



Article

Jessie Kleemann's Art of Survival

Still from Jessie Kleemann, *Kinaasunga*, 1988.

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By David W. Norman

Since at least 1984, long before ecocritical art history or klimapoesi entered Danish academia's vernacular, Jessie Kleemann (b. 1959) has cogently examined the cultural and affective politics of Kalaallit Nunaat's changing landscape.¹ This was my immediate reaction after receiving an invitation to reflect on her practice for this issue on performance and environmental collapse. My second thought was that climate is only one of many topics in Kleemann's repertoire, which has expanded substantially since her career began four decades ago. Rather than beginning from a narrative foundation, as much self-described "anthropocene art" does, her recent performances tend to center on affectively-potent materials and a limited choreography developed in response to them. She stretches thread through her teeth and winds it through a crowd, stomps ship's biscuits into powder, streaks orsoq across her flesh, as if shaking loose the memories and emotions that have congealed to these materials since the start of the ongoing colonial encounter – and in some cases, earlier.² This emphasis on response, specifically the role of physical contact in affective and mnemonic relations, this is the proper place to begin introducing her multifaceted career.

As deeply personal as Kleemann's approach to body art is, her methods have also emerged from collective contexts. Any account of her work will mention her reinterpretation of customary performance genres and their cultural, gendered and ceremonial protocol. Kleemann herself traces this influence to her childhood in Upernavik, where she witnessed ceremonial actions firsthand (Moestrup 2010, p. 71). Equally noteworthy is her training at the Tuukkaq Theater, founded in 1975 with the goal of revitalizing Inuit ancestral heritage by way of anti-mimetic dramaturgy.³ These experiences, memories and methods culminate in her actions, but they are also only the beginning.

In each action, Kleemann gives something of herself that takes on new life through her audience's response. She sets things in motion, creating a long duration of actions rather than individual gestures, as Stine Lundberg Hansen (2020) has insightfully identified. Beyond any one motif, Kleemann's live art is an exercise in establishing and maintaining relationships, relationships that demand reciprocity. Bethany Hughes (Choctaw) has emphasized that reciprocity "is a how, not a what; it is a way of being and acting that aligns with specific values" (Hughes 2020, p. 128). The how of Kleemann's actions activates a sense of responsibility, not least the mutual responsibility between the collective and the individual.

Acknowledging the relations that bind one body to the larger social body, and many more-than-human forms of agency, is a prerequisite for evaluating the planetary and corporeal threat of climate change. Equally, fostering reciprocity is essential to addressing colonialism's ongoing effects in Kalaallit Nunaat – a colonialism, moreover, that is deeply entangled with resource extraction industries responsible for the climate crisis. Kleemann has addressed exactly these ecocritical concerns in several major projects. A list of such works might include her first volume of poetry, published in 1997, which connects themes of memory, land and cosmos; her 1993 video *Spirit*

1) This year marks the start of Kleemann's tenure as director of Eqqumiitsuliornermik Ilinniarfik/Nuuk Art School and several international exhibitions, including *Flyvende beton/Flying Concrete*, a project organized by the pan-Nordic land art initiative Experimental Environment.

2) On Kleemann's use of *orsoq* (seal blubber) see Thisted 2017 and Norman 2018.

3) On Tuukkaq's methods, see the *Peripeti* special issue *Gronlands Teaterhistorie – På vej*, particularly Birgit Kleist Pedersen's (2019) historiographic reflections in her essay's conclusion.

Hosts Join the Elements, which aligns cultural, elemental and spiritual orientations to place with a long historical timeline, combining *uaajeerneq* and drum dancing with electronic techniques like luma keying; her collaborative performance with the collective Wolf in the Winter in 2003, for which she performed the role of host during a site-specific action at Assaquataq, an island depopulated following postwar forced relocation policies; and her 2015 performance *Homage to Soil for Scoresbysund*, in which soil facilitated an act of mourning (Norman 2016). Recently, Kleemann addressed the emotional and bodily fallout of ecological collapse in her 2019 action *Arkhticós Dolorós* and her 2021 poetry collection published under the same title.

