

EATING THE EARTH

RikTheMost — Merissa Foryani — Melanie McKerchar — CR Green

A selection of new poetry developed in response to Ruth Watson's exhibition *Geophagy* at Toi Moroki CoCA.
These works were developed following a workshop led by RikTheMost, February 2018.

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RUTH WATSON: GEOPHAGY

Geophagy, the practice of consuming dirt and clay, can be read as a metaphor for our overpopulation, consumption, and destruction of the Earth. Used by some indigenous peoples in cooking to absorb toxins from indigestible plants, *Geophagy* can also be read as a more positive reference to our relationship to the Earth, and to indigenous knowledge; a conscious and purposeful consumption.

Auckland-based, Canterbury-born Ruth Watson's multifaceted exhibition is acutely about the present moment, speaking to global politics and environmental issues. Through a sprawling installation, video, audio and printed works, Watson takes a critical look at the world today and seems to suggest that it's not clear what we should do, collectively or individually. With so many issues and paths of action vying for our attention, the immeasurable size of the problems we face, and the systemic causes out of our control, taking action can feel overwhelming. Describing the world as being in a state of "dystopian present", Watson reflects on the complexity of our relationship to the environment, and the incongruity of living in a place that we are destroying, without any clear means to unify and prevent that destruction.

This collection of poems was developed in a workshop responding to Geophagy run by RiktheMost. After a tour of the exhibition with Curator Khye Hitchcock, participants spent an afternoon on site developing new works. Later that week, they also performed these works at a spoken word night held in the gallery.

RikTheMost is a spoken word artist from the UK. They've been commissioned by the BBC, performed at the Royal Opera House, had their work featured at events and taught workshops around the world, represented Australia at the American National Poetry Slam Finals and were ranked second in New Zealand, 2017.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIRT

RikTheMost

I am born from the Earth.
Well... mother...
My mother...
My Mother Earth.
Not dirt,
As such,
Well... dirt,
But not dirty:
No, there is no dusty deity dictating mounts of dirt at me,
No, mucking my being,
Just earthly.
I can't remember the last time I even bothered with dirt...
Perhaps long ago,
When I was born and it was still a part of me;
Part of my mother
Earth wasn't an "other" then.
Not something separate from,
But within.
Yes, we don't bother with dirt now:
Scrubbed "clean",
Unbound from skin;
Holy matricide;
Divorce our kin;
Discard the earth from our mother's tongue,
After chewing up and spitting out all it has ever given.
Under foot,
Trampled;
Ground back into the ground.
Beneath us.
Yes we hover so high above it now,
But remember:
It released us.

