

Spain Journal

Lisa Samuels

Tuesday, 17 July, 2012, Madrid. It was 33C at Atocha Station yesterday evening arriving on the bus from the aeropuerto, the flat brown city gradually accumulating as we looked at the window. The city was far away then suddenly close. I stood for an hour today in front of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, the Hieronymus Bosch triptych in the Prado Museum. Bosch's Central panel is the largest, with heavenishness on the Left and hellishness on the Right. On the Central panel, a large egg releases human beings. The interspersed black figures are like the pale figures, though fewer, and absent from the heavenly Left panel and the Right's hells. The Central panel's five background mountains have turned into deformed artifices in blue and pink, forms that back-resemble the pink mounds of the Left panel, which is of course "pure" in being symmetrical and "unconstructed": of heavenly nature and the divine and "our first [pinkish] parents". I saw more things, but mostly the mirroring.

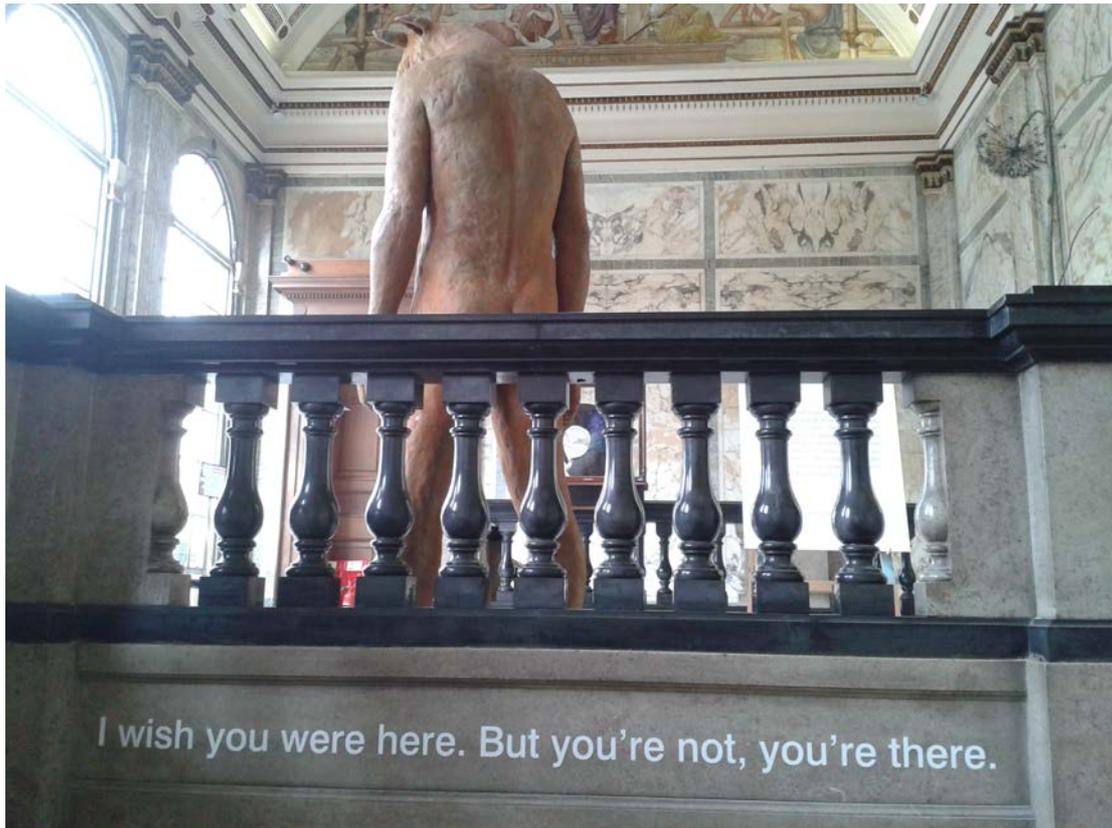
Michel de Certeau's "ratios of fabrication" – in his book *The Mystic Fable, Volume 1: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* – depend on the symbolic references to which the viewer is tuned, also on your interpretive pulses. Interpretation unfettered from the symbolic? Not possible of course, but as I continue to look at the Bosch triptych the revelations swerve, the blue structures work the faculties: the blue translucent abdomen of the human-gorging ant, the blue clusters recurrent as blueberries. Cuplets. Blue circles.

