinner. So many

fucking mosquitoes. Damp wood. Hungry. Eating marshmallows out of the bag before the potatoes were cooked. Zipped in. Baby fussing. Halogen. Milk. Glance: Flukes out of the water, twenty feet away. The tenderest splash, black surface re-knits its calm.

Then: Blow spout. Reverse gasp. Water forced up out of the body of the body of water.

In 1848, my mother's family came to Canada from Devon, England, in bundles of eight on wood bunks just under the surface of the Atlantic Ocean with bent elm rib-planks to hold it back. The black and white cows too. Holstein Friesians, from what is now called the Netherlands, part of the E.U. The ship almost made land but a storm blew them halfway to Greenland again. They survived by eating the same oat biscuits twice: the ones they had eaten when they spied land and then puked up on the way back to Greenland. And drinking human milk from the nursing moms, otherwise...

There was nothing to drink until Oxford county. On an exceedingly farmable bluff formed during the ice age when "loose material carried forward *under* the ice was sometimes left in place, later appearing as whale-shaped, forty-metre-high, one-kilometre-long 'drumlins.'"⁸ The family farm overlooking a valley filled with Dutch cows. Four-hundred and fifty million-years-ago filled with the inland sea later named Lake Erie: "warm, shallow waters supported a large variety of life, including corals, sponges, clams, crinoids (sea-lilies), brachiopods, cephalopods and trilobites (ancient shrimp)."⁹

And the Delaware Indians. Dirt outlines of their Great Houses are visible from the barn bridge in the wet spring, before the cow corn (aka *blé d'inde*) is sown. House ghosts rising up through the alluvial soil. Boat-shaped. Arrowheads wheeling up out of the disc'ed manure churn. Earthenware shards.

The mug, the heirloom mug. The one thing that survived the first crossing. Used for rainwater or wet nursing. It was kept under key in a finery cupboard. I saw it but wasn't allowed to hold it. Ordinary. Brown. Earthenware. Tankard-y. Freshwater able.

Why does anything leave where it is? Is it because of the wrongful use and division of the land or sea or air? When I accidentally visited the landed gentry in England and France and the Muskokas (2010), the ladies with horses and sailboats were always on their cellphones to *their* people. Their people = the horse shoers, the bovine milkers, the shit removers, the fence fixers, the chicken beheaders, the biscuit bakers, the rabbit skimmers, the boat drivers, the wet nurses (aka nannies). Unseen participants in the muffled margins of someone else's personal things and animals and private spaces.

Lacking these themselves made them things and animals and common space?

Well, for some of us now there is something rather than nothing: The family tree. The family nose. The family land. Except for a stile for the hikers. And the weedy shoreline which must forever remain in the public domain such as strolling along and looking at the waves. Private property vs. public access.

[A]mong non-humans, and separate from non-humans, there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized except by means of a violence and wilful ignorance, with the category of what is called the animal, or animality in general.¹⁰

I have not managed to corral my mind into a Venn diagram of two and only two unbroken perimeter fences with humans on one side and then, across an unbridgeable gap, a second trap to kettle the biological up-and-comings: those coming from over the sea or up through the soil or under the fence. Or evolution.

Letting history show me, by headlamp, from above and from below, its self-contradictory ways means that I have not been able to tell progress tales.

Tales that let me spread the world map-flat, and then sever it in two by means of a violence like a hatchet in the upper vertebrae. Or tongue. In a box, on a plane or a boat:

Making for home.

Thinking the world through such oppositional categories—public (shoreline, air-space, civic museums, City Hall) vs. private (the family farm, a paid-for airplane seat, nursing rooms for new moms, nipples)—and to be able to have and to hold such concepts; to wield them *requires* the build-up, in flesh and spirit; in legend and in geography; in phyla and centuries, and across every body, watery or otherwise, the hard-to-break habit of cutting everything into two perfect halves and giving them chain-link names that make war happen inwardly between them: French or English. Female or Male. Human or Ruminant. Fish or Commerce. Up or Down. East or West.

Humans are a certain kind of blind being. Stereoscopic left-right straight-ahead eyes-fixed-in-skull types. We are without fluid eyes. Bendy eyestalks. Eyes on the sides of our heads, like whales, looking two different ways at once: sonic, fluid, perpetual.

We are not so gifted at echoing off the underwater quasi-humans taken flight; the almost-animals in the spring dirt photos, the inverted whale-ship glimpses, the neighbourhood tsunami being: 231 miles northeast of Tokyo. All the other others. The shadowy participants of lived existence in, and among, and above, and underneath all of us and moments: the ones that tie all propositions, all trees, all names, all fences, all nets, all language into stuttering knots.

NOTES

¹ "European Public Law." Editors' translation.

² Dictionary.com, s.v. "paradox," <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/paradox>.

³ "Sturgeon," Upper French River Cottagers Association, <http://ufrc.ca/index.php?page=sturgeon>.

⁴ Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 88; 98; 172-3.

⁵ "Marie Charlotte Houle Desruisseaux Houde," Famille Descôteaux, <http://genealogiedescoteaux.com/getperson.php?personID=119367&tree=Famille1>.

⁶ David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), 65. Cited in "3rd Summit of the Americas," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3rd_Summit_of_the_Americas#cite_note-8.

⁷ Declaration of Quebec City, Third Summit of the Americas, Quebec City, Canada, April 22, 2001, <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/59660.htm>.

⁸ Frank Remiz, "Toronto's Geology," Toronto Field Naturalists, 2012, 2, http://www.torontofieldnaturalists.org/documents/TorontoGeology-2012Jan24_web.pdf.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 48.

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KAREN HOULE is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Guelph, and adjunct graduate faculty in the School of Fine Art and Music. Her areas of specialization are political theory, ethics, environmental philosophy and feminist thought. She co-edited (with Jim Vernon) *Hegel and Deleuze: Together Again for the First Time* (Northwestern, 2013). Her monograph, *Responsibility, Complexity and Abortion: Toward a New Image of Ethical Thought* (Lexington Books, 2013) came out at the end of last year. She is the translator of a book on improvisation (forthcoming, PS Guelph, September 2014) called *Lé Quan Ninh: Abscédairer d'une expérience*. She has published numerous academic and non-academic articles on topics ranging from animal tracking to Foucault, from watershed ecology to Derrida, from canoe flotillas to Irigaray, from rape to Steve Reich. She is also the author of two books of poetry: *Ballast* (House of Anansi, 2001) and *During* (Gaspereau, 2008). In the Fall 2014 she will be the inaugural Eastern Comma Writer-in-Residence at North House, rare.

KIKA THORNE, artist, filmmaker, and curator, was a co-founder of she/TV; participated in and documented the sculptural protests of the Toronto-based October, February and April Groups; helped found the Anarchist Free Space & Free School in Toronto's Kensington Market; and in her role as curator for VIVO Media Arts Centre helped instigate *Safe Assembly*, a fourteen-day collective program and gathering to express dissent against the effects of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver. Thorne has exhibited extensively, including projects at e-flux, Kino Arsenal, and Forum Expanded, Berlin; Murray Guy, New York; The Apartment, Access, Contemporary Art Gallery and Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver; and Pleasure Dome and the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Toronto. Her room-sized tensile sculptures were the focus of *The Wildcraft*, a solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Windsor. She received her MFA from the University of Victoria, and she is currently working towards a PhD in Studio Practice at York University, Toronto.

ARTIST PROJECT (reverse):
KIKA THORNE, *The participant*, 2011
Photograph and missing video files.
Periphery of the G8 Designated Protest Zone,
Huntsville, Ontario, 2010.

