

A Blazing New World, For Iris, Part I

A girl is taking a walk through a shopping centre, everything is covered in an undead ooze that catches the shape of the light; everything in the shopping centre is covered in—

*"A trace or residue of the surface interacting with air and light, the mediums of vision."*¹

*"An imperceptible membrane, stretchy, spangled, gauzelike, of total vitality, which included laziness. A crystalline gel. An alphabet."*²

*"Greek goddess Iris, who is the personification of the rainbow and a messenger to the gods"*³

This girl called Iris is walking through a shopping centre. Every unit in the centre is bubbling full of plastic gel that seeps down the walls and coats the objects on counters and display cabinets. Draped around her body are a series of imperceptible garments, licking her limbs like a glaze. Like they are full of longing, they loathe their deceptive stillness, they dance in rebellion and cling to the floor like they're covered in mucus. As Iris walks, she leaves a silvery trail like slug tracks, reflecting all their colours under the strip lighting of the centre. She appears to move but her surroundings stay the same; it is only after a while that it becomes apparent the floor is in motion beneath her, propelled by the trails of slime running beneath her.

Iris is painting a picture to herself under her breath; the paint falls from her garments and from her lips, it drips into her slugslime —
Drip...drip...drip...
(Every drip is an echo is a surface).

As every colour hits the floor it becomes, she utters, reflective, shellac, cheap, viscous; mean, girlish, glittering, anxious; infatuating, optic, new, gesture; light, unholy, horrific, excessive; latex, expensive, hollow, pulsating; populous, massive, anthology, party; cheap, exoskeleton, theory, gloss; shimmering, sensual, rotten, glorious; attention, time, grease, meaning; nostalgic, utopian, affective, consumed; oily, crystalline, slimy, the surreal, structural, surface.

The walls have ears and throats and tongues and eyeballs, their entrapped objects echo with the unctious of her picture. She's foaming from the mouth; everything is dripping from her lips in detergent liquid and bubbles. Floating upwards and disappearing into the sky. The slugslime melts off the floor in a peel, it's a hard rind and will shatter under force, turning into gemstones.

¹ Tavi Meraud, 'Iridescence, Intimacies', in *What's Love (or Care, Intimacy, Warmth, Affection) Got to Do with It?* (Sternberg Press, 2017), pp. 139–61.

² Lisa Robertson, *The Baudelaire Fractal*, 1st edn (Toronto, Canada: Coach House Books, 2020).

³ Stéphanie M Doucet and Melissa G Meadows, 'Iridescence: A Functional Perspective', *Journal of The Royal Society Interface*, 6.suppl_2 (2009) <<https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2008.0395.focus>>.

Iris walks through the shopping centre and coats herself in the language like it's a garment; the kaleidoscope slugslime twinkles under the strip lighting so violently that it produces its own alphabet.

Once Iris stops walking the entire shopping centre will dissolve and this is what will be recovered from the rubble.

Introduction

At the centre of the iridescent encounter is a deception of surface. By iridescent, I mean the tendency of the iridescent surface to change its colours under different angles – a dappled surface responsive to light and the angle of the eye. Overwhelmingly optic, “iridescence is only insofar as it is seen,”⁴ which is to say, to will it into existence, to *really* make this matter, look a little longer. Iridescent objects hold a certain shine, sparkle, dazzle – it has an ungovernable response to our gaze and produces attraction by way of holding attention. Watch it change – this means gaze. The iridescent seduces. It lives to coat the world in its dance.

In this book I use iridescent behaviour from the last three decades as a vehicle to examine the place of the image, garment and text in relation to *girlhood*. More specifically, how it is projected in and travels through different (predominantly western) worlds. I endeavour to explore the *thingness* of this phenomenon and the depth that lurks within its dappled surface.

‘Iridescent’ descends from the Greek Goddess, *Iris*, and of the Greek, ‘poikilos’, which refers to dappled colouring. The Latin suffix *-escent* means ‘having a tendency toward’. *Iris* was a messenger and a rainbow. The dappled colouring of poikilos can also be used to describe a person who is artful, changeable, unstable – like the rainbow.

Iridescence is a troubling quality. In his book *The Viscous*, Freddie Mason calls viscous qualities *tendencies* so that we consider not how materialities *are* their own meanings but how they secrete things that we attach meaning to. Materialities flow, we behold “like forbidden jewels these hidden seizures.”⁵ Iridescence shifts, changes, ripples like a cursed river.

I have seen the iridescent on containers and vehicles; make-up bags, pencil cases and phone screens. I have seen it in mixtures; nail varnish, powders, resins. I have seen the iridescent on the body and in the accessory, in the garment and gesture. The swirl of a dancing skirt, the wink of a gemstone on a finger, the shimmer of a puffer-jacket on the 453 bus to Deptford Bridge. I have seen it in and on the girl, my teenage-hood and myself. Most recently I have seen the iridescent in an image of a horse, upon a friend sending me an article entitled *9 Horses That Shine Like Gold*.⁶

As I write this, I glance down at an iridescently glittering scrunchie around my wrist. It’s been there all day and I’ve paid it no attention until this moment, as I am sat under the icy glare of my computer screen. Its sparkle will continue if I stop looking at it, yet when I do, is specifically dependent on the quality of light in my environment, what kind of garments I am wearing that rub up against it, how long before I break my gaze. When the lights in this café blow out and we are all plunged into darkness, the iridescent subsides for a while. The iridescent relies on light and attention, it produces in-sparkle its own desperation.

Iridescence is a product of matter clumping together and reflecting minuscule molecules and waves of light. It rushes and smacks the light with dazzling scintillation. This is an *intra-action*, a term I borrow from Karen Barad acknowledging the constant shifting, diffracting

⁴ Meraud.

⁵ Freddie Mason, *The Viscous: Slime, Stickiness, Fondling, Mixtures* (punctum books, 2020), p. 28 <<https://punctumbooks.com/titles/the-viscous-slime-stickiness-fondling-mixtures/>> [accessed 7 July 2021].

⁶ Leslie Wylie, ‘9 Horses That Shine Like Gold’, *HORSE NATION*, 2013 <<https://www.horsenation.com/2013/01/03/9-horses-that-shine-like-gold/>> [accessed 3 October 2021]. Thanks to Hattie Morrison.

and influencing of ‘things’ inseparably as a neither human nor non-human phenomenon, but rather a “dynamism of forces.”⁷ Mason says, “the dynamics of matter, whether it bursts, trembles, sticks, shimmers or pulls is always as well an imaginative event.”⁸ It is I who hold my gaze at my wrist, desperately trying to suck something stunning out of it. I am struck with the scrunchie’s indifference to me, but also with a cascade of other qualities that interact with the fabric, the light, the depth. Textures are “something like a sensual singularity, the feel of a substance... the great excess”⁹ This is to speak of texture not just in a visual way, but also of fabric and fold – what it feels like to be wrapped in iridescence. To wear iridescence is to be an element of light – a participant in *affect*.