Rather than summarizing these projects, however, this essay unfolds as a series of reflections on different moments in Kleemann's career, from her introduction to moving image media in the 1980s to an action on the streets of Vesterbro in 2021. My essay, in other words, is not a historical survey or a biography. I do not claim to speak for Kleemann, nor do I outline one discrete theoretical insight.⁴ I will instead situate her work alongside other attempts to theorize the body during moments of crisis. I align Kleemann's emphasis on reciprocity with traditions ranging from ancestral performance genres to post-1945 action art and contemporary practices advocating on behalf of the world's thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.⁵ Kleemann's methods, refracted through these traditions, place embodied action at the center of efforts to form more ethical relations.

Before turning to these methodological reflections, I begin with one of Kleemann's first major projects, the video *Kinaasunga* (1988). Beyond any cultural, art historical or theoretical connection an author might trace through Kleemann's live art, the video draws on a deeply personal experience. This experience may never be fully knowable to anyone but Kleemann herself – which makes it an ideal place to begin considering her career-long efforts to marshal the power of art toward the project of collective survival, in opposition to violations perpetrated against all bodies.

Witness

Kinaasunga initiated a crucial moment in Kleemann's career. As the first work of video art produced by a Greenlandic artist, it was the centerpiece of Kleemann's first solo exhibition. Although the exhibition opened for just three days, October 28-30, 1988, in the auditorium of the teacher's training college in Nuuk, it marked her transition from theater to exhibition-based performance art and a multimedia visual art practice.

The video's title, shown in character-generated text in the opening seconds, immediately establishes an ambivalent tone. Due to Kalaallisut's non-differentiating subject-verb structure, *Kinaasunga* can translate declaratively as "Who I Am," or if posed as a question, "Who Am I." Cut to the performer, who appears against a white backdrop. As she turns to face the camera, we see dark marks at the corners of her eyes and a rectangle of paint covering her lips, which never part

4) Kleemann's (2012) monograph provides a more complete introduction to her practice.

5) Readers unfamiliar with conditions of gender violence in settler colonial societies, which (among other organizations) a Canadian national inquiry commission has documented, should refer to *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (2019), available online at <http://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/> (consulted 25 August 2022). Recent media coverage of thousands of Inuit women and girls subjected to forced or coerced IUD insertion by Danish doctors in postwar decades, a practice legal experts have considered genocide in other contexts, indicates the need to examine connections between patriarchy and colonial governance in Denmark-Kalaallit Nunaat relations.

over the work's twelve-minute duration. She raises her hands with palms pressed together in a prayer position and covers her face. A single zoom draws the viewer intimately close.

Although no additional performers appear at any point, in this opening sequence, we begin to sense another presence. Perhaps, recalling a move ubiquitous to early video art, Kleemann is responding to a subject conceptually positioned on the other side of the lens, the same position the viewer occupies. Yet something about the performer's deliberate actions suggests the recording medium is not holding this presence at a distance. Like an interface in the word's truest sense, the video raster is both a barrier and a portal (Paulsen 2017). Just as video in general involves a process of transubstantiation – making the absent body present through rapid electronic activity – Kleemann's performance suggests she is coming into contact with another in an encounter that grows increasingly volatile. An encounter that is transforming her into a different state.

As the video progresses, changes to Kleemann's gestures, appearance and the video's technical support make this transformation apparent. Her actions become repetitive, mechanical, her head shaking side to side and her eyelids flickering, as if her movements are not her own. The marks across her mouth and eyes expand to cover half of her face and editing effects fragment her body. In one sequence, solarizing – a procedure that inverts the video signal's light ratios – converts the performer's recognizable figure into a pulsing mass of electronic energy, dissolving her image into the screen's surface. Just as the painted markings overtake her face, these technical interruptions suggest other forces are manipulating her person. The video monitor becomes a mask, a force that both mediates her presence and consumes her.