CONSUMERS

Merissa Foryani

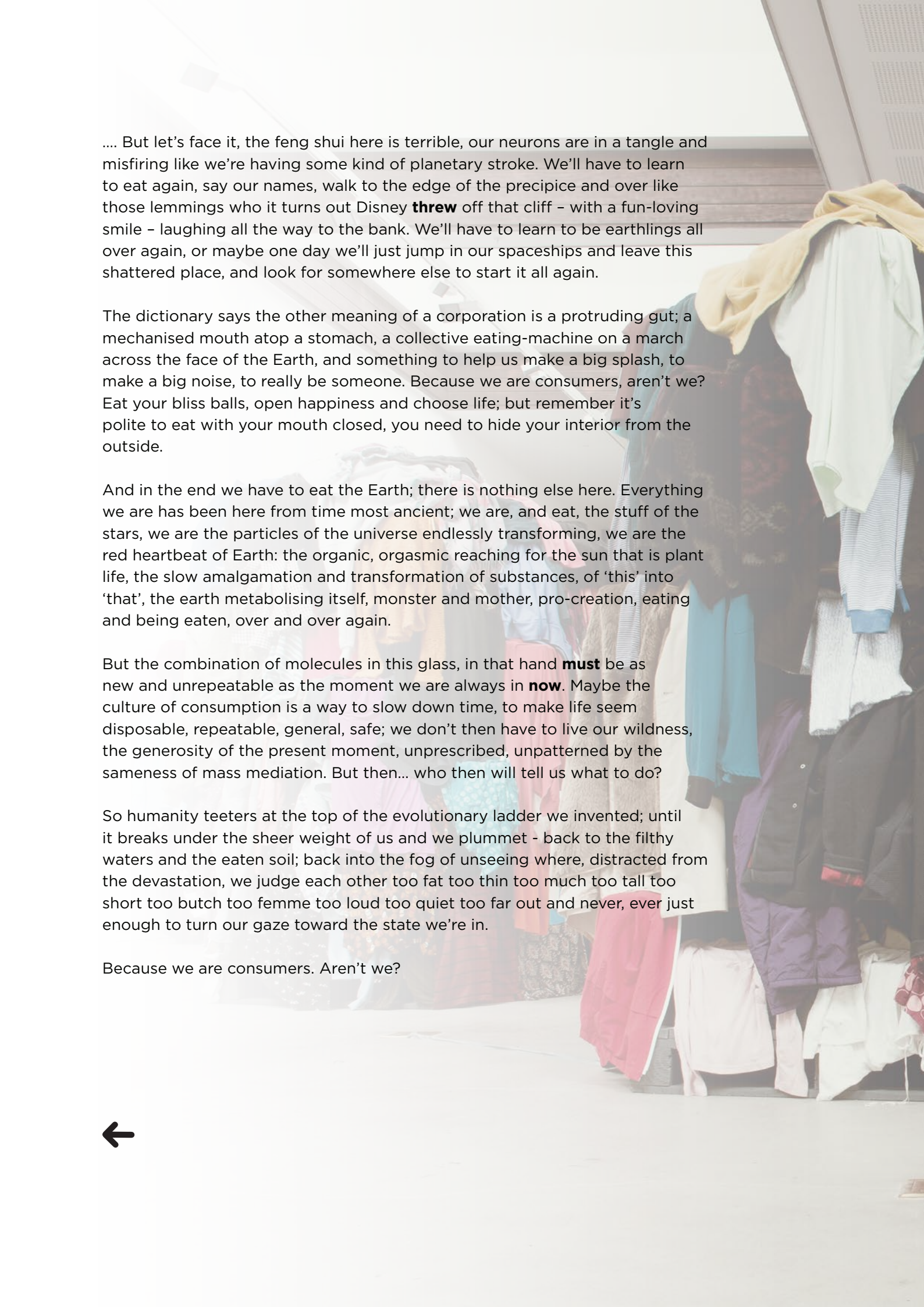
When someone stops eating, their bodies become a protest and a perverse kind of protection as their lives run down to a standstill and stop, like the entropy of a wind-up watch. Their skeletons in the ground or up in smoke we say it was a singular disease, poor thing; a personal disorder, a one-off, not a reflection of the obscenity of a world where you can no longer see the moon or the horizon for the piles of shiny junk mirroring to us our distorted façades. But – just before they get there, before it's really clear they've gone too far we say wow, we say, you look fabulous darling, that diet is really working, you could be a model you know, you're an example to the rest of us.

And someone else fills up past comfort and satiety, past numbness to nothingness, til their flesh bursts forth to sleep and unconsciousness. And we say ooh, and what a shame, and what is she thinking, exercising only her elbow as she brings her hand to her mouth, biting and chewing and stuffing her face, soon she'll need a crane to haul her body from her house, a custom-made coffin to lay her bulk in the ground, at last, at one with her prey.

And yet these things make sense amid a barrage of information and overwhelm, a bombardment of images and fragments, the spectacles of war and devastation, cast-off celebrities and white noise, the mass-produced sale of self-expression, the mimicry of fashion uniforms. Where we must keep up! with the changes of fashion and technology, the tyranny of the new; where despite our omnipresent screens, our MRIs, our CAT scans, our bodies dyed and mapped and scrutinised, so much is never seen. Like a poisoned apple the action is on the surface, while our true interiors, ignored, have turned to dust. Our meat, our organs, our bones and our hearts under cover, incognito, out of sight and out of mind. Where we contend with the glaze of judgement, un-sight, being un-met while we wonder (but we know) who and what gets to be visible, pursued, pored-over and dissected and who is left unseen, discarded, and trampled in the street – and both conditions kill. Our GPS screams for updates while the physical map is full of holes, and moulders in the gutter, sodden and reeking.

And here amongst the waterfall of clothes, the fading smell of bodies and memories, the aura of decay, the discarded, the disowned, the 'so last year'. The smells of bodies unstarved and so unvalued, the detritus and disarray, the dirt and food stains, the clutter and blank spaces. The sparkles, beads, and hearts to decorate our skins and the colours and shapes of us already sold to us as the markers of identity **before** the clothes go on.





.... But let's face it, the feng shui here is terrible, our neurons are in a tangle and misfiring like we're having some kind of planetary stroke. We'll have to learn to eat again, say our names, walk to the edge of the precipice and over like those lemmings who it turns out Disney **threw** off that cliff - with a fun-loving smile - laughing all the way to the bank. We'll have to learn to be earthlings all over again, or maybe one day we'll just jump in our spaceships and leave this shattered place, and look for somewhere else to start it all again.