Has the Left panel's background landscape been moved? The Right panel has five structures in the top darkness: lights shine out of them like bonfires inside houses. In the Right panel, culture leaves us to have only violence as our mind. A huge knife between huge ears. Sound is nature, and then music is the fallen instrumentation of cultural action. We play from there. Coins come out of the asshole of another bending figure who spurts them into the acidic pool situated below the Dread Ant, where its abdomen ejects the still-whole human figures it is eating at its mouth.

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Thursday 19 July, Salamanca. At a hotel in the southern part of the Centro, near the rio Tormes. We arrived yesterday via the express autobus from Madrid, climbing up out of the plain, over the mountains, zooming across the dry landscape.

There can be no question that I have a fear of disaster, of being separated from people, a fear that comes out clearly when traveling to the unfamiliar, as with these six planned months in Salamanca. Yesterday we almost missed our bus because I said no turn around I dropped the tickets I thought I communicated to take the other way so I continued, picked up the tickets on the floor, then ran around looking for my family on the bus level, I looked at the descent place, I called the number of our mobile phone in New Zealand/Aotearoa – in short, I did everything I could (not) think (I could not think) of until finally doing what I should have done at first, which was retrace my steps back to where – I threw down my arms.



Royal West of England Academy, Bristol, 3 September

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The last two nights I fall asleep then wake up in the dark. I run through Spanish phrases in my mind, I thrash and experience bodily discomforts. A high-pitched streaming sound suffuses the mid-part of my head. My eyes are wet and my mouth is dry and the surroundings are hot and deserted. In the throes of arriving the person is unearned, disinterred, marbled, aroused, unable to get containment.

At lunch the gazpacho is lovely and I eat it all. The sardines and lettuce are strange and I crunch them, I munch them. The melon is delicious, honey and cool and green and I eat it all. The vino de casa is tolerable; I drink a small glass.

Room 308 has a spectacular view of the Old and New Cathedrals, which are built right up against each other. The evening skies are open and everyone perambulates. In summer, children stay up till midnight. No one speaks English at all.

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Apartment 2 B. Solidly made 1970 rental, quiet and dusty with collapsing furniture. We spend weeks buying materials to make it work. At the summer solstice, the sky at 22:30 still has its blue glow and the city is lovely in its architecture and surprisingly slow. My tongue works the Spanish phrases and the Madrid lisp, prevalent here as I thought it would not be.

A portion of abandoned land is fenced off below the old wall remnant near the hotel. The old wall is crumbling over it. Fancy people in wedding guest array sway down the stone streets next to a fabulous-looking palace thing that turns out to be an Art Nouveau museum that does not allow you to take photos inside. The land sits there with trash in it. In one story, a woman is hired to clear the land but must do so with no tools: she has to meet people and get them to help. Then pieces of the wall drop and she is buried with the almost cleared land.

Thinking is also the body, the walking torso, the lips of the vagina set laterally and speaking not only of sex and birth. I start to work on “bioautography,” the term that shaped in my mind when I was studying Carolee Schneemann’s *VULVA’S MORPHIA* (1997) earlier this year. Schneemann works vaginal and vulvar images as cultural, being thinking vaginally. She’s done similar work before, in *Interior Scroll* and other embodied challenges to “Rational Meaning” (to use Laura Riding’s title in a manner not totally snipped from its source in her posthumous *ars post-poetica*). Thought is never brain alone, which we know but need continual reminding. If the body can survive with the torso and head alone, is everything else “extraneous”? What is it to inscribe a micro-culture with or as the story of a body? To envision with one body part?