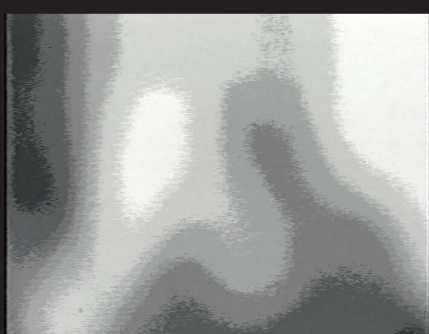
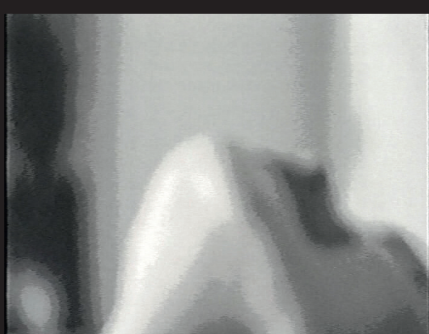
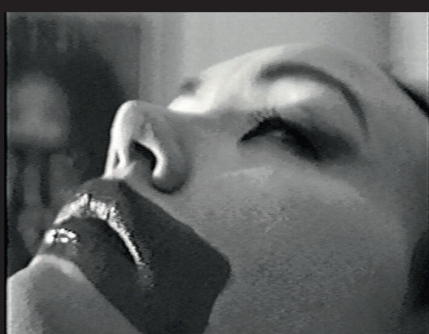
As is often the case in Kleemann's work, *Kinaasunga* invites multiple levels of interpretation. At its most general, the video is about a form of violation that fractures a person's identity, that makes one other to oneself. Additionally, several of Kleemann's formal choices convey culturally-specific significance. Her facial markings refer to the protocol of *uaajeerneq*, the East Greenlandic mask dance, a performance genre that complements the video's themes.⁶ As Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory (2016) has noted, the dance serves a pedagogical function by sensitizing audiences to extreme, frightening experiences similar to those encountered on the land, while also removing stigma surrounding sexuality.⁷ Ultimately, however, the video's autobiographical register exceeds these collective levels of resonance. *Kinaasunga's* most defined gestures derive from a private history of actions, memories the video evokes without fully revealing.⁸

6) In typical *uaajeerneq* performances, the dancer paints black and red patterns onto their face using soot and whale oil and stretches their cheeks to produce frightening yet comical expressions. Although today the dance is entirely secular, the Kalaaleq artist and author Jens Rosing (1956) argued that *uaajeerneq* originated as an esoteric practice continuous with Inupiat and Yupit mask dancing genres, where masks assume the identity of supernatural beings. A later version of Kleemann's performance, which she recreated for Markku Lehmuskallio's film *Minä olen* (1992), confirms her facial markings are the red and black of *uaajeerneq*. A deeper introduction to *uaajeerneq's* structure and history is necessary to appreciate Kleemann's experimentation, but this is beyond the scope of this essay.

7) Williamson Bathory, a dedicated *uaajeerneq* performer, emphasizes this secular, pedagogical function, noting that *uaajeerneq* was revitalized within 1970s sovereignty movements.

8) Kleemann chose to maintain a degree of anonymity and ambiguity when staging *Kinaasunga*. I have in turn limited my description of the video's autobiographical background out of respect for this.

Stills from *Jessie Kleemann, Kinaasunga, 1988.*



The audio narration, a single poem read aloud during each of the video's cycles, signals this autobiographical reference while shrouding it in opacity. Consider the first stanza:

Sinnattulerlunga iterama
iteramalu sinnattornanga
Anna, panna, samanna, kanna –
Iternanggalu takunngilara
uangaanngitsoq
illiunanilu taannaanngitsoq⁹
(the poem continues for six stanzas)

The language evokes disorientation, even dissociation. Although the performer barely moves, the poem suggests her waking consciousness is slipping in and out of a dream state, and her sense of spatial orientation verges on collapse. The constant negations prohibit any certainty from taking shape, as though she is attempting to speak herself away from whatever is happening, has happened. The performer's rigid movements, at times appearing almost involuntary, echo this sense of near paralysis, as if driven by a compulsion not to wake, not to see a "you" or an "anyone" who may or may not be present. The tension between "I" and "you" escalates as the subject vacillates between disappearance – "Kinaannginnama illiunnginnama / uangaasunga ujarlugu" – and complete assimilation with the other – "Uangaasunga, illiusunga, taanaasunga."¹⁰ She then asks herself if, after retreating to safety, will she awaken and see this you: "Illiusutit – uanga."¹¹

Violation is palpable in this language and imagery, both of which portray the subject locked in an enduring bond with the other that has overtaken her. The video's last minutes disclose a final trace of the event. As the echoes of a base guitar mix with the looped narration (extensive audio feedback is introduced midway through the tape), we see the performer restrained on a bed, struggling to rise.

