

Event Introduction:

Chi: Tenderness, in the name of love. Forced contact, in the name of love. How many times have I, have you, have we, have they, brushed off the hand that dares to impact the flesh. Name the flesh, inscribing our identities for us, onto us. They lick the stamp and press it into my arm, so forcefully the stamp sinks underneath the skin. Wound closes up in a second. It's like it never even happened. In the name of love. Hi everyone. Thank you so much for coming. Before we begin, we would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people, the Traditional Custodians of this Land. We would also like to pay respect to Elders both past and present of the Kulin Nation and extend that respect to all Indigenous Australians present. Sovereignty was never ceded.

Frankie: What we are sharing with you tonight is a result of numerous conversations, snippets of speech, paragraphs of musings. We like asking questions of each other, we like that most of them are unanswerable. We talk over our keyboards via email and we write next to each other in public spaces. Through these dialogues, the body has come up, again and again. We are writing through it so I suppose it's no surprise. It seems we are obsessed with the container. We come from varying points of location within this, and navigate points of invisibility that lay claim over the body. Our interest in points of contact, intimate touches and glances, the soft, loving strokes of oppression, lead the way through this conversation.

Chi: During the early stages of tonight's work, Frankie and I had a lot of conversations about what shape this event might take. We spoke about the idea of *decolonising love* and what that would mean, for us specifically, to *decolonise* our conversation. In a climate where our cultural politics are inescapably bound by neo-colonialist and neo-liberalist language, structures, systems, policies, loopholes, and institutions, where does decolonisation even begin? Where does it begin for me and for you, individually, and for us, collectively? As non-Indigenous Australians, Frankie and I wondered about how we might participate in that discussion, coming into it from drastically differing entry points. Being queer, being non-white, being writers, being simultaneously complicit and unaligned with the politics that love us, that skin us; it is a constant negotiation of which the difficulty of navigating varies from day to day.

Frankie: We would also like to quickly note that whilst this event is Auslan interpreted, it is not wheelchair accessible. and that has meant certain bodies are excluded from this space. In the future we endeavour to engage with accessibility in a more rigorous and meaningful way.

Letters:

Chi to Frankie:

All I feel like doing lately is repeating myself. I don't feel like producing anything new – there is no fuel for that. All I feel like doing is repeating myself. Sometimes I say something once and I don't know what I mean. I say something but it's emptier than silence. I take full responsibility.

Vacant and heavy at the same time. Hopeless. Helpless. Hopeful. Tender. I want to wade my way through this sticky mess and reach a spot where I can press my thumb to my temple and feel myself go tender. Vacant and light at the same time. I might have dimmed the lamp on myself. Now the hues of the walls and the ceiling have warped my posture at night.

I'm sorry, this was meant to be a letter of love. But it's hard to pull my vision from underneath my body and out into the real world right now. I'm sorry, I say to you and myself. Words are spilling out but they don't have a discernible meaning just yet. No attachment to me.

Yeah, disembodied, that sounds about right. Completely disconnected from my own blood – this bruise on my thigh holds no sentiment. And I smile. I'm sorry, and I smile. But the way I present myself does not negate the way I feel. It feels antagonistic and I'm paranoid. I'm paranoid and at the same time, I wouldn't mind tossing it in the bin and walking away.

Yeah, disembodied sounds about right. Toss and walk away. Except my arm got stuck to the bin and detached itself from my body. Where's my shoulder gone? You can still rest your head on my other one.

Frankie to Chi:

I read this short piece of prose my friend sent me about grief which went something along these lines: "how do I keep this gold and tender thing from being trampled on by the world? When the world comes walking in around me, how do I keep a tired, airy space uncrowded?"

The piece of prose was about remembering the last moment you had with someone before they died; how to keep that precious thing tender and lofty – smooth silk & speaking, around a world clattering.

But the feeling you describe – a disembodiment, perhaps that is like trying to hold onto something gold. I mean, there's kind of this huge garden within you – with such crisp scents. I don't think tenderness is weak, I don't think hovering above the body makes this garden wild & scarred.

Did you ever imagine that you would lose that soft part of you? That one day you would realise, or the world would make you realise, that it was too hard to be like uncooked meat? That the world would surely trample uncooked meat.

Why I am going down the garden & meat path I suppose is because how else to talk to feelings? As soon as I know the texture of them, the width of them, the feeling visually, there I go, I can comprehend.