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26 July, viernes. Los hombres, las palabras, working on a nearby apartment. It is just after mediodía and we’re recovering from last night’s dinner at Ana and Jesús’s much worked on country place, with swimming pool, areas to play soccer and basketball, well-defended chicken coop, hand-welded barbeque shelter. Fifteen minute’s drive

out of Salamanca. The environment reminds me intensely of Taos, New Mexico, in the Estados Unidos. Lightning and rain after 22:00 hours, desert-like for summer's intelligence.

Lacking internet in the apartment, we go almost daily to the public library in La Casa de Las Conchas. We get library cards that enable us to check out four books at a time. Yesterday was Iglesia de la Purísima and buying a juicer, a toaster oven, and a water purifier. One is "smeared across general life." In mid-August I arrange for wifi in the piso and our connections to the world open out.

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29 July, Sunday afternoon. Books, airplane tickets, hotels, appliances. A huge ship readying to tell the story of how it headed for that complex reef and had its destruction. I woke up to avoid going fully into that disaster. The world they are banished to is the old world – they are seen from a distance beginning to speak the old language again – and she sighs, ready for the hard passage, waiting to start the family, the pillowslips and evidence put aside and it doesn't matter, what to do with the plastic bag that has the dead man's facial parts in it. The men in authority permit the residence to continue.

Salamanca has a looking culture: when you walk around people look at your face and hold their gaze. If you look directly back at them the response makes it seem as though the lookers think they are invisible: as though they are looking the way we study pedestrians from inside a car, unselfconsciously presuming we ourselves cannot be observed. I find if I look back at Salmantinos they sort of blur their eyes and slowly detach from invisibility in a mildly disturbed surprise.

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9 agosto. Hot day again: the temperatures have swerved from 38C to 25C for highs. At the window of the apartment. Last night the Plaza Mayor with Rowan for ice cream at 21:30 PM. Watched the lights come on at 21:45, the big square gold-stone glowing, then walked home.

Yesterday we went to a wall art exhibit at a sister site to the small gallery at the Casa de Las Conchas. Some nice executions of the contemporary familiar, with a guard who makes it hard to look at anything but him, wanting to speak English, to ask if his accent is good. He has the whiff of morning drinking and an age of desperation, after which perhaps one becomes sanguine, or a murderer.

There is a nice undergraduate student who is meant to help us in this English-less environment. She is animated when speaking about Holy Week, Easter, when Salamanca's Lady of Soledad – “she is not the patron, but she is the most loved” – is brought out in wrought velvet clothes to parade in the city. As soon as a new year begins, says the student, the count down to holy week begins. People stand in freezing rain for hours on the night, on the midnight, if they must; they pray that the rain will stop. People belong to Brotherhoods of various Marys: she pays 12 Euros a year to be part of the Soledad brotherhood, por ejemplo, which has about 3,000-5,000 members. Brotherhoods of the image. I become aware of the expense of the clothing changes on the many bodies of Mary in the many churches.



Toledo, 22 September

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13 August, lunes. Four weeks of no summer programs or Spanish classes for 8 year olds, and four more weeks before school begins. We walk around every day. We went to Ávila and walked every part of the wall we could. You find pieces of Santa Teresa here, and in Salamanca; her name begins to symbolize absent names, cultural wave peaks of what it means to articulate, who gets to write and how the words survive. And if you could see through her proposed castle walls, those she writes of in her 1577 book *Castillo Interior o Las Moradas*, her metaphor for the journey of the soul! Spiritual transparency as a plastic imaginable, castillo interior as the swallowed bioautography of translucent engorgement that shines through the personhood of a believer. A physicalized spirituality. The shape of a thought that must be earned, its visibility and slow access. And not the body inside a building, but elaborate buildings inside a spiritualized body. As though you could swallow your desired and imagined land and become the image of it that fills you in.

In Salamanca people walk very close to each other, they fill up the sidewalk, and yet they turn their movements at the last moment to avoid running into anyone with an actual touch. This proprioception differs from my experiences with other public movement: I think of general queue-walking tendencies in some countries, indifferent privacy-obliteration in others, gendered cluster-walking, expectations of wide and narrowed personal space. Everyone smokes, the mothers and fathers hold the cigarettes slightly away from their children.