Still, violation is never represented outright. Instead, feedback distorts the poem's testimony, distancing her speech from its enunciation until the electronic sound is almost unbearable. Dissolves, solarizing, and other editing procedures fragment the performer's on-screen body, which repeatedly collapses only to later rematerialize. Scene after scene, she is forced to endure a cycle of exposure and erasure. Rather than unmasking the video's autobiographical foundation, these strategies force the viewer to occupy the discomfort of not knowing, a not-knowing filled with oppressive noise and visual disruption. Rather than revealing violence, and potentially turning violence into spectacle, *Kinaasunga* makes us witness the psychic peril that follows violation. In this the video transfers to the viewer the experience of trauma, the condition that Cathy Caruth (1995, p. 5) explains as, "the delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence." Traumatic events are by definition unrepresentable. Trauma itself describes the physiological and psychological effects that accompany this absence of memory, which manifest as violent and unexpected episodes of affective instability. By transferring this experience into the practice of art, Kleemann dares us to confront the pain that destructive practices wreak. But perhaps she is also

9) "Jeg drømmer at jeg vågner / jeg vågner og drømmer ikke / Højest oppe, dybest nede, længst derude / Vågner ikke, ser ikke / at det ikke er mig / at det ikke er dig / at det ikke er nogen." The poem appears in Kleemann 1997, p. 37 (Kalaallisut), p. 71 (Danish). In the video, the narration is read in Kalaallisut without subtitles.

10) "Fordi jeg ikke er nogen / fordi jeg ikke er dig / leder jeg efter mig / Jeg er mig / jeg er dig / jeg er alle."

11) "Du som er dig – mig."

tasking us with working to overcome violation, even when it is so overwhelming as to become unrepresentable. Even when it seems insurmountable.¹²

This video performance initiated a continuum of embodied actions that extends into the present. The commitment it demonstrates to asserting the physical body in opposition to violence courses through Kleemann's oeuvre. In later years, Kleemann has described her entire practice as an exercise in healing, stating, "Jeg får min krop til at vise, at jeg kan komme over det, der er sket. Det jeg gør med [min krop], det er mit. Jeg vil give det til jer, men jeg bestemmer" (quoted in Nikolajsen 2020). Following this commitment to reclaiming bodily agency, *Kinaasunga* testifies to survival, even as it documents "the loss of human integrity and compassion, and the violence that structures both gender and sexual relations," to call on Kristine Stiles' (1992, p. 96) assessment of art made in resistance to destruction. By exposing the pain of a body that has survived devastation, it demands collective opposition to violence.

Survival

The living body – as subject, object, raw material – has often taken center stage during moments when survival no longer seems guaranteed. When mass constituencies face an imminent threat, one that calls into question the ontological conditions of life itself, the factually-presented body can signal the sheer precarity of survival. Consider, for instance, the systematic, international turn to action that unfolded in artistic circles throughout east Asia, Europe and the Americas following the Holocaust and the US bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, events that heralded the possible annihilation of all human and ecological life. The post-1945 culture of risk prompted numerous artists to abandon representational expression in favor of the active *presentation* of bodies under physical and psychological duress. This collective response to destruction, and the imperative of survival that has only grown more tenuous, shared no common style, method or agenda beyond identifying the body as both the agent enacting and the object targeted by destruction. Because the body, Stiles (1992, p. 76) asserts, resides at the heart of "the technology of actual annihilation and the psychodynamics of virtual extinction" alike.

But for many Indigenous nations around the world, apocalypse had already come and gone. Andrea Carlson (Grand Portage Ojibwe) emphasizes this in her critique of the anthropocene concept. She explains the movement of Indigenous futurism as emerging from a need to heal after five centuries lived under crisis conditions: "We have been forced to contemplate our annihilation since the arrival of Europeans; we are trying to imagine the end of ongoing efforts to disappear us" (Carlson 2020). Just as the environmental emergency looks different when viewed within colonial relations, "the" body, however factually presented, is never entirely universal. Certain bodies are more often seen to signify the position of all bodies, even as they fit with ease into spaces that are hostile to others.¹³

12) In my 2021 PhD dissertation, I examine *Kinaasunga*'s involvement with technical and thematic procedures specific to analog video in greater detail. Kleemann utilized editing effects such as solarizing, feedback and dynamic tracking in a manner that positioned video technology as an agential force, one that fragments and reassembles her image through its own technical and social modes of structuring perception. This places *Kinaasunga* within a continuum of feminist video performance that understood the fractal video raster – a fragile process of constant spatiotemporal balancing rather than a fixed image – as analogous to patriarchal processes that fragment subjectivity.

