



## ***bullehell<sup>1</sup>, explosions, shrapnel***

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### Side Gallery

I've been triggered so many times, I no longer know how to discern my body from the rubble. Traces are all that is left in the archive; the event is an **explosion**, transforming one thing into another. Endless contingencies from innumerable perspectives, moving fluidly between the delineations of space and time, subject and object...

Propelled by the energy of the **blast**, we are thrown into free fall. In Hito Steyerl's *In Free Fall*, she describes that '...while falling, people may sense themselves as being things, while things may sense that they are people. Traditional modes of seeing and feeling are shattered. Any sense of balance is disrupted. Perspectives are twisted and multiplied.'

When described like this, it seems I might be talking about something galactic -the **collision** of planets or the birth of a star. I am however referring to my own emotions, which are as intangible to others as dark matter.<sup>2</sup>

Each event's explosion expels memories like **shrapnel**. Our bodies function as a material, carrying violent transcriptions written by a great diversity of oppressive forces. Power dynamics **beat** humans into submission, and coerce them into violence against others. We are the resonant **booms** of trauma that form lineages of pain splayed across the globe through all of time.

So, where is my body now? In Paul B. Preciado's impactful essay *My Body Doesn't Exist*, he describes 'an epistemic crisis' resulting from transitioning. The body's innumerable owners are revealed, policing whether it exists and in what form. It is made of wreckage and shrapnel - rubbish both literal and abstract.<sup>3</sup> Rubbish to sort through and partially recycle, but never quite understand. My attention is **shot** amidst this explosion that seemingly grows exponentially. This feeling resonates with Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (itself written amidst the paradigmatic trauma of the Holocaust) the image of an angel is caught within the gust of an eternal explosion, never quite capable of going back to rescue any person or object from the expanding wreckage.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Idea Channel's 2013 Youtube video *Can Bullet Hell Games Be Meditative?* for the exact origins of this title – whilst I am no ardent video game fan, this understanding of contemporary existence has had an oddly profound effect on my understanding of meditation.

<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, a scientific lens on issues like combustion, black holes and time could greatly improve this understanding – alas I am not every body, just the one I currently occupy.

<sup>3</sup> The list could look something like: subconsciously racist undertones and overpriced factory garments; internalized transphobia and misogyny; poorly thought out conversations about Donald Trump; mining and plastic bags; Bunnings, Officeworks, Coles and Woolworths; disaster **wreckage** and mass graves; 24 hour cable coverage and astrology memes; ongoing colonial government policies and the dehumanizing of migrants; Facebook and Instagram posts... The list is endless and all encompassing.



No one seems entirely comfortable with this debris. Echoing Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, in this world we exist as **damaged**, incomplete beings that live within many broken stories.<sup>4</sup> This I consider the ramification of trauma that **'shatters** the most fundamental assumptions that govern functional daily living, leaving survivors and witnesses questioning what they really can know about and do in this world.<sup>5</sup> In some sense, it is inherent to the conscious experience through an awareness that once we did not exist and now we do.

Intuitively, I would regard this space of previous non-existence as the most fertile for myth making, religion and personal cosmologies. It is important that artists consistently assert their creativity against other's attempts to monopolise control of this territory. Eventually it swells to a scale of a dogma that dictates a person's ability – to what extent do they choose to be themselves while **bombarded** in shrapnel?

By virtue of the horrors this world presents, the weapon of trauma is as capable of unifying communities around a common bond, as it is of manifesting genocide. It is the vehement belief of this author that the suppression of trauma in all its bizarre and multiplicitous manifestations is an important step toward oppression, dispossessing its victims of their bodies and denying the reality of their experience.<sup>6</sup> This artwork is a self-reflexive attempt to open discussion on trauma, in the hopes that we can continue developing a more considered approach to its ample complexity.

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An enormous debt of gratitude is owed to Noah Shenker and his profound guidance in my thinking on oppression, victim/perpetrator binaries, and trauma and its connection to technology. It is unfortunate that I wasn't able to finish his unit (Trauma, Memory and the Modern World) but it should be abundantly apparent that its lessons no less have been thoroughly absorbed.

The support of my visual arts teachers, Meredith Turnbull, David Egan and Spiros Panigirakis giving space for the depths of my emotion to leak across our homeroom floor has been instrumental in making me sufficiently comfortable to express myself without fear of judgment or reprisal. Their knowledge, constructive criticism and confidence in me will not be forgotten.

I recognize that it can be deeply uncomfortable to be in the presence of someone lost in the delirium of early stage gender transitioning, along with trauma resurfacing and related pains. While I will not apologise for the poison departing my body, the strongest gratitude goes to those who stood firmly in support of me, especially my mum, Nat, Eamon, Nicky, Will, Hannah, Callan, Erin, my housemates both current and previous, and of course Kelsey. You all have been the network keeping me from getting lost in the void. I look forward to returning the favour in the future.

*Solidarity with other members of the global precariat! This too shall pass! Change is coming!*

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<sup>4</sup> Crucially, this understanding was mediated through the brilliant MUMA exhibit, *TEETHS GUMS FUTURE MACHINES SOCIETY*, a work orchestrated by artist Lily Renaud-Dewar. The irony of only having read parts of a manifesto that prominently espouses incompleteness is not lost on me.

<sup>5</sup> Christine Muller, *September 11, 2001 as a Cultural Trauma*, 2017, p. 8 referring to psychologist Ronnie Janoff-Bulman.

<sup>6</sup> I think here of authoritarian states I have briefly studied like Cambodia and Indonesia (though Australia and America share this quality) and their denial of either the genocide or its associated events. The common argument against giving proper credence to the victim's suffering goes something like: to do so would only reanimate the violence committed against the victim – and funnily enough, this is often said in passive tense to avoid speculating exactly *who* might commit such crimes. Oppression tries to maintain existing hegemonic power structures in the face of inevitable change. Excessive resistance only ends in further damage to repair later on... to the best of our ability, we must hybridise constantly with new stories in order to adjust to an ever-changing world.