The references in this book are applied through an interdisciplinary methodology, putting feminist theory such as feminist new materialism and post-structural feminism, next to literature, visual arts and dress, and pop culture. These references are not wholly iridescent, but each one takes a step towards asking what it means to shift, shine and scintillate; what is at stake when we do. Rather than simply pointing at obviously iridescent things, I am much more interested in ways to organise iridescent tendencies; what this feels like against the body and how we write it. This approach is both literary and *designerly* – a belief that feminist material and cultural thought can stem from all sorts of places. In this way we yield not only more interesting dialogue but also one that reflects the world as we encounter it; unfinished, overflowing, in-motion. My own writing is much the same because of these materials. A textural-textual analysis that puts different voices in dialogue cannot stand alone but rather leans on such voices to illustrate all the ways we show up in the world; what Rebecca Coleman calls *worldings*.¹⁰ These references are connected through myself, as I am positioned in this book through, around, and with affective tendencies of iridescence. The voices in these pages are connected through iridescence as it is felt – in tactile sensualities.

Each chapter takes a texture through which an iridescent experience is organised: oil, crystal, and slime. Oil references sheen and surface, crystal: sparkle and glitter, and slime: movement and the bodily interior-exterior. Therefore, texturally the book *almost* returns to itself and is organised away from the chronological or linear. Within each chapter iridescence finds itself in artwork so we may talk about gaze and the ways art reflects social movements or ideas that are pertinent to iridescence. We speak of dress, what we wear as a social marker, and iridescent clothing as dazzle or camouflage. In this sense we can ask – is it powerful to disappear? At the close of each chapter, I position a post-structural feminist writer in dialogue with another writer whose work is more contemporary or works with experimental form in a different way. This allows us to question how writing itself can be iridescent, and how feminist writings on gender and *girlhood* in the past three decades are non-definitive, and that these can illustrate iridescent worldings. Finally, wrapped around these chapters is a story of two girls on a journey to find their *Blazing New World*¹¹, as this really, is the aim of the book.

⁷ Whitney Stark, ‘Intra-Action’, *New Materialism* <<https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/i/intra-action.html>> [accessed 28 February 2022].

⁸ Mason, p. 33.

⁹ Mason, p. 26.

¹⁰ Rebecca Coleman, *Glitterworlds, The Future Politics of a Ubiquitous Thing* (London, UK: Goldsmiths Press, 2020).

¹¹ I borrow this term from Margaret Cavendish’s *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* (1666).

Some Girls are Goths

Specifically, the kinds of iridescence I am interested in are ones that have come in the past two decades to be co-opted into an image of *girlishness*. I use this term with a distancing from biological gender, rather referencing the idea, *girl*, a projection or proliferation of images circulated through contemporary society and critical theory. In *Philosophy for Spiders*, McKenzie Wark writes, “Girls are, amongst other things, objects that power perceives as a thing to be desired... In the language of identity, the girl has never been. She is the empty slot in a language defined by others.”¹²

Wark speaks about Kathy Acker as an example of resistance to the girl-slot, “in the absence of language, where the girl isn’t, could be many other possibilities.”¹³ In this way, the suit, the surface, the hole, is thrown back and filled with a usurping of the image, a strategic and active “*unknowability*.”

Let’s take iridescence as something that happens of the surface of things. A spill, leak, or shallow river running atop centuries of fossilised turds. Accessories to girlhood: garments and adornments, a shiny coating or oily encrustation. Objects that encapsulate our ideas of preciousness, attraction and value, yet are made to be cheaply accessible and endlessly replicable. The sparkle of the iridescent lingers in this idea of “girlishness as a consumer paradigm,”¹⁴ all our troubled dreams full of the stuff of fantasy and plastic reality.

The vision of the girl as a non-gendered and idealised consumer was popularised by Tiqqun’s *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-girl*. Here the young-girl is executed as a commodity in herself, “the being that no longer has any intimacy with herself except as value.”¹⁵ A symbol of a *disintegrating social whole*. I am, however, driven to move away from this text’s diagnostic cynicism, and what feels like an overreliance on what Ariana Reines calls “female intellectual rage against the more vapid and conformist members of our sex.”¹⁶ Instead I want to look towards how material and language can offer an alternative understanding of the girl as a mode of resistance, a “vision machine”¹⁷ of alternate pedagogies. A contribution towards a new language of possibility.

In the last decade the young-girl has been the focus of ‘teen girl art,’ says Rosanna McLaughlin for *Frieze*, citing “the effects of prolonged adolescence.”¹⁸ This has been explored by mainly London based female artists in the 2010’s. *Re-materialising Feminism*, a programme of events at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 2014 included a performance by Beatrice Loft Schulz, re-writing the *Story of Joan of Arc* as a rebellious teenager. Teen girl art often uses iridescence as a vehicle to produce recreations of this image, like Samara Scott’s 2015 exhibition *Silks* in Digbeth, Birmingham that “excavated chunks of the concrete gallery floor, filling them with rainbow-hued pools of feminized flotsam.”¹⁹ Others

¹² McKenzie Wark, *Philosophy for Spiders: On the Low Theory of Kathy Acker* (Durham, NC, USA: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 148.

¹³ Wark, p. 148.

¹⁴ Rosanna McLaughlin, ‘Teenage Dreams’, *Frieze*, 29 October 2016 <<https://www.frieze.com/article/teenage-dreams>> [accessed 7 July 2021].

¹⁵ Tiqqun, *Preliminary Materials Towards the Theory of a Young Girl*, trans. by Ariana Reines (South Pasadena, CA, USA: Semiotext(e), 2012), p. 18.

¹⁶ Tiqqun, ‘Triple Canopy – Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl by Tiqqun’, trans. by Ariana Reines, *Triple Canopy*

<https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/16/contents/preliminary_materials_for_a_theory_of_the_young_girl> [accessed 11 July 2021].

¹⁷ Tiqqun, *Preliminary Materials Towards the Theory of a Young Girl*, p. 14.

¹⁸ McLaughlin.

¹⁹ McLaughlin.

work more literally with the image of the girl: Amalia Ulman's 2014 *Excellences and Perfections* staged a series of images of a rich, white girl "acting out scenes from a vacuous luxury," curated through Instagram over six months. In this way, the young-girl is both a performance, image and a living (not necessarily female) person with a set of experiences.

In 2016 I was 18. About to leave my teenage bedroom for the first time, the same room that I find myself back in at this moment, pondering McLaughlin's words:

*"The teenage bedroom has been granted a decade-long extension, as have all manner of pubescent mores."*²⁰

I am fascinated with my own extended teenage-hood in the same way that I am fascinated with the iridescent. They see something of themselves in each other and carry a deception; an otherworldly, nostalgic, dreamlike tendency. The girl is grotesquely multiple. Iridescent matter will change its shape to fit that of my skin, asks what we mean by surface.

It's perhaps true; some girls are young-girls. Some of us are ageing and tired. Some of us are goths. Some of this makes us iridescent.

