

# Drawing On the Body

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*"Here is a lesson: what happens to people and what happens to the land is the same thing"<sup>1</sup>*

This is the first time I have written about what has happened. I am a woman who has survived the indignities of the workplace. I was once one of those "...technicians of rhythm and regular activities"<sup>2</sup>: a project manager working in software development. Ten years later I was left with a feeling of "Is this it?" Not only did I feel cheated, I had skyrocketing cortisol levels, palpitations, panic attacks and a continuous sense of impending doom. I can write about this now because I returned to my body, my Self, my interior landscape of sensation.

I had existed in a disembodied state. I barely registered my emotions. Restless nights and panicked mornings. I was unsure why or what was causing it; a myriad of things it turned out. I quit my life as it then was. I grieved for months my losses. Soon I found I was grieving losses I had no words for. They bubbled up from my belly, my hips, my shoulders. My spasming lower back releasing choked and repressed emotion I did not know was there. So began a journey inside, to an internal landscape that was mine alone. An intimate place I ignored, avoided and disavowed, fearing its unknowns.

The beginnings of releasing my grief physically led me to a path of realisation. The spasms and convulsions seemed initially to come from my hips and lower back. I learned about the psoas; the muscle of the soul. It meets at the points of major arteries and nerves in the lower abdomen. The only muscles that join the legs to the torso. They exist as a pair, the hip flexors. They hold you up most of the time. The psoas is a long

muscle that looks like a river of water gushing over rock. It flows from the spine, threads through the core of us, and winds its way around the ball and socket joint of the hip.<sup>3</sup> It supports our breath as a wave like motion. When I imagine its texture I think of *Against the Wind (Sea Song)* by Wilhelmina Barns-Graham. A similar shape to the waves created by the sea and the wind. The psoas equally requires fluidity in movement and attitude to be healthy. Dried up and tense it triggers a continual sense of anxiety.<sup>4</sup> A seemingly never ending, self-perpetuating, cycle of fear.

I did not listen to music for a year. I listened to podcasts and almost obsessively to the news, seeking anchorage in 'real' world happenings: I needed the material and the concrete. I did not want to die of my sorrows as Deirdre did.<sup>5</sup> Now I make work to music, I am listening to music now as a write. The soft flowing sounds so reminiscent of dissolving frozen, icy, fragile rigidity, back to rhythmic, pulsing, tidal form.

Drawing from this affective history, I investigate disembodiment and anxiety as repressive strategies of the patriarchal and technocratic power structures prevalent in Western society. These structures place and freeze our bodies daily into seated postures, perpetuating anxiety through the landscape of our physiology.<sup>6</sup> They promote the supremacy of rational thought over the wisdom of our physical and emotional bodies. They deny the unity of body, mind and emotion, dismissing the rich internal landscape of sensation that can root us in our Selves, to our World and to each Other. These repressive strategies are, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, forms of social domination. They exist threefold: domination of our inner nature as emotional repression; domination of

<sup>1</sup> Linda Hogan, *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 89.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1991) 130. A term that Foucault applied to religious orders in an educational context but could very easily be applied to myself.

<sup>3</sup> Liz Koch, *The Psoas Book* (California: Guinea Pig Publications, 2012) 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 44

<sup>5</sup> The Irish myth of Deirdre of the Sorrows. A beautiful young woman promised to the King of Ulster, Conchobair Mac Nessa. She fell in love with the warrior Naoise. Fleeing Conchobair they travelled to Scotland, but to no avail. Conchobair tracked them down, killing Naoise and taking Deirdre back to Ireland as his wife. Different versions of the story end with Deirdre dashing her head out on a rock but in the version I know, she died of heartbreak.

<sup>6</sup> Valerie Strauss, "The right — and surprisingly wrong — ways to get kids to sit still in class," *The Washington Post*, 07.08.2014



ABOVE  
Niamh Moloney,  
*Drawing Experiment IV*  
(2017). Ink powder,  
gouache, watercolour,  
marker and tap water  
on paper, 204 cm x  
180 cm