Suppose there were something playful about imagining feelings as texture... Rubber, velvet, coarse malt, crusted salt, sweat on a top lip. Suppose I am better at empathising once I can see what you feel.

When I was a child my Mum used to make me create a hand gesture about feelings. I'd say 'I feel like this' and she'd say 'show me with your hands'. My skin would go all red & my face would scrunch up & instead of my head experiencing the emotion, I made my body feel it. Yep, yep, I know the head's the

body – I know. But I guess the head (and I'm being ephemeral here) can be disembodied. Or the head can disembody us.

Suppose you could make a shape with your body which represented your emotions...

What would that look like and would it have sounds?

Yes, I know, woo-y; but the flesh helps in reminding the head the physical is changeable, disposable, sacred, quick, vulnerable, devastated.

My love, with the greatest tenderness,

Anupama to Chi:

I don't re-read books much anymore, but I used to when I was little. I must've read *When I was Puerto Rican* by Esmeralda Santiago about 15 times. Actually, the story of how I found that book is also a nice story. Deborah took me and Maya and Mama to a booksale in an old church in East Hampton. It was a beautiful, bright white building & the booksale was in the attic and it was a free-for-all, except we had to pay for the books. I mean to say there were maybe 15 tables with boxes and pallets on them containing books upon books in no real order. We walked around the room & Deborah picked out book after book and we bought them all. She had read most of them.

In *When I was Puerto Rican*, Esmeralda describes this feeling of being out of her body & of watching that empty body walking down walkways on the way to church, to school, and back to her uncle's house. She was tethered, but still loose.

There is something magnetic about certain ideas and visions. I have read that passage many times and have looked for that feeling in myself. And I think I've faked it. Maybe I felt it once, for a period of a few months, genuinely, but it's hard to know for sure.

It sounds like a beautiful feeling, like a freedom. But it isn't. It's not that the body is some anchor. My body is irreducible, and I never want my mind to stray from it. I am my body.

The problem is, I have no way to talk about trauma to the body without injecting distance into my language. How do I embody pain?

Love,
Anupama

P.S. Is it important? The aftermath & the afterword are what count. And the past is distant anyhow, even in the body.

P.P.S. When did I stop re-reading books? When did I stop jumping in puddles? When did you?

P.P.P.S. The thought of reading *When I was Puerto Rican* again, now, makes me sad. Why?

P.P.P.P.S. You don't need to answer any of these questions, but if you can, please.

Chi to Anupama:

I re-read often. I rarely read books for the first time. I often re-watch movies and TV shows and interviews I have seen before. I like to know what will happen. I prefer to watch the trailer and to read about how a movie was made, before I go to see it. I like to think before I do. I seem to favour anticipation over endorphin. Perhaps they are one and the same for me.

How do you embody pain? I'm not sure. But I embody it tacitly and continually. It is difficult for me to distinguish between pain and lack of. For me, even when prolonged, pain is something instant. Continual pain or trauma for me is never in stasis; it is a rapid series of sensations, one after the other after the other after the other. And so each sensation, each prick, is already too far away from you to articulate, the minute your mind tries to tune into it and turn it into speech.

I have never done it myself, but when I think of how to embody pain on the page, I think of Fiona Wright. I have re-read segments of *Small Acts of Disappearance*, but there are many words in that book that I have not read once. Wright's language around her bodily traumas is extremely visceral and succinct and perhaps most notably, it is extremely familiar to me. I never thought I could write about self-inflicted pain--even long after it happens--because why write about it when you can do it? Feel it? Again...

I only stop jumping in puddles when there is no water there to collect. I jumped in puddles on Jefferson Street in Brooklyn on my last day in New York. My socks were soaked through and I loved it.

I have not jumped in a puddle since then.

Warmth.

Frankie to Anupama:

When I was reading what you wrote a while back about the layers of skin, the epidermis, the heat, the cooling, I imagined one of those slow moving animated videos about the human body, which breaks a part different matter in bright blues, reds, yellows. I'm pretty sure that's not how the body works; I mean I'm sure we are not those colours on the inside. I remember once when I was a child, Mum and Dad took us kids to Byron Bay and near the destination is this place called the Crystal Castle. There, you can get these photos taken of your 'aura' the bodies around your physical. When I go back there as an adult, the prices have doubled and my friends and I don't even bother going beyond the doors.

Why I bring up the aura photos is not because the photographs 'proved' that 'different bodies' outside the physical exist but that I suppose the association with your very visceral description of skin, heat and coolness made me think of those photographs.

