

Dedication to Gravity

An inscription, a form of words, a formation, falling, pulling.

During the *WAKE Festival* at the]performace s p a c e[in Folkestone a small group of us performed dedications as a way of tracing experiences of the artworks through the town, across the artists and with the environments. Writing dedications is an attempt to expand the experiences of a performance, and during the festival dedications were usually created in the twenty-four hours after viewing a work. This is the final dedication to the works in *WAKE*. It has been crafted in reflections after the festival's end; it is not my intention to record what happened but to trace lines out beyond the immediacies of bodies in front of bodies into the landscapes of thoughts and feelings beyond. It is *in the wake* of the festival that this final dedication comes into the light.

Dedication

This final dedication is to gravity. It is a dedication to being drawn. To falling into and pulling beyond. To finding a way of moving from this lived experience into relations with other concrete realities. To moments in which we are lured into new relations. To the fragile webs that make this time together possible. To the milieu. To the shape of our earthly ecologies, networked and multiple. To the composite states of waking and wakefulness that we use to resist the pull of gravity. To sharing being awake at the same time as others and in the same place. To the state of wakefulness that we dedicate to the performances and to each other. To noticing the moments in which atten-

tion varies. To the quality of attention. To the trail of moments. To the drift. To the wake.

The purpose of the dedication (this one in particular) is to commit this body, this time, this attention, this soul at work to the relationship between things. To accelerate awareness of the attention as it functions relationally. To draw a line between the here of a body in a space and the "somewhere else" that it might propel us towards. It is an attempt to express the infinite in the concrete. The dedication is an action that creates a movement from passive observer to a choosing participant in the contract of attention.

The dedication (this one in particular) foregrounds moments of deviation, following the movements that occur in consciousness and the drifts that make minds move like feet. The dedication not an act of imagination, not a fantasy, but a tracing. It picks up a line of flight to relate it to something concrete, in the actual world. The dedication an act of "extreme attention" – attention that pushes through, to reach out the other side and grasp another thing, also concrete, and in the world which grounds the experience.

The dedication (this one in particular) is temporal, a function of effort across time; when someone dedicates themselves, it comes at the cost of their time, labour and efforts. The effort of attention is an offering without desire, it is a space of yielding and opening. The attention is turned towards an object, as though walking through and along, and in and around, and always on an axis of relationship between here and there,

you and it, becoming and belonging. During the festival attention is always in proximity to the performances and the nature of your attention is changing as it performs in you and with you.

What kind of attention is offered in a dedication?

What kind of dedication is required of our attention?

Attention

French philosopher Simone Weil was deeply concerned with the flows of attention and the energy required to sustain it. In her collected writings *Gravity and Grace*, she says: "attention alone—that attention which is so full that the I disappears—is required of me. I have to deprive all that I call 'I' the light of my attention and turn it on to that which cannot be conceived." She sees attention as focused and emptied so that the infinite is revealed. We liberate energy in ourselves. Pour it into our attention. Consenting for it to be focused without desire. Weil writes that at the highest degree, a person's attention presupposes love and faith.

We find ourselves at a time in which the focus of our attention, what we do with it, how we direct it and how we dedicate it holds currency. Attention increasingly becomes a site of capital extraction as more demands are made of our minds, bodies, feelings and data, as we see more grabs for the capital that lies under the skin or in the flick of an eye.

Could we see dedicating our attention as a political act? Or one of radical love? An attempt to nurture "that which cannot be conceived" into being?

The dedication reminds me of the effort of the earth, holding itself in place in the universe, the gravity of the spinning, pulling, words in formation, the effort to survive. We need to discover the kinds of attention required to conceive of the care necessary to sustain this place we inhabit. Through the dedication, as we pick up our thoughts about this body we face, we question our relationship to all bodies, to a network of bodies, to the ecologies of the earth, to nature or the natural world. We question our dedication to it, our commitment to its care, to our care. As though we are unable to conceive of ourselves as part of this ecology, we are distanced by screens, politics, advertising, social worlds. When we do sense a connection, these moments are fleeting and occur only once we are empty for a moment and able to confront the void.

Gravity

Simone Weil believed that two forces rule the universe, light and gravity. "All natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception." She describes gravity as the fundamental law as it defines the forces that govern the expectations we have of ourselves in the presence of others. The energy required to change the world and the energy to sustain it come from the same place, but the motives governed by gravity require less force.