Every Girl is a Shape-Shifter

Aged around 14, a school friend was sleeping over at my house, and as we sat cross-legged from one another on my bed we spoke about our pubes. Above my bed I had bluetacked a picture of the sunset in a clumsy metaphor about how wide the sky was. Speaking about our bodies, I had said 'underneath our clothes girls are all just tangled messes,' and I'd meant this. It was a struggle to contain, I had meant, how leaky and excessive a pubescent body was; so difficult to make it beautiful. *Tell me*, I had meant to say, *that there is something beautiful about this*. Around the same time as this, an image began circulating online. A crude illustration depicting a crowd of pink girls with tits like melons, their unity interrupted by a sketch of one girl drawn with a black line. She reads a book with an 'error' message tacked to her forehead. This image was a reminder to any girl who wished to believe it: *You Are Not Like Other Girls*.²¹

A couple of summers ago one Love Island contestant wasn't getting on with the other girls in the house and upon being confronted about this, replied, *I'm just not like other girls*. She meant, *I get on better with boys, I am not a girls-girl*. What this appeared to do was alienate her from the all-female friendships that seemed to be necessary in the house for both support and narrative. This was the status quo – the girls and the boys. What this admission did was to identify from female friendships and pop culture a binary: you can be like the other girls, or you can be *not like other girls*. This confrontation sent me spiralling back to my earlier teenage-hood where we, anxiously angsty girls, identified with this refrain because it told us that we were different, this was special, being a *normal girl* was a narrative that did not belong to us because we were meant to be part of 'better' things. What does a girl really look like, anyway? The horror of this image now, is guttural. *Not being like other girls* divides girliness into a binarism that does more to reinforce gender roles and stereotypes of femininity than it does to act as a principle of resistance to the gendered image, which perhaps it was an early and mislead attempt to verbalise.

²⁰ McLaughlin.

²¹ Celyra the Romantic, 'You're Not Cool, Just Sexist: Why Your "I'm Not Like Other Girls" Act Is Bullshit', *Nouveaux Romantiques*, 2015 <<https://nouveauxromantiques.wordpress.com/2015/12/29/actually-you-are-like-other-girls-why-your-im-not-like-other-girls-act-is-bullshit/>> [accessed 4 March 2022].

This image tells us that being pretty is a kind of compliance, and that by reading a book we gain a kind of self-awareness that gives us the ability to be *not like other girls*. *Other girls* can't read, of course. This reflects the *girl* in wider society because it says that as a *girl*, one can only serve to be illustrated by another hand. In refusing to accept the binaries of this view, we open girlhood to possibilities of community, unknowability, and of course, the radical view that there is freedom to be found in choosing to be beautiful *and* intelligent, ugly *and* stupid. All these things can be girlhood, or not. To put it another way, in resisting the binaries of self-othering, we reclaim the freedom to be unknowable – to shape-shift.

After Joan

Sometime around this image, a girl called Joan of Arc plates herself with metal and runs away from home.

*Joan of Arc is in love with the image.*²²

Joan of Arc loves the image so much that she becomes it and in turn, it becomes a vessel for truth. Beatrice Loft Schulz rewrote the story of Joan of Arc in a performance as part *Re-materializing Feminism* at the ICA. She wraps her limbs in tape and writhes around slowly, reciting Joan's story like a manifesto.

Joan of Arc's immaturity is the container for another story: Joan of Arc and the allegory of touch.

Joan of Arc leads men to battle and is then burned at the stake because she did not see God. Some hundreds of years later she's bought back from the dead and turned into an artist. Joan of Arc's immaturity points towards her vulnerability, and each step in her story is a footnote for how fucked up and famous she eventually becomes. Joan runs away to New York and transforms her image to that of an artist.

Joan of Arc impulsively...throws out her clothes and her makeup, shaves her head, and poses as a young male artist.

Confounded in layers and surfaces, the authenticity of the image is revealed through asserting one's own joints as a politico-religious manifesto. Wark quotes, "in the future we'll never conceal anything about ourselves (unlike you) because our purpose here is the marking of history. Your history."²³ The girl is a rebellion-machine and this is when Joan of Arc *really* sees God, and they both look like teenagers.

Joan of Arc's body is not a metonym. A collection of clothes, surfaces, looks, and body parts, it is the real document. A confession.

Joan of Arc reclaims the authenticity of the idol as a subject of oppression and palimpsestic fiction. Joan traces two thin lines throughout the ICA, out towards Pall Mall, past Downing Street and right into the teenage bedroom. One says myth, image, idol, and the other says document, fact, confession. They are each made of razor-sharp surfaces, twisted like a helix, catching the light and reflecting all the colours of Iris, our rainbow.

²² Beatrice Loft Schulz, *The Story of Joan of Arc*, 2014.

²³ Wark, p. 150.

A Blazing New World, for Iris, Part II

Iris is playing a game, still walking, to see how long she can stay in one place without breathing or dying. To stay in once place whilst walking is to be a video-game avatar like Lara Croft.

She puts on her skin as fruit sellers warble underneath the sincere spires of Castle Quay (the town-centre shopping experience). The centre has stood, probably, for decades; an arch and foreboding structure in the shadows of which, this small market town has seeped from the soil. Claire's Accessories has stood here for as long as anyone can remember, making profit from adorning and punching out little holes of flesh from the girls within a 15 mile radius.

Near the till points of every store is a display hung with cheap and inoffensive tat, designed to target the impulsive. In neat little bags small items are encapsulated with the same iridescent plastic, shimmering in blues, pinks, greens, yellows, lilacs. They are objects of transformations: touch, stroke, daub. They are moulded, melted, cooled, into shapes of use. *Around us, all of here*, Iris says to the cashier, *used to be liquid*.

*Dead, wrapped in plastic,*²⁴ these displays of technicolour plasticity are only ever a container. They are so unspecial, so disposable, so cheap that they could be anywhere. But this one is in front of Iris and she's looking at it. She is suspended, for a moment, in a skin that is deceptively cavernous; a kind of nowhere-ness.

²⁴ Mark Frost and David Lynch, 'Twin Peaks' (ABC, 1990).

C1. OIL

Let me define oil in my own terms. A noxious film stretched thin. I'm thinking of glaze. Crude. Deep sea. Frack. Pump. I think of how clothing coats the body and oil does not leave room for air. This surface is mouldable, varnishing the tongue and the fingertips. This sense of plasticity, manipulation of form. Plastic clothing and objects with oily tendencies: my Barbie dolls, rain macs, the jelly shoes that had a brief resurgence a couple of summers ago. Let them separate themselves from the rain, let all language bead up and roll off.

Oil makes plastic, and both have a material infinity that will lead to our own destruction in a horror of permanent youth. The oily accessories of my childhood will litter the backs of drawers and landfill forever. Oil: I am thinking of all the *My Little Ponies* in the world, smelted from the stuff. I am thinking of a Trojan *My Little Pony*, its hollow guts serving as a space to encapsulate Joan of Arc, Iris, all the artist-girl-freaky bodies confessing they believe in the image.

Oil is an ecological disaster. Oil is iridescent. When oil spills in the ocean it kills the fish in its path and coats the birds in a nightmarish mud. In the summer of 2020, melting permafrost caused an oil spill that turned an entire river in Siberia shimmering blood red.²⁵ Oil is iridescent because sunlight contains all the colours of the rainbow. In a spill, as the light hits the oil it spreads imperceptibly thin across the water from its centre. As the light interferes with the oil it produces different colours in relation to the thickness of oil across the surface. So, iridescence is a difference of light and depth.