La Crisis, the term here for the economic crisis rolling on since 2008, is evident in the many “Se Vende” signs in many stripped-out stores. A U.S. financially-oriented person we meet in September asserts that Spain cannot sustain its small-business and relaxed lifestyle models. A University of Salamanca academic whom we take to lunch explains that the university teaches multiple languages, for example Aramaic and Hebrew, though only to a few students; “but you have to defend that”. I think of the messages of disdain for un-moneyed subjects in contemporary English-language-dominant academia, and I think that Spain’s universities have a whole decade of stripping out to experience, a decade they have not yet had.

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Thursday 23 August, on the bus to Madrid, a few days after a quick trip to Aveiro, the “Venice of Portugal,” a seaside and formerly sea-faring town with a museum to Saint Joan, a princess who refused marriage and went into the Dominican convent with her retinue (“and her fundage,” says Mark). We go into the Chapter Room where she became a nun: multiple wall art shows her hair being trimmed off by a gently stern superior. She is beautiful and humble and fought-over and saintly saintly saintly! The Art Nouveau Museum in Aveiro is spare and friendly: it has a tea room with Big Pillows and a middle-aged white man doing clown routines. Aveiro’s gondolas are over-large and motor-powered, but it’s fun to take a town at its self-amused definitions.

Our strange hotel, though, Estalagem da Pateira, is far outside of town on a quiet lake that reminds me of Lake Rotorua without the sulphur smells. The hotel features an enormous Soviet-style sculpture dedicated to people who have emigrated from Portugal. Countries they have gone to are featured on a rough world map with labels for the destination country’s names. Most of those names have been ripped off from the cemented continents.

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26 August, domingo. Many Spanish academics we meet would rather live and teach in the United States; they are perplexed that we moved to New Zealand/Aotearoa deliberately. I explain that I have been happier away from hegemonic absorptions, though I’m aware that everywhere’s provincial and that big countries simply float along with more sounds in their own ears, in an enlarged and well-populated provincialism. I think about what it means to write “words without borders,” a poem in my first poetry book whose title means more to me now than it did then. What it means to be a Euro-evident person without a stable regional identity. The Salamanca graduate student had never before considered that western representations of internationalism tend to go by name-sound, ethnicity, and definite point of origin, as though the person represents what that country’s up to. A regional identity as

allowing people to thrive in the bodily expansion of *from-ness*. There's that question again, "But where are you *from*?"



Estalagem da Pateira, Portugal, 18 August

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Thursday 30 August, on the train from Paddington to Truro, after 24 hours of bus from Salamanca, exploration of Valladolid, hotel night, bus to tiny aeropuerto, grim RyanAir flight, then Stansted express to Liverpool, London Underground to Paddington, and finally this Great Northern Rail to Truro. Not sure yet how I will reach Falmouth, but I have taxi cash if it comes to that.

We are at Totnes now, and I look out the window at the passing countryside and think about how people live. All the ears in the world! The cows and fallen blankets! The hazy reading material! The flash of lights across the trees and clackaclack. The laughter of children and the tears on the Underground. The aching back and

inscrutable lexicons. The eyes and faces in their shapes and tasks. Crying baby scores the norm. People feed each other, invent ceremonies, the wind blows across them.

“I never realized before how much it’s just language,” said the student. No wonder one is always beginning again.

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In August, among other books from the Casa de Las Conchas library, I speed-read *The Battle for Spain*, trying to figure out the contemporary perfusions of History in Spain, how monarchy, and the Inquisition, and Catholicism, and the expulsion of the Jews, and post-empire, created the conditions that let Franco “own” Spain for more than 35 years. I start to piece out the newspapers more, and I begin to see how La Crisis is a transparent block adding to the transparent blocks of historical culture. Later on, a mother from the school whispers to me – she doesn’t want the other mothers to hear – that the current government are like nephews of Franco and are using La Crisis to tighten things up again. Each of these layers comes to mind when I see another beautiful Salamanca couple walking along, his crisp shirt and buffed shoes, her make-up and careful clothing. The pressed shirt as savior of culture.