The dictionary says the other meaning of a corporation is a protruding gut; a mechanised mouth atop a stomach, a collective eating-machine on a march across the face of the Earth, and something to help us make a big splash, to make a big noise, to really be someone. Because we are consumers, aren't we? Eat your bliss balls, open happiness and choose life; but remember it's polite to eat with your mouth closed, you need to hide your interior from the outside.

And in the end we have to eat the Earth; there is nothing else here. Everything we are has been here from time most ancient; we are, and eat, the stuff of the stars, we are the particles of the universe endlessly transforming, we are the red heartbeat of Earth: the organic, orgasmic reaching for the sun that is plant life, the slow amalgamation and transformation of substances, of 'this' into 'that', the earth metabolising itself, monster and mother, pro-creation, eating and being eaten, over and over again.

But the combination of molecules in this glass, in that hand **must** be as new and unrepeatable as the moment we are always in **now**. Maybe the culture of consumption is a way to slow down time, to make life seem disposable, repeatable, general, safe; we don't then have to live our wildness, the generosity of the present moment, unprescribed, unpatterned by the sameness of mass mediation. But then... who then will tell us what to do?

So humanity teeters at the top of the evolutionary ladder we invented; until it breaks under the sheer weight of us and we plummet - back to the filthy waters and the eaten soil; back into the fog of unseeing where, distracted from the devastation, we judge each other too fat too thin too much too tall too short too butch too femme too loud too quiet too far out and never, ever just enough to turn our gaze toward the state we're in.

Because we are consumers. Aren't we?



WHOSE FINGERS DRESS YOU?

Melanie McKerchar

Rag and bone, rag and bone, rag and bone
Once each precious piece of fabric was a treasure
carefully sown, and then re sewn, and sacks were sown
into clothes to be mended and tended and handed down.
Fabric was from the land, harvested by hand, carded from lambs
and skins of beasts were stitched into all that we needed.

Rag and bone, rag and bone, those words are gone from our
lexicon
as we dress in dinosaurs and crushed forests.
Gold thread shoots through plastic softness, that binds our flesh,
leaches sweat,
shares no breath against our skin. Toxin touches toxin and
becomes waste.
Like bower birds and magpies we collect the sparkle that spears
our eye for an instant,
for an instant it is love, necessity, satisfaction.
And then it is not.

Rag and bone, rag and bone, rag and bone.
Her fingers sew, bead after bead after bead after bead after bead.
The pain is gone, lost in the years of this pennies-a-day job
stitching the shine for the west which she will never have.
We no longer sew, but now we throw out the labours of those
who have nothing else.
The next hot trend is only a click away.

Rag and bone, rag and bone, rag and bone
Sewn in battery cages in another world, where unseen her toils
have no value
to those whose skin touches her fingerprints, and the hint of her
breath lingering
in the weft is tossed out as last season's trash.
And only 30 years ago we all could sew
And only 60 years ago our clothes were grown
And only 100 years ago each stitch was a precious gift.
And now we dress in plastic bags.

Rag and bone, rags and bones, rags on bones.
In my wardrobe there's nothing to wear, a heap of nothing,
so I put nothing on and I am glorious.

HOW NOW TO EAT THE EARTH

CR Green

Born with all senses, but not listening, what do you have left
to eat the earth with? All right, then. Touch it. Pick it up.
Go ahead. While this roly baby rolls around, let the viscose,
polyester, nylon, rayon, spandex, 100 % cotton, linen blends
fall through your swollen fingers. The earth's disposable, isn't it?
So, do it quickly before it's past its use-by date. Let your eyes
feast
on the packed and piled flavours: the sweetest of stripes,
rainbows
and calicos, four seasons of bitter frocks and jackets, mountains
of savory
pants and pantaloons. Devour rocks with your nose. You have my
permission
to blow it. Strain them through your remaining teeth. Smell the
timeline of marbled
chocolate strata, inhale layers of melted icing, baked Alaskan
volcanoes waiting
to be set the ocean on fire. Let your tongue polish them all until
chaos shines --
so bright an audience of angels wants to stare. Let them look
deep into your core.
Is there feeling there? Underneath it all? Feeling for something.
Feeling for anything.
Even though you can't hear their wings,
listen to what those angels say about the days
you have left to eat. "Count them," they are saying.
"They are numbered. Your home has a number."



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