When we think of oil and plastic there is a small step to the superficial. In an essay seductively titled *Iridescence, Intimacies*, Tavi Meraud says that iridescence is “puzzling, dazzling, seemingly superficial,”²⁶ and we are led to question the ‘realness’ or ‘truthfulness’ of the iridescent surface. Intimacy is interesting here, as a mode of closeness or of determining realness. Oil is too real, so irrevocably entangled in global economies – the raging fuel of it – and the way there were queues ‘til the bottom of the road when there were petrol shortages over the winter. How it writes the shape of our governments. Its clinginess and desperation – in oil spills and the absolute refusal of plastic bags to *just rot*. In oil there is impossibility, something so exhaustible and fossil, yet relentlessly pumping itself into everything. The toxic necessity of this stuff. Oil is made of ancient and dead girl-matter.

In the early 1990's, around the same time as Tiqqun wrote about the young-girl, Fredric Jameson spoke of a ‘new depthlessness’ – a postmodern phenomenon of late capitalism that proposed a new tendency towards the surface. “Fascination and practice hyperfocused on the glass more than the display.”²⁷ Through new depthlessness we see an “existentialist model of inauthenticity and authenticity, in which behaviour mirrors a self.” On the one hand, this organises itself similarly to iridescence; a shape-shifting plasticity that changes shape and speaks of the shiny surface, attraction, value. Teen girl art perhaps seeks to confuse this theory. If young-girlhood is organised around a depthlessness; a power-tripped or aesthetic experience of the image-as-truth, then by rewriting and bringing to the surface more troubling tendencies and materials in the image of young-girls – such

²⁵ ‘Arctic Circle Oil Spill Prompts Putin to Declare State of Emergency’, *BBC News*, 4 June 2020, section Europe <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52915807>> [accessed 4 March 2022].

²⁶ Meraud.

²⁷ Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘The New “Depthiness”’, *E-Flux Journal*, Politics of Shine, 61, 2015 <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/61/61000/the-new-depthiness/>> [accessed 5 October 2021].

as changing one's image, work, reclaiming the malleability of objects in a metaphor about the body – we see a complication of the image and its depth. An oily plasticity.

*“We live in a time of iridescence, of scintillation between the virtual and the real—an iridereal perhaps, where surfaces are no longer concretions to be encountered but rather sites of dazzling encounter.”*²⁸

The girl brings iridescent moirés into a notion of depthlessness and dressed as an oil-spill re-writes the surface. This chapter presents iridescence through plasticity and oiliness, allowing us talk through surface-ism and make slippery and *iridereal* the icon, the image, the fold. The surface is an intra-active ‘thing,’ and by complicating this notion of *depthlessness*, it is made deceptive. The real and the unreal, like us, are actors.

1.1. I am Not a Girdle!

So let this be a mediation on material, a trip through texture, an impression of a haptic-optical experience.

How might oil and sublime speak to each other? I think in a vicious morphology; the way both phenomena communicate with the world by force. A spill or a breakage of light. A rupture of the normal – of the surface. The line between beauty and terror is thin, and we find it in both oil and the sublime. Oil and sublime are indifferent, and bigger than us. Neither the oil spill nor the aurora borealis cares about you.

The theory of sublime is most often associated with Kant, in which the subject is instilled with admiration and terror in equal measures.

*“The sight of a mountain whose snow-covered peak rises above the clouds, the description of raging storm, or Milton’s portrayal of the infernal kingdom, arouse enjoyment but with horror; on the other hand, the sight of flower strewn meadows, valleys with winding brooks and covered with grazing flocks, the description of Elysium, or Homer’s portrayal of the girdle of Venus, also occasion a pleasant sensation but one that is joyous and smiling.”*²⁹

Kant’s definition of the sublime is one that invokes patriarchal action and thought; “the sublime *moves*, the beautiful charms,” by turns resigning the beautiful to a more genteel territory of “adornment and glitter.” This produces what Barbara Claire Freeman calls “an allegory for the patriarchal (but not necessarily male) conquering of subject,”³⁰ so although *not necessarily male*, the sublime is a site of a gendered difference. Freeman calls for a feminine sublime, “that which contests binaries and separate ‘male’ and ‘female’ selves [...] a position of resistance in respect for the patriarchal order.”³¹

I am not interested in Kant’s sublime.

Freeman’s work towards a feminine sublime embraces the unstable social body. “The feminine sublime takes a position of respect for otherness, ally receptivity and constant

²⁸ Meraud.

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. by John T. Goldthwait, 1960th edn (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1764), p. 47.

³⁰ Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women’s Fiction* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1997), p. 4.

³¹ Freeman, p. 10.

attention to that which makes meaning infinitely open and ungovernable.”³² I want to take this a step further and ask how we may ally materiality in our understanding of a contemporary vicious sublime.

Here, we embark on a definition towards the *oiled sublime*, wherein we do away with patriarchal scale and embrace a “textual and political practice”³³ with a position of respect for trouble, otherness, change. The oiled sublime looks towards terror in an age of screens and modernity, looks towards the girl as a tool of resistance, girlhood as a secretion and old blood. We look toward the skin, the screen, the page as a surface. The surface as a notion of solidity, overhung with new notions of reality, and leaking, or to return to *Iridescence, Intimacies*:

*“Surfaces are in fact these zones or localities of iridescently shifting, at-once-elusive-and-alluring shining – projecting into the space of the given reality and undermining its hegemony.”*³⁴

How will we ever come towards a definition of the iridescent if we do not embrace the ungovernable feminine sublime? To be iridescent in this way is to be oily and embrace the allure of being shiftingly-invisible. Within the revolutions of sticky and slippery stuff, we can come to a new topology of the iridescent encounter – one that encompasses the girl as unknowable subject. We return to McKenzie Wark’s description of unknowingness as liberation, “Girls in the Acker-web may escape into unknowability, as far as power’s gaze is concerned.”³⁵ The girl’s body – my body, is not an adornment to be conquered by a patriarchal sublime. The girl-body is not a girdle. Instead, we claim the ungovernable-unknown as liberation from this power-gaze. We are as the iridescent is – weaving, scintillating, strategic, cunning.

1.2. Heaven, Full of Amorphous Amphibians

What images can the sublime show us of icons, utopias and iridescence? Sublimity has a partly religious mode through “objects of rapture,”³⁶ encounters with heaven and hellish terror. What can rapture mean in a materialistic age of screens and mass production? A time some theorists have deemed the long nineties, a *slow cancellation of the future*³⁷. Rapture must go by another name.

Heaven was an exhibition at Tate Gallery Liverpool in late 1999-early 2000:

*“The enquiry into the nature or image of heaven in our time... the image is in many ways what it has always been: magic, impossible beauty, glamour, the sublime, the absolute, the distinct, the different – the qualities that have always been ascribed to the saints or the multiple manifestations of divinity.”*³⁸

Heaven was an insight into the concerns and material culture of the new millennium, looking at religion through the lens of a society “formed by fashions and markets, a media-soaked

³² Freeman, p. 11.