But later, talking with a visual artist from Bilbao, I realize when trying to explain “My Spain” that part of the trouble, my lack of comprehension, lashes back to mirroring. Spain and history, Spain and Physical Culture, Spain and language fractures, Spain and cathedrals of blood, the stone walls with images of shooting, the transfixing Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica in Salamanca. Each of these is a mirror for cultures I have known more intimately, those I have learned by doing, and the stripping bare of the familiar shows again the structure of Busy Distraction and power buy-in that is the contemporary occidental. Maybe that’s just culture? I have no distance.



Ávila, 4 August

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31 August, Penryn, Pip-ins Sandwich Bar & Café. The overcooked scrambled eggs and thin toast come almost instantly. The two women who run the place are unsmiling and efficient. They never have requests for jam, they don't do jam; but when I get up again and ask for maple syrup they look around and find marmalade, evidently not the same thing.

Walking down from the new Tremough campus, through the trees and leaves, I see two men dressed to clean the pathway. They move slowly and amicably and are friendly as they affirm my directions. Narrow streets, and when I reach Penryn there is a haircutting place with a beautiful small man working his magazines. Thereafter, I see many women with smooth haircuts.

Two double espressos and I'm more myself despite not sleeping much. Stayed up late talking with two women of the conference who had arrived earlier to our campus

accommodation. The set-up reminds me of my first college, where we had to shout out “MAN ON!” when a man was walking through the corridors of the female dorm. In the morning, I forfeit the free breakfast in order to come to town and think.

The public library of Penryn is just what I want. A young librarian, Tessa, wants to understand my wish to photocopy the vaginal-shaped Tithe Map that June Palmer made for her 1986 book *The People of Penryn in the Seventeenth Century*. I show Tessa some images of Carolee’s book, *VULVA’S MORPHIA*, and tell her about the Environmental Utterance conference and the “bioautography” talk I will give the following day. She has a friend who is a poet.

I walk down to the Penryn River and see more vulvar shapes, take more photographs to use in my presentation.



Penryn, 31 August

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I begin to formulate a theory of wild dialectics after giving that title to my new poetry book. Ideational development following a verbal *coup de foudre*. Wild dialectics happens partly in somato-psychic approaches to thinking and cultural geography, and bioautography has attendant perceptual encouragements: to see the area around oneself in terms of human anatomy and the shape of place rather than preferring abstract terms to characterize a place or culture or permitted identity configurations. To experience ideation as bio-geographical shapes and rhythms.

I call it wild dialectics partly because thesis, antithesis, and synthesis are not in stable logical relations, though they may be composited in terms of differentiated causes and desired conclusions in a thought experiment. If I were a logician I might understand C. S. Peirce's idea of abduction in the philosophical way he meant it; instead I understand its relation to my interest in imagining what you don't know. I think of them in the same orbit. The abductive move replaces any conceit of induction or deduction. It's the move I imagine to be operating among the constructed contact points in wild dialectics, i.e., the aforementioned "stable logical relations" are still kin to Hegelian dialectics. It's turtles all the way down, which is fine if you are clear about your investiture in those disciplinary turtles.

I'll develop some of these ideas in two essays I am working on, "Bioautography" and "Wild dialectics." For now these notes.

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Sunday on the train from Truro to Plymouth then Bristol. Taking this side journey means I missed the final conference talks, but it also meant that Maggie and Aodán and I walk around together talking for my last hours there. That talking made a particular enwrapped time, the highlight of the conference said Maggie and felt I, though Environmental Utterance was altogether moving, body-mind work generously explaining its commitments. Maggie and Aodán and I talked about fear and gardenias and visual art and presentations we had seen. Maggie makes no distinction between human and non-human animals: they are all her beloveds, by her anchoring

moorlands. Aodán's performance work, "A consideration of 'abair: arespeaksay' as an investigation of and as environment", was another highlight.