13) "One fits, and in the act of fitting, the surfaces of bodies disappear from view. White bodies are comfortable as they inhabit spaces that extend their shape" (Ahmed 2006, p. 134).

When Kleemann centers her own experiences, the mere fact of her presence has provoked sharp reactions. As she noted in a recent interview, “I have come across Danes who say: “Why are you so hard on us.”” The remark, Kleemann elaborated, occurred in response to “a performance where I draw on some of the pain, my own pain, associated with being in a postcolonial situation, and that was perceived as too harsh” (quoted in Steiwer 2021). One explanation is that her audience perceived the reality of her experiences as a threat to *their* reality. This anecdote is instructive because it reveals how Kleemann’s approach to a central feature of postwar body art – the establishment of immediate communicative relationships between artist and public with the aim of restoring collective attentiveness – immediately discloses anti-Indigenous sentiments, regardless of whether this was intended. Perhaps when Kleemann asserted her bodily and mental agency, the message this audience member received was that they bear responsibility for her pain.

Because performance demonstrates – in concrete, living form – the histories, prejudices or standpoints that have congealed to certain bodies, many artists of marginalized positions have adopted embodied action as a means of resistance. Presenting the living body as the art object has, for instance, exposed racist practices in art institutions that reduce Indigenous bodies to the status of objecthood. James Luna (Payómkawichum and Ipi) forcefully demonstrated this in *Artifact Piece* (1987), for which he installed himself in a display case in the San Diego Museum of Man, lying motionless and surrounded by museum didactics.¹⁴ But beyond merely exposing objectification, embodied performance emphasizes persistence in the present moment. As the Anishinaabe artist Rebecca Belmore has stated, “my body speaks for itself. It’s the politicized body, it’s the historical body. It’s the body that didn’t disappear” (quoted in Augaitis and Ritter 2008, p. 55). When Belmore in 2002 nailed her dress to a telephone pole in Vancouver’s Downtown East Side and tore it apart, she was taking onto her body the pain of an ongoing genocide, the pain of Robert Pickton’s victims and thousands of other Indigenous women and girls. She mourned the vanished while also, through sheer physical force, asserting their presence, resignifying Indigenous women’s embodiment in terms of vital, active defiance.¹⁵

Still, it is not unproblematic that the bodies of artists like Luna, Belmore and Kleemann are so often viewed as a hermeneutic for pain. Consider, as a point of comparison, the Stó:lō author Lee Maracle’s assessment of the limited space white feminist discourse has afforded to Indigenous women:

White women invite us to speak if the issue is racism or Native people. We are there to teach, to sensitize them or to serve them in some way. We are expected to retain our position well below them, as their servants. We are not, as a matter of course, invited as an integral part of “their movement” – the women’s movement. (Maracle 1996, p. 18)

The statement could easily describe the position Kleemann is often called to represent in Danish arts circles. For Inuit artists in general, invitations regularly include the expectation of representing their homeland in its entirety, an expectation that caters to non-Native curators’ interest in appropriating some form of arctic Otherness.¹⁶

14) *Artifact Piece* is well-documented. See e.g. Townsend-Gault 2006.

15) This seminal performance, titled *Vigil*, is also well-documented. See e.g. Huhndorf 2021.

16) A recent example is Lunds Konsthall’s 2021 exhibition *Worst-Case Scenario: Four Artists from Greenland*, featuring Pia Arke, Julie Edel Hardenberg, Elisabeth Heilmann Blind and Kleemann. Peppering their

Stills from *Jessie Kleemann, Arkhitiós Dolorós*, 2019. Photos: CA Reid.



All the same, Kleemann's actions demand recognition for specifically her right, as a Kalaaleq Inuk woman, to be in the world. Unlike the aleatory performance art that emerged in the 1960s from Anna Halprin and Merce Cunningham's spheres of influence, which aimed to redistribute bodily agency to the masses by elevating prosaic actions to the status of dance, Kleemann's gestures are rooted, specific and often mnemonic. To viewers who share the position of being a woman, an Inuk woman, a woman who has known violation, a grandmother, a person far from home, her actions immediately disclose the experiences they derive from. To others, these gestures remain opaque.