³³ Freeman, p. 12.

³⁴ Meraud.

³⁵ Wark, p. 148.

³⁶ Freeman, p. 3.

³⁷ Mark Fisher, ‘The Slow Cancellation Of The Future’, 2014
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCgkLICTskQ>> [accessed 17 January 2020].

³⁸ Doreet LeVitte Harten, *Heaven*, 1999, p. 5.

society that craves networks of all kinds.”³⁹ Seeped in cynical imagery of religious effigy cut with icons of the millennium, the sublime was re-examined as a mode by which we encounter iconography, consumerism, the sheen of the it-girl and the iridescently glamorous garment. I look back at *Heaven* now, to find images of sublimity in the decades that gave us our teenaged selves, in an echo of the end of the future and McLaughlin’s *decade long extension*. Like an object of rapture *Heaven* tells us that nothing new is happening, not now, not ever, gloriously, disgustingly, sarcastically, again and again and again.

I turn to Olga Tobreluts and her series *Sacred Figures*, imposing the heads of celebrities onto classical figures creating “a pastiche which indicates the emergence of a virtual figure highly in demand.”⁴⁰ In the two examples I see, Kate Moss and Lisa Evangelista are painted into saintly figures.

Kate sits in a darkened room, peers out of one window and Lisa peers out of the other. Kate’s shimmering indigo shawl covers her hair and shoulders, her skin glows gold like a saint. Lisa wears a grimace and a ruff, her dress studded with jewels. Kate studies scripture and from her hallowed window repeats a holy refrain.

When the girl is a neo-classical figure she is hidden in the folds of catalogue ues behind the sheen of high-gloss paper. Tobreluts works with irony: “Symbols of the western system negate its values once they are reconstructed and incorporated into an older aesthetics,” she’s calling into question the western value system, “the hegemony of the Avant Garde,”⁴¹ but also highlights the way in which our it-girls time travel. These images bring new meaning to new depthlessness, as the writing-over of history also becomes the proliferation of surface and iconography. With a focus on the it-girl-supermodel, the girl is foregrounded as a herald of the end of history. An armageddon figure, she is given a centuries long face-lift – Kate and Lisa stay neo-classical, until the end.

With Armageddon comes the radioactive nuclear accident, and the smelting of new bodies. In haute couture we serve the girl up to iridescent insect-life in new and terrifying silhouettes. With the creeping fear of a new millennium the iridescent can also be a nightmare-machine, reflecting in its shimmer the shudder into an age of screens, into the plastic and into the machine. Endlessly replicable, we all buzz with iridescent-clipped insect wings and KateMossLisaEvangelista pouring over scripture (*Vogue*).

In the *Heaven* catalogue I see images of two Thierry Mugler runways. *Chimère Couture* (1997/98), feathers, metal, precious stone trim, embroidery. *Manteau de soir en marabout sur corps astral constellé diamants blurs* (1995/96), embroidery, incrustation, marabout feathers.

The 1990’s was in some ways the era of the supermodel: Naomi Campbell, Kate Moss, Lisa Evangelista, Jerry Hall, Tyra Banks and co. Here, the supermodel becomes a symbol not only for glamour and beauty but scenes of new worlds glittering in full colour and encrustation. These models wear shiny, slick, garments moulded to the shape of their bodies like they’ve been dipped in jewelled oil. Doreet Levitte Harten, the curator of *Heaven*, writes in the exhibition catalogue:

³⁹ Lewis Biggs, Director TGL, LeVitte Harten, p. 5.

⁴⁰ LeVitte Harten, p. 187.

⁴¹ LeVitte Harten, p. 187.

“[Mugler’s garments] *Epitomise “the woman” in all of her iconic transformations, be it in her angelic, fatalistic, or demonic manifestations. The woman inside the garment is non-existent insofar as she has already been allegorised by it, making her presence optional if not obsolete. What remains is an image of utopian dimensions.*”⁴²

These runways are both horrifically glamorous, the diamantes and feathery metal reflecting the light, the body ablaze in colour. In something of an anti-iconography, the supermodel here is rendered imperceptible against the garment, and according to Levitte Harten escape a lustrous male gaze because a viewer is blinded instead.

*“The gaze that is focused on glamour does not relate to it in terms of desire, since glamour draws its power from blinding the person subject to it. However, because it blinds rather than seduces, it contains a sacred component, similar to the experience of the sublime. The glamorous woman is not desired but admired by the viewer’s gaze, thus becoming a quasi-religious object.”*⁴³

By making the woman into an image of sublime “quasi-religious object,” is her personhood made obsolete. Or is it rather hidden, protected? There is something about Levitte Harten’s description that makes me uncomfortable. Perhaps it is the way that the garment and the girl seem to swap places – the girl is seemingly made into a surface. Even though she escapes desire, she becomes admired instead, which seems like a parallel to Kant’s beauty/sublime comparison. Let’s look at it this way though: the conglomeration of horror and glamour in *Chimère Couture* subverts the image of the supermodel that perhaps a viewer likes to think they know and own. In allowing the garment to cloud the body in a nacreous haze, the supermodel or girl can thus escape the gaze and transform behind it. If this image is of utopian dimensions, then it is not because of the girl, it is because she is hidden in the body of a vulture or a phoenix, and this makes her impenetrable.

I think this complicates what Levitte Harten calls the utopian. Our Winged Woman and Diamante Dame present complicated visions where obscenity is a superpower yet is still described as an *object*. I propose that these images contain dystopian proportions. By bringing utopia and dystopia, heaven and hell, into dialogue we thus do away with Freeman’s criticism of the sublime – a patriarchal binarism and embrace the ungovernable feminine sublime. Oil is the horror-machine driving the ruins of a world taken over by iridescent winged-women, Irises, Arkes, Medusas.

Let’s look further at dystopia, and at Alexander McQueen’s final collection *Plato’s Atlantis* (Spring/Summer 2010). In this aquatic-dystopian world the girl disappears into a sub-aqua scalene inferno, the silhouette adorned with bubbles and spikes. The ‘Armadillos’ round off this catwalk shortly after models wrapped in floating tulle like jellyfish, a full body of iridescent paillettes and stiletto heels that elongate the feet talon-like, both grotesque and glamorous.

*“The designer’s apocalyptic forecast of the impending ecological meltdown of the world. Predicting a time when, as he wrote in the programme notes, ‘the ice caps would melt... the waters would rise... and life on earth would have to evolve in order to live under the sea or once more or perish.’”*⁴⁴

⁴² LeVitte Harten, p. 155.

⁴³ LeVitte Harten, p. 155.

⁴⁴ Chloe Fox, *Vogue on Alexander McQueen*, Vogue on Designers (London: Quadrille, 2012), p. 138.

In *Plato's Atlantis* iridescence signals otherworldliness and has transformative capabilities. The supermodel or girl disappears again, into an amorphous amphibian androgyny. This watery new world is described as a dystopia but reaches glamorous heights similar to Mugler's garments in *Heaven*, conversely hailed as utopian.