There's a large round castle remnant near the station whose name is like bereft. Lostwithiel I think. I have been thinking about not believing in innocence. I don't think children are "innocent" so much as in need of protection. Then you can only *get* innocence, or be, like Maggie, transacted by the world.

On Monday, Bristol is dinner with friends and an exhibit on "Unnatural – Natural History" at the Royal West of England Academy. A walk, a re-hello to Clifton Bridge, then the train to Paddington. In the morning: back to Spain!

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Sunday 9 septiembre, back from a three-day trip to Bilbao. The ALSA bus from Salamanca takes 4 ½ hours, and the countryside between is a little greener, after the low desert mountains around Salamanca and past Valladolid. It was hot, though; much hotter than the 20-30 forecast we got online before heading out.

We left amidst School Notification Day, when we find out Rowan is not enrolled in any school by the educational Junta, though we'd done paperwork and interviews weeks before. To my surprise, a University of Salamanca colleague sprang into action when I emailed asking for help. He visits the Castille y Leon Junta to persuade those in charge, and lo, Rowan is enrolled in our school of choice. Our nice undergraduate student is there, too, and later on she tells us about the Junta conversations. Mark theorizes, I think rightly, that Spaniards like to Take Things On, to engage and make deals. It's an aspect of Spanish culture I had not yet encountered, one reminiscent of years I've lived in the Middle East, where deal-making is integral to institutional contexts. No one in the U.S. or New Zealand/Aotearoa would drop everything to help us with that kind of story; but then, such deal making is not par for the course here/there.

Leaving Bilbao, the bus comes up swiftly, out of the valley amongst mountain tops. Bilbao is a river city with multiple bridges and the fabulously museum-conscious

triumph of the Guggenheim. Last night's restaurant server, in her zippered black dress and high wedge heels, told us that the Guggenheim really changed Bilbao, from a relatively fusty historical place to a more dynamic city.

Out the window of the bus, over to the west, the landscape opens up wide – it looks like “a ton of grass” says Rowan. I say it looks like dry mountains, very rocky, above yellow agricultural fields. The highway has been sculpted amidst low hills, some of which are blasted out to make the road smooth.

The Bilbaoans were voting on a new city symbol, in a kiosk on the Gran Via, last night when I went out walking. One of the symbol options is “Much more than Guggenheim.” The preferred one, I gather lingering, unites Spanish with Basque, in word and image. Two young women, filling out the voting form next to me, nod amicably as I tick that option which they have chosen as well. Then I realize I cannot submit my ballot; I cannot vote there. I keep walking, by the statue of John Adams, by the smoky shops.

They were smoking and smoking – seemingly everyone, from young mothers to cane-leaning men. There are not as many signs of La Crisis in Bilbao, a port town with enough industry around to buck the trends, I guess. Apparently the Bay of Biscay is nearby, though not near enough for us to visit. The old city is marvellously dark, with narrow lanes and families almost overrunning the Plaza Mayor. Rowan plays pick-up soccer with neighbourhood kids who aren't really so rough, compared with what life is like for children in murderous places.

Along the route between Bilbao and Salamanca are many wind machines, enormous turning triads that appear from the tops of the dry mountains like a stretching arm from a head with no head. All arrow and upward motion.



Bilbao, “Deja aquí tu marca / Utzi hemen zure marka / Brand that you love” ballot, 7 September

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In Bilbao I saw marchers walking sparsely and slowly, holding Basque language advocacy signs. In Barcelona the newspapers tell of linguistic separatist movements. But we witness no intense protests, during these first months, though later there’s a huelga general that makes me hear things I’ve been missing.

Anywhere there’s a whiff of protest we see police, in firm blue uniforms and firm blue cars, sitting tight. The newspapers tell us about economic and language manifestaciones, and in Salamanca I saw a riot tank that looked like the Yellow Submarine had swallowed a rectangular Humvee. But the Stones of Salamanca are generally quiet; nothing appears really threatening.