Yet despite the forms of difference that structure Kleemann's relations to her audience, whenever she places herself into vulnerable positions, you become responsible for and responsive to her, just as she is responding to you. This performance of reciprocity is more than any artist-audience encounter or the shallow, corporatized conviviality mass-produced as "relational aesthetics."¹⁷ Reciprocity is the start and end to much longer processes of recognizing our already-existing responsibility to one another and the spaces we inhabit, relations that far predate their mediation as "performance."

In *Kinaasunga* and the actions that followed it, Jessie Kleemann demonstrates that reciprocity, survival and even presence are active conditions that are maintained through continuous effort.¹⁸ For those who have experienced violation, and Indigenous women worldwide, presence is the result of historical, contemporary and intergenerational resistance. By insisting that survival and presence are a *practice*, I wish to underscore the collective significance of Kleemann's efforts to reclaim bodily agency through art. Survival, after all, is the core of climate activism's social practice. Conversely, Alberto Toscano (2018) has proposed understanding the anthropocene as an antipraxis. The warming air, the earth depleted of minerals, the melting icecaps – these are all the inverted image of capitalist expropriation, our own actions turned back on us.¹⁹

Still, Kleemann's practice goes beyond survival, or even survivance. She is reaching out, demanding that we recognize our obligations to care for and sustain all vulnerable beings. In this, her work aligns with Indigenous feminist theorists such as Zoe Todd (2015) who define relationality as the core feature of an anticolonial environmental ethic. I close by drawing attention to two recent performances by Kleemann that articulated these intertwined imperatives of decolonization and environmental action.

catalog essays with references to glacial melt and archaeological data, the curators stated a goal of "illustrat[ing] how topical Greenland has become" through climate change, a topic barely present in the work shown. This feeble effort to enforce a theme over the artists' heterogeneous practices implies at worst a cynical desire to exploit the media spectacle surrounding climate change via "artists from Greenland," with the art appearing very much like an afterthought. Stating that Kalaallit Nunaat has become "topical" barely conceals an appropriative logic ubiquitous to mainstream environmental discourse, which deems the country and its people meaningful only as far as their fate reveals something about conditions impacting other regions.

- 17) For a critique of relational aesthetics from an Indigenous studies perspective, see Anthes 2015, pp. 165-66.
- 18) Relevant here are the Anishinaabe literary critic Gerald Vizenor's (1998) concepts of survivance, a portmanteau of survival and presence, and transmotion, actions that establish continuity between past, present and future expressions of Indigenous belonging.
- 19) Toscano cites Marx's comparison between immiseration resulting from the production of surplus (the theft of labor) and ecological depletion resulting from the theft of natural resources that, due to the concentration of populations in cities, never return to the land ecologically.

Screening disaster

In the video documenting *Arkhiticós Dolorós*, a performance that took place atop Sermeq Kujalleq Glacier in Kalaallit Nunaat in 2019, two modes of perceiving climate crisis converge. The first appears in the video's opening minutes, where we see Kleemann laying out materials that establish her action's boundaries: a transparent plastic sheet, black nylon fabric and a string of fluorescent lights placed atop visibly soft ice. The recording is straightforward, clumsy even, and no effort has been made to edit out this stage-setting scene's more awkward moments.

Unlike the glossy cinematography de rigueur for contemporary moving image work, the bare-bones camerawork recalls a style typical of global warming's own visual culture. The shaky, hand-held shots of Kleemann bracing against the wind in front of pooling glacial lakes echo, technically and thematically, countless images of devastation: grainy live-feeds of calving icebergs, smartphone videos of desperate beings fleeing wildfires or floodwaters. As genres, performance documentation and disaster documentation have a common foundation: each summons visual techniques that ensconce their representations in an aura of truth and urgency. But just as performance scholars have stressed that documentation never originates from a neutral standpoint, most viewers will admit that visual evidence of environmental collapse, however compelling, rarely tells the full story of this global-scale disaster, nor has it achieved its goal: rallying the world to action.

As the performance proceeds, another mode of visibility takes over, and with it a more ambivalent mood. As Kleemann raises the cloth above her head, twisting in the wind, the black fabric envelopes her. For an instant, she disappears into a shapeless mass fluttering over the ice's edge. Some minutes later, after she has bound her face in ship rope, shuttering her eyes, mouth and nose, she approaches the camera, breaching the distance between performer and spectator, but also between action and recording. Momentarily, the black of her shroud envelopes the video image. Image and body, like the glacier itself, hover on the precipice of disappearance. With this slippage, the reportage style of environmental documentation – to which the world has grown collectively, lethally numb – gives way to something else. When representation dissolves, the landscape's physical intensity appears to collide with the sheer affective pressure of creating art atop a melting icecap.