Plato's Atlantis saw alien shoes with ribs and cliffs painted pearly iridescent white, whole bodies of paillettes and oyster shells. Something in the underwater speaks to dystopia – beautifully glistening aliens lurk in unknown depths. We can say that this way our iridescent models are coated in an oily sheen, as the image-surface of the it-girl disappears, is perhaps liberated, from form in a symbolic destruction of the image.

1.3. The Fold

Once the image is destroyed then, it becomes a series of folds. An alternate landscape.

I'm in the room, and I'm thinking of plastic. I'm thinking of hot oil conglomerating, sitting, cooling, into a hard plastic pellet. Stretch the pellet as far as its surface allows, streeeeettttchhhh it far, far, faaaaaaarr until it's nothing but a skin. Oils seep through pores in the walls and they set into the shape of a gallery.

Subtitled *Details for a Retrospective*, Karla Black's exhibition *Sculptures* catalogues around 20 years' worth of work from 2001 to present from Edinburgh's Fruitmarket Gallery. Beyond the rain, the gallery bristles with "forms that never quite settle."⁴⁵ I drift towards a towering mountain of glimmering plastic wrap pointing upwards, towards the sun, which is a series of spotlights hanging from the rafters. Swirled into its folds are wisps of delicate pink paint. Something about the matte paint against the reflective plastic says iridescent. It gives impression that it is cusping on collapse – like when you haven't taken the bin out and it's brimming with crisp packets and cellophane. Elsewhere, the same cellophane is suspended from the ceiling in an infinity symbol.

I want us to return to the word brimming. An impulsion toward the surface – a whorl or a bubble. I am impatient and I lead Brimming through the room with my hand. It smells of nothing and chemicals. It looks like motion and colour. The silence of the room too is brimming, waiting for someone to take another photo, something to reach out and touch us or fall over.

I drift through a series of peels, globs, skins and stacks. They are chosen, according to Black, for their aesthetic qualities "rather than any meaning that might attach to them in the wider world."⁴⁶ Blobs of iridescent creams and goops like make-up are dabbled onto a sheath of nylon and hanging heavy to the floor. Panes of glass stand or hang like large tablets around the tower, encapsulating strokes and swirls of peachy, baby, soft and sloppy pastel shades. In another room the brickwork and metal rafters in the building are left exposed, and shiny metallic leaf, iridescent goops and gels gobbled onto the walls and suspended in the space shine and sparkle against the dark.

I cannot ignore my own body in this space – I see myself in these reflective surfaces. Swirled in plastic and creamy iridescent resin, I snap a picture of someone through a pane of pastel swirled-glass. Like the room has given us body paint, it throws back our own surfaces. Outside it is raining and I wear a plastic rain-mac that glitters with raindrops from

⁴⁵ Karla Black, *Sculptures: Details for a Retrospective*, 2021.

⁴⁶ Black.

the sky, refuses to settle on my plastic skin – so oil and water separate, and as I walk into the gallery they glint and reflect off the sculptures, like a kind of touch.

1.4. Sinew

Let's look at some more cellophane folds. In 2006 the fashion photographer Nick Knight threw a masked ball because he'd won an award (it was the Mötet Chandon Fashion Tribute), everyone said how humble he was and, in their apparel, all went into outer space.

Fashion stylist Katy England attended the party wearing a McQueen pink and white candy-striped wedding dress. English Vogue ran a feature of this event, sitting glossy photos of Kate Moss in pewter and Katy England in her wedding dress side by side. I read the coverage of the event, thinking about Karla's plastic mountains, the soft shade of pink she'd daubed onto the spire of swirling plastic – the same shade of pink as Katy's dress. They pose in front of glittering plastic wrapping, like the stuff of Black's tower:

"The set, partially inspired by a classic Cecil Beaton shot of young debutantes readying themselves for a ball, is wrapped polythene sheeting...speak of unbridled decadence and beauty."⁴⁷

In the image, three girls in white dresses and crystal-encrusted caps sit in a sea of balloons covered in a clear plastic wrap. They're swimming in froth, like they're sitting in a pan of boiling water. How is this plastic iridescent? In a manipulation of the surface, roiling folds and waves like Black's sculptures, that do not settle. What keeps it all together? I mean, what binds iridescence, gel, foil or cellophane to the body and stops it running off, pooling all over the floor? I arrive at a term for the thin layer beneath a surface, in a body, the thin filmic material that joins the muscle to bone (image, meaning) – *sinew*.

A friend, upon talking about sinew, describes the disgust of animal biology – the grossness and meatiness of ourselves. "It looked beautiful, *actually* iridescent," they say, "like something I could buy in Claire's Accessories." This image of Katy and Kate wrapped in plastic – swinging, slowly sparking, reflecting light. McQueen's Armadillo covered in her own sinew, holding herself together. The body of the girl is fibrous tissue that connects piles and piles of plastic, crumpled and laid into galaxies in a corner and woven into the shape of a dress – the girl here, is the sinew of this moment.

Isn't the girl often sinew? The meat that connects the image of a girl to the idea of attraction and value. This is sinew because it holds an idea to an image, and then we get something we can attribute to meaning or movement. And can we not say the same about looking at art? Our bodies in the gallery produce looking, which is the thing that connects what we can interpretation to the pile of stuff in front of us. Our bodies are the sinew that makes art, like our supermodels wearing McQueen and Mugler forge new identities from a girl-shape, create new meanings. Garments which surpass my own body creates a fantasy and a film – which her body exudes like sticky sauce.

And what does this mean for the iridescent? Black's exhibition, the Knight ball, the debutants, are united through something shiny and undulating. But to really get into the iridescent we must think of behaviour – plasticity. We must return to this section title and remind ourselves of oil. In a glass, if I put water and a drop of oil together, the oil will spread imperceptibly thin and create a skin, sometimes one molecule thick, coating the water. If I

⁴⁷ 'Knight Vision', *English Vogue*, November 2006.

stick my finger in it, it bends and ruptures and changes shape around me. These surfaces fold, warp, and speak of something new. A metamorphosis of iridescence.

Through the metamorphosis of iridescence, the girl is given opportunities to hide. In an image that has been overwhelmingly public, we may find that through metamorphosis – behaviours, dynamics, sparks, of forces that interact with the iridescent copiously – we are able to add weird shapes and colours to a narrative of girlhood that act as a form of liberation or revenge. As McKenzie Wark says of the girl and her deception, how she might evade us:

*“The girl too is not an identity of an event, but something produced by chance and fluid time. Lulu: You can’t change me because there’s nothing to change. I’ve never been.”*⁴⁸

I have been produced in the folds of fluid time – *I’ve never been*.

1.5. The Veil

How do we write iridescently? In answering this question, I want to reach for the post-structural. Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva. Their writing floats in and out of sense, contains tokens of metaphor and whispers of embodied knowledges. Like the iridescent alludes to a depth, we use these writers to speak of sensuality. They use language in a different way. They answer to a different kind of logics – that of the body.

These texts also carry trouble. They are deliberately unclear, so in disturbing the surface, the patriarchal, they also squirm beyond our reach. They separate, as oil and water. They speak of a biological difference that is harmful. When speaking of the girl, we must remind ourselves “there might be many kinds of girls.”⁴⁹ When we speak of girl we also speak of dirt and trouble, hope and refusal. We speak of a wider body, writer-body, mythical body, horrifying body.