Nevertheless, whenever I see a bag dangling on a door handle, or left behind on a bench, I wonder if it will explode. A relic of the years in Israel/Palestine, near misses.

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Salamanca billboards and hairdressing places, *peluquería*, often feature images of women with their mouths partially open. After thinking about vulvar images for my “bioautography” talk, I have turned to thinking more about how various things piece together as I get ready to go to France and England for other talks and performances in October. I think about how the body is positioned, about the holes in the body. To imagine Hole Theory, I think about how we formulate wet words in our hole mouths and talk them toward each other in often encouraging fashion. We hear them with our waxy ear tunnels and circulate them round our watery minds. I think about our wet eyes, about the wet eyes of the Virgin Marys in those churches that present Her as crying tears for our sorrows and needed intervention. These matters extend from my “membranism” ideas, but hole theory comes across differently. I’m imagining it as I revise *Tender Girl* again, too.

The thing about those open mouths of the billboard women is that they do not look like they are ready to speak, nor like they cannot breathe through their noses. They look like invitations, slightly open doors, those mouths. I think one reason people are drawn to fellatio is that the penis can be imagined as a nurturing producer at that moment, like a mother’s breast that gives milk when it is sucked. The mirroring of the penis tip, then, is not only in the vaginal cervix – they look alike!, I observed in surprise to the agreeing gynaecologist – but also in the nipple of the nursing breast. So one bodily openness that does obtain in Salamanca, mothers breastfeeding at any time and place, is an outward and visible sign of body-mirroring whose layers interfold. How and where do holes meet each other; what are the many ways they open and absorb?

Everywhere we move amidst bodies that have been where we are, geophysical and architectural and anatomical holes, absent presences in areas where we stand. The hilltop hides or shows who’s been there: geoarchitecture, like a pa or path, is a deep surface hard to see, buried placentas marking and fertilizing, uniting and dispersing one’s ties with a place. No wonder William Bartram, in his *Travels* (1791), perceived America as simultaneously virginal and inhabited! But even composited architectures,

like the Stones of Salamanca, signal buildings and events no longer perceptible. We stand and stare at presences whose holes look back at us. I fall through the wet stare with streaming eyes.



Convento de San Esteban, Salamanca, 13 August

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22 September, Toledo. I find the Black Mary in a side church whose name I forget to note: I hurried out because a tiny girl in lace was going to be baptized there and the guests were gathering. The city is formidable in its depths and purgations: the Sinagoga del Tránsito was too lovely to be destroyed after the 1492 expulsion of the Jews from Spain? Somehow it survived. Almost one hundred and thirty years later, the Mayflower arrived in Massachusetts with my maternal ancestor Edward Winslow. And yet Spain is the country directly antipodal to New Zealand/Aotearoa: I'm amazed when I see the bodies of those countries transposed upon each other via their global n-sphere line.

Everywhere you walk in Toledo it's bumpy, with stones the size of baseballs embedded as the streets, which are coterminous with the leaning narrow houses that frame the cloistered sky and dense living. Toletum, Tulaytulah, and what did the Visigoths call it. Toledo reminds me of Mareb and thick culture, how it settles inside the bodies of the inhabitants. An interstitial culture as one that's not so hard to find your way inside, perhaps.

It all depends where you start from. The Visigoths and Muslims sound pretty good, by comparison. Wild dialectics finds the opening and the search and the delivered stuff, the hold and the notion and the cultural equation, the move across bodily thinking from a starting point to a contingent terminus by way of a trembling posited wish, a series of moves any of whose points may be called thetic, antithetical, synthetic, depending on how you are holding which instruments and your mind in your hands. In the digitas, wild dialectics is conscious cascade among such dimensional holdings.

What I cannot hear in Spain, because I miss so much of the language, reminds me of why some people say it is better to be blind than deaf. If I could hear everything here, what would the place's languages make me realize? What is the mirror image of a sound? When you rhyme your ideas, you might swerve polysyllabic. Spain to España, origins and matriculations. Semejanza, estamos aquí. Or I could put monosyllables side by side: we are here.

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