Weil is an extremist: she suggests we need to follow the path of privation to feed only on the light, to release ourselves from gravities hold. If grace is the exception, it describes how we might place ourselves in the presence of "that which cannot be conceived".

The relationship between grace and gravity might also describe an attitude to criticism, to attention, to dedication, to making new things possible, to being here and really here, to being drawn by the earth, to being moved by it, acknowledging that our place with each other is made possible by the laws of gravity. Weil writes that obedience to the force of gravity is the greatest sin. "Thus we corrupt the function of language, which is to express the relationship between things." This is how the dedication might function, as a site of resistance, poised between gravity and grace, a bridge of language between points.

The artists in the *WAKE Festival* allow forces of gravity to appear, to take a place in the performance, in the church, the shop, the]performance space [, on the foreshore and in the depths of the ocean, all performing, networked and multiple against gravity.

In the performances we see a body holding a mirror, a body holding a piece of glass, two bodies holding lumps of coal, a body holding a bowling ball, a group of bodies holding in a secret, a body holding a cup of blood, a body under a roll of grass, and you holding your breath, holding yourself against the weight of it all, against the weight of gravity, with grace.

What are the critical practices necessary to attend to "that which cannot be conceived?"

How can we imagine new ecologies for the body, as networked and multiple?

Devotion

Simone Weil died at the age of 34 in Ashford, Kent not far from Folkestone. It was reported in the *Kent Messenger* on September 3, 1943 that she had died from self-inflicted starvation. She is buried in a cemetery on the edge of Ashford, and it is recorded by the cemetery that her cause of death was anorexia. Throughout her life, Weil deprived herself of food, refusing sugar at the age of six in solidarity with the resistance, eating foraged blackberries on walks during her time at the farm of Gustave Thibon in France or gleaning as she picked fruit for work. In the end, she refused to eat more than the rations afforded to soldiers fighting on the frontline of the Second World War. Weil performed these acts of empathetic resistance and solidarity with people she had no contact with. She was able to feel for others across the world and her position came from strongly held views about the obligations we have to each other. She sketched out a philosophy of thinking and feeling for and with others that resonates strongly today in our world of distributed global suffering.

We might ask analogous questions about what can we feel for/with a person working in an Iron mine on the steppes of Mongolia? What can we feel for/with a tree dying of disease? What can we feel for/with a person on a hunger strike in endless

detention on an island off Australia? We might ask what do these realities of suffering have to do with us, and how do we act.

Watching Kira O'Reilly's performance, we stand on the concrete slabs of the Folkestone Warren, overlooking the sea, the channel, the cliffs of France, there are groups of people picking blackberries that grow abundantly along the shoreline. The bushes grow out of cracks in the concrete, the onlookers move from eating blackberries to watching the performance, and back and along the shore, searching for the next ripe berry.

The story of Veil's starvation is now contested by biographers, who believe that tuberculosis and mounting health problems made it impossible for her to eat in her last days in Ashford. One biographer says: "as for her death, whatever explanation one may give of it, will amount in the end to saying that she died of love." History is like that, it is a terrain of fictions, and myths; what we learn later can sometimes be truer than what we know at the time. History is always reforming, enacting factual erasures of what is felt, and even later still fidelity to initial impressions, to the knowledge that ensues might be seen as folly, pride or hubris. Simone Veil is often misjudged a Christian mystic, her philosophical works are more than mysticism and she was more than a Christian, her work plumbed the depths of what it means to be human in a newly globalising world, she wrote about the complexities of exile and un-belonging. The writings collected in *Gravity and Grace* are aphorisms, they trace the edges of thoughts, describe a searching beyond the veil.

How do we resist the erasure of knowledges that are not yet in languages that can be spoken?

Snow

Now snow is falling. It was soft at first and now it's moving fast, a perfect balance between gravity and grace. If gravity is of the earth and grace of the ether, what are we and everything between? It is as though we are held in a balance between these two forces, like snowflakes rushing towards the earth.

Folkestone is covered in snow for a single day. And beneath the snow is water that has frozen and turned to black ice. The movement of time changes: the cliffs are covered in ice and snow, a small white van slides sideways as the driver tries to steer it up a hill (the snow is treacherous). Children throw snowballs, and more so than usual people stop to speak to each other, not about the snow but because of it. From the cliffs it looks as if the sea has disappeared.

Months earlier in warmer weather, from these cliffs you would have been able to see a small boat succumbing to gravity and sinking beneath the waters.

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