Sometimes obscurity is a superpower, but sometimes it lands in the wrong spaces. We must not get lost in the wispy world of these words. We use them to make a return to our own worlds. What if these texts used obscure stylistic qualities to throw into question the boundaries of the gendered body rather than set it apart? We iridise (which I have decided is the *verb* form of iridescence) but we do not outline.

To *iridise* is to deceive the surface. To speak of an interplay between light and surface, something like a covering that hides and goes to new depths. Perhaps this is to speak of something like an oily coating, a plastic sheet – or a veil.

Bathsheba and the Interior Bible by Hélène Cixous takes a journey “in the direction of Bathsheba,”⁵⁰ studying the painting *Bathsheba Bathing* by Rembrandt. Composed of short sections it is a journey into and around the light of the painting, the flesh of it, but also a journey into absence.

“The country is a room of palpitating folds.

⁴⁸ Wark, p. 148.

⁴⁹ Wark.

⁵⁰ Hélène Cixous, ‘Bathsheba the Interior Bible’, in *Stigmata* (Abingdon, OXON, UK: Routledge, 1998), pp. 3–24 (p. 3).

What I feel: this obscurity. It is the troubled air of our secrets, those that govern us and that we're not really aware of. We (Bathsheba) are in the secret. The secret surrounds us. Bathsheba is seated in our room, in our breast, like a luminous heart. She contains the light. The light doesn't spill out."⁵¹

In *the troubled air of our secrets* we are shown our folds in dappled golden light. Cixous asks us what we're not seeing. The absent, the other half of the image that isn't there, "the other side belongs to the night. I will never know then, but half of Bathsheba, the illuminated part."⁵² Bathsheba the girl is a half-illuminated image, and there are worlds within her that we do not know about. We do not know her, and I read this as a kind of liberation.

Cixous points us to a veil in the image:

*"Rembrandt grazing Bathsheba's groin with a veil.
The veil, a nothing that creates the nudity.
Without this transparent nothing we would forget she is nude."*⁵³

The veil consults absence. Catches the light, activates the world around language. These folds are immovable in paint – the body is brought into light by it. This transparent nothing, like iridescence, tricks us with its depth. This is to be wrapped in iridescence in a different way – to be wrapped in light.

We must now look further than Bathsheba and instead at the practice of veiling – what this might say to iridescent interactions. I turn to Lisa Robertson's book, *The Baudelaire Fractal*. In this novel Hazel Brown, a teenaged girl renting a series of rooms in 1980's Paris, takes a walk over the wrapped Pont Neuf. This is a reference to a wrapping project by Christo and Jean-Claude, in which the oldest bridge in Paris was swathed in 41,800 square meters of polyamide fabric for two weeks in Autumn 1985.

The Pont Neuf wears a veil, "silky in appearance and golden sandstone in color."⁵⁴ The veil gives way to a manipulation of surfaces – glazes, folds, pleats and ripples – transforming the bridge into "a festival of pleasure."⁵⁵ This veil:

*"A kind of synthetic from the future, with qualities both ancient and extraterrestrial. Very Issey Miyake, I'd now say..."*⁵⁶

How might Cixous reply? She might say, "the interior world is full of night and golden stuff," she'll speak of the light, "the stuff, the linens, the dark golds, the white golds, border on, play in major and minor, the body's blond gold."⁵⁷ Bathsheba's blond gold is draped in sandstone around the Pont Neuf.

Robertson replies with an image of the bridge, "*become flesh, imbued with mysterious and occult passion.*"⁵⁸ In this way, when the Pont Neuf lights up in gold one evening in 1985, it

⁵¹ Cixous, p. 7.

⁵² Cixous, p. 11.

⁵³ Cixous, p. 9.

⁵⁴ 'Christo and Jeanne-Claude | The Pont Neuf Wrapped' <<https://christojeanneclaude.net/artworks/the-pont-neuf-wrapped/>> [accessed 27 November 2021].

⁵⁵ Robertson, p. 131.

⁵⁶ Robertson, p. 131.

⁵⁷ Cixous, p. 8.

⁵⁸ Cixous, p. 130.

does so with the *golden stuff* of Bathsheba. She is the oldest woman in Paris, which is made of her, as Hazel Brown walks a line over her spine.

In an email exchange, Robertson recalls that this wrapping was not the iridescent cloth I imagine it to be. She says that perhaps Christo and Jean-Claude's latest project was iridescent. This year they wrapped the Arc de Triomphe in a silvery sheeting, and I recall two weeks in September when my Instagram sparkled. The Pont Neuf wrapping was something matte and woven – she returns to the fold, the undulations in the fabric that remind Hazel of *Le lit défait* by Eugene Delacroix. I return to the description of this image, to the folds of a material made to sink into the folds of the body:

*“...deep tarnished silvery folds and creases formed by the weight and movement of absent bodies...the sense of languor and intimacy...at once irresistible and completely impersonal...The image was a threshold.”*⁵⁹

What role does iridescence play in this novel? Robertson describes the Samaritaine department store on the banks of the river *“competently swathed, not in the creamy synthetic toile, but in a glittering iridescent plastic sheeting, in a pleasantly irritating promotional echo of art.”*⁶⁰

Iridescence according to Robertson plays the role of the echo, the duplication, image. It reverberates meaning into the world around it. Two kinds of looking are muddled – looking at art and shopping. These gazes echo each other and play a role in obscuring what lies beneath the gauze, like the unmade bed, an absence.

On the other side of the painting, the veil, the *ancient and extraterrestrial* sheet is a whole world we will never see. We look again at Bathsheba and Cixous says

*“We call this: profile. In fact it is a side, a half, a demi-star. The other side belongs to the night. I will never know then but half of Bathsheba, the illuminated part.”*⁶¹

If the wrapping around the Pont Neuf counts as a veil – which, being a pleated fabric adorning a body, I think it does – then what these writings teach us is that the fold is an act of iridescence. In this movement our attentions are pointed around the frame, and we are told that we are looking at a demi-star – there is a whole other side beneath that remains obscure. Like an oil spill we look deeper into the puddle, into the sea, and this side that we see acts as a veil. Rainbow scintillations direct our gaze, shows us that we are only ever looking so deeply into a surface (skin). Its own deception being that our attentions are drawn by an unstable act of light. What happens beneath the surface is suffocated by light, and what this tells us is that either things die, or they hide, find a different way to breathe.

Cixous reminds us that Bathsheba does not look at us:

*“Don't stop looking, don't stop living (that is to say dreaming, that is to say leaving) in order to look at us.”*⁶²

As Hazel Brown walks over Bathsheba's bridge she calls pleasure, she says light, don't stop leaving, in order to look at us.

⁵⁹ Robertson, pp. 123–24.

⁶⁰ Robertson, p. 131.

⁶¹ Cixous, p. 11.

⁶² Cixous, p. 9.