The screen-mediated afterlife of this somatic experience inevitably dredges up debates over the ontological status of action in body art. The positions have been rehearsed countless times: action is fleeting, but it is also a medium through which cultural memory is transferred, securing continuity through change (Taylor 2003). In the age of climate crisis, however, fleeting action, the preservation of memory and the threat of disappearance have a particular valence beyond academic arguments. How, then, to theorize the body in art during a time when inaction – or action that does nothing to assure continuity – is the order of the day, and when thoughts of disappearance hover over the entire body politic?

As I see it, Kleemann's actions at Sermeq Kujalleq, and in her oeuvre as a whole, embody this collective climate of risk. Although she appears singularly vulnerable in the performance documentation, stumbling in bare feet while surrounded by onlookers in cold weather gear, we would do well to take her performance as a warning. The vulnerability she exposed herself to at the glacier's edge will come for us all, if it hasn't already.

Despite the apocalyptic glacial retreat that the video displays, certain gestures in *Arkhiticós Dolorós* indicate a resilience that cannot go unmentioned. For one thing, the artwork demonstrates Kleemann's extensive knowledge of historical Kalaallit performance practices, practices that have adapted to colonization's cataclysmic upheavals. Although non-Inuit viewers may associate the act of binding the face's orifices with the world's collective refusal to see, hear or speak of the climate

emergency, it also recalls performance customs in which this gesture serves an apotropaic function. Sealing off points of entry to the body's intimate core helps enable the performer to navigate a treacherous terrain while maintaining her locus of control, without losing her spiritual center.²⁰ This gesture acknowledges the present moment's liminality, a time suspended between life and extinction. Equally, it announces the performer's intention to *remain* – to remain grounded to this planet under threat. Surrounded by a moaning, decaying landscape, shrouded in an aura of death, Kleemann's actions inscribe her physical body at the center of a struggle for survival.

Survival resonated loudly on Vesterbrogade in April 2021. Outside the gallery Pythias Stemmer, Kleemann read from her latest poetry collection, also titled *Arkticós Dolorós* (then still in-press; the book was published in October 2021) while swaying underneath the same weatherproof tarp that shrouded her on Sermeq Kujalleq. Amplified by speakers, Kleemann's voice ricocheted across the street, through traffic, up the fortress-walls of apartment blocks, while she hissed lines such as these:

(...) et lys i en kugle
der består af actinoider
i en tanke hører du
hvalernes tyste lange sang længes i kor
ingen af dem græder så længe
menneskene hører
de hører (ja!) uden at lytte
og agere
de kan ikke bevæges
som fastfrosne stadier i en opadgående strøm
der sidder fast i sit eget blik (...)
(excerpt of longer poem from Kleemann 2021, p. 57)

At one point, the performer grabbed a package of skibskiks. Rock-hard, flavorless, calorie-dense biscuits once a staple food for sailors, they are also a petrified colonial import, which the Danish royals mailed to Inuit families as Christmas “gifts.” Tossing the biscuits into the street, Kleemann stomped them into dust, the cracking fiber reverberating with her voice. An instant later, as if completing the gesture, an oblivious cyclist scattered the crumbs into the gutter.

These actions – separated in time and space but united in their denouncement of human inaction, of “hearing (yes!) without listening” – indicate with extreme clarity the historical and material junctures that inform the current environmental emergency. As petroleum products, the thick plastic and nylon that Kleemann unfurled on the melting icecap are a direct index of industries responsible for much of the world's carbon emissions. Plastic is also modernity's quintessential kolonivare. Like the skibskiks that seamlessly integrated into daily life throughout Kalaallit Nunaat, in the aftermath of the Second World War, US trade organizations disseminated plastic across the planet.²¹ It is not coincidental that these materials would cross paths in Kleemann's work. The new era in global manufacturing that plastic facilitated, and with it the cultural hegemony that Hardt and Negri call empire, is not so distant from the “old” colonialism, still very much alive.

20) Although numerous accounts of Inuit spirituality describe the significance of binding, I choose not to reference these in recognition that esoteric knowledge should not be available to all.

21) On plastic's role in the two most recent cycles of accumulation, see Mansoor 2016.

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