Fig. 1 & 2

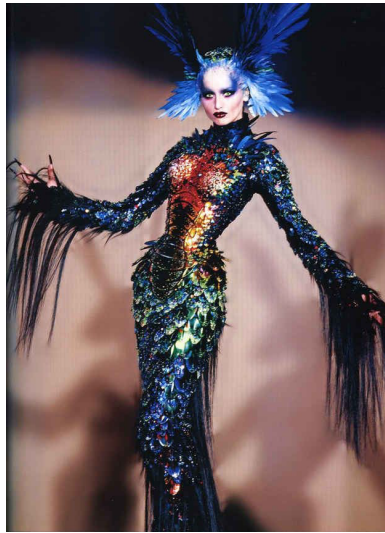


Fig. 3 & 4

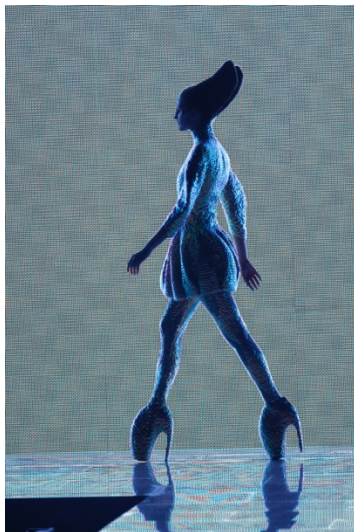


Fig. 5 & 6



Fig. 7 & 8

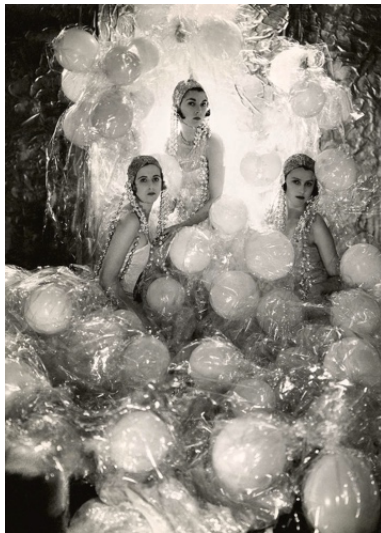


Fig. 9 & 10

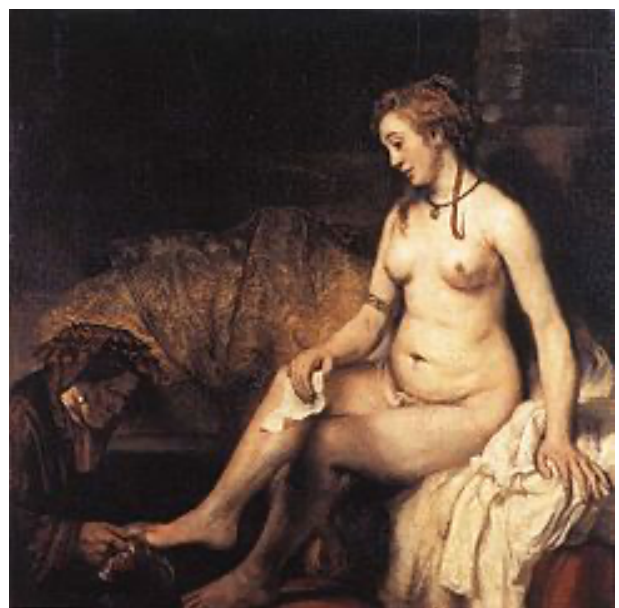


Fig. 11 & 12

Ode to my Sister
&
The Story of Iris and Arke, An Interlude

No one told me that Iris had a little sister whose wings contained more colours than her own. Iridescent wings. I think of my own little sister – more rebellious and messier than me, she, like Arke, iridescent in deception.

Let me re-tell the story.

Iris is a Greek goddess, a messenger and a rainbow. Iris has golden wings. She is where the word 'iridescent' comes from – a deceptive surface that twists the rainbow. She travelled upon it. Some say a fold. A lie.

Arke is Iris' sister, she had *iridescent* wings. She is sometimes understood to be the faded second rainbow under the first. My own little sister would never accept the position of faded second rainbow, and I think about how loud she is.

During the Titan War, Iris is a messenger to the gods, but Arke becomes messenger to the Titans. This is a betrayal, and so Zeus strips Arke of her wings.

After Zeus takes away Arke's wings he gives them away as a wedding present, and it is possible that they end up on Achilles' feet.

Podarches: Feet like the wings of Arche.

I am biting the inside of my mouth away and what comes out is pearlescent and gobby matter. I am going to save my mouth-chunks, make a pair of wings, resurrect her.

The wings will attach to the inside of my mouth, so flying, like dentistry, becomes an open-mouthed affair. My tinder bio: *I wear my wings in my mouth and my heart on my sleeve.*

Love could never contain the iridescent, it means too much.

A Blazing New World, For Arke, Part III

As Arke walks through the centre, the gemstones hit the floor with a rattle, and each rattle has a voice inside of it.

"What is it about materials that glimmer, like silver, gold or diamonds, that makes people think of them as noble?"⁶³

"An impossible icy volcano erupting the baleful fire of the swallowed sun"⁶⁴

"Crystals are early humans. We were once and can be again diamonds, and we carry icebergs and the snow tops of mountains inside us."⁶⁵

Arke walks out past the centre; it's slowly breaking down and becoming a museum of itself. It's producing its own history. The further Arke gets from the centre she realises that it's made of a thousand screens pulsating with plasma, wrapped around a bubbling core. The image has now subsumed the real, and every unit is flooded with holograms of garments that are all kept in one gigantic warehouse. The screen is a many sided dice wrapped around its own scintillating centre. She rolls a six and keeps on walking. In the distance now, the centre glows like moonlight on water. This new kind of light has a texture like the smoothness of mirrors and the whole air is full of beads of grease. This is how we reproduce, when we see ourselves reflected one thousand times over in tiny liquid diamonds hung from the clouds.

She's walked right up to the edge of the sun and the fire is freezing cold. The poles flipped in the new millennium and turned the sun into a huge icy fist. Everything perceptible happens in ice-light, erupted in a spray of crude minerals with the brilliance of the nocturne. Perceptible includes literature, because breath is warm Arke is learning a language from the mist in front of people's mouths. She is the messenger who did not stay loyal and keeps these as records, develops a mode of communication that relies on the interactions between fog and wind.

If Arke stands exactly where she is standing now, now the centre and the sun look the same, like time has split into dual sunsets and sunrises. You can hear the passing of time like salt-grit melts ice. One tells the truth and the other tells fiction, both songs sound the same.

She reaches the very edge of the sun, just before the blaze becomes unbearable, and realises that the sun is one long icy pole – not a ball at all. The sun is an unending self-generating strip light. The nearer Arke gets the closer she is to turning her whole body into

⁶³ Han Kang, *The White Book*, trans. by Deborah Smith, Granta 2019 (Portobello Books, 2017).

⁶⁴ Anna Kavan, *Ice*, 001 edn (London, UK: Penguin Random House, 1967).

⁶⁵ Esther Leslie, *Liquid Crystals: The Science and Art of a Fluid Form* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Reaktion Books, Limited, 2017)
<<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rcauk/detail.action?docID=4806475>> [accessed 7 July 2021].