Would it be too much for me to say that the skin seems just a process? I mean, if you had to name it by a characteristic.

I feel like living is, anyway, and the heat and colours kind of speak as contact, non-contact.
What was the thing you once said about the non-void and the void? Or sound and non-sound? How that person entered a room that was void of sound, in a capsule, and all they could hear was their own blood.

I think we can't go properly *into* own bodies because of affect. Like how looking at things that come from our bodies sometimes look so *other*.

I guess understanding (or attempting to) understand your insides can be oddly like looking at a volcano from from a far distance.

I guess you can be *of yourself*, but you can be so *other* to you, too.

Tenderly.

P.s have you ever seen visual replications of a human lit-up only by heat? They move through space glowing of red parts, yellow, orange, then blue where it's cold. I think it's a kind of x-ray vision, a cap you can put on a camera to make your heat come alive.

Anupama to Frankie:

When the skin is just process, it is also desperation. I really struggle to think about anything. It seems to me that the skin is some constant.

[My great aunt, Auntie Maggie, once took me & Maya aside when we were visiting the new apartment block in Sawantwadi that had been erected on the site of my ancestral home. She said to me and Mya. "My skin is brown, your father's skin is white, you have skin in between. Now, tell me, what is the one color that all humans share?" She meant red - the color of blood, but Maya and I upset her because we said everyone has white teeth, and white eyeballs and black pupils. It's so easy to disrupt such flimsy logic. The color of blood isn't the key to world peace.]

The body, in some ways, is always trying to be outside of itself, but the skin is the process by which we are contained.

In every moment, I feel I both want to be and to escape. I am saying this now, but it need not be true at all times.

I am surprised at the effect your words is having on mine. I want to write of eruption, of the latent potential for eruption contained in the body, and I see your reference to volcanos. Influence is impossible to fully erase.

Do you think it is possible to write not of the self? I want to say and do and confess things at all times, but each action that I desire to do is selfish, or self-interested, or self-centered. Like, writing. At any rate, I have a sore throat, that is how my body is in this moment.

How is yours?

Love,

Anupama

P.s That was a very clinical letter. I don't know why. I wasn't expecting it to be.

Anupama's Works: (2/6 poems) (Not necessarily in this order...)

If the skin is a natural defence against the elements, why does it make us so vulnerable?

blind a beast

sure say something unsaid unspeakable
curse me
have dignity
hey hold my feet on the way to toorak and i
swing upside down like fruit
on an overwatered tree
the tram driver says *do that again and i'll call the police*
don't you think it's unfair doesn't it hurt you too

[colour opens doors right i forget this and
which doors?
you people with a single vision everything
else pixilated out क्या पागल, कैसे पागल]
weak tiny baby let me hold
your hand
you're blind let me beat you with it
you're blind a beast let me skin your white skin
when i cut you hope to god it hurts
touch me again and i burn you up
i burn your fingertips with a red Bic lighter outside a bus stop where it's
illegal and i bite them [i am in love can't i burn too?]

ondine's curse

holed up by the banks of the river
holding a man in one hand and a man in the other
he claims

*oh yeah I can lift any weight you ask yeah
just tell me
what it is I will do it
I can feel the
inside of my lungs itching like a burning grain
of sand embedded there will never
come out*

do you know of ondine's curse
this is a failure of
autonomic control of
breathing yes it is a

misnomer

after you walk in the streets a little
you scratch your face and if you inspect
the fingernails, there is fine black grit
beneath them from the polluted air

semiautomatic

hunger is the opposite
of everything I eat my
way out of purgatory I ingest
everything I swallow myself
I have that fear of peanut butter sticking
to the hard palate of my mouth I eat everything
but peanut butter I am
hungry and out of work
I lay down on a conveyor
belt like Chaplin's in *Modern Times* and I fuck it up
and I miss
everything and get sucked into the
machinery where I am eaten
first and the gears pound me
I am cooked by a Black and Decker waffle
iron my hair falls out to start with I eat only my hair and nails
then I carve bits of thigh and boil
them in water to make soup I eat
slow to make the most of it
and sometimes share it with
those I love a meal brings people
together I eat leather I make choices I
have free will and I choose
to eat it instead I eat
art when I can get it
except art eats me so it's
more like a once-in-a-while treat
I eat steel mostly hammers some
drill bits I eat a Cessna 150 I wrap
bacon around the barrel of my
M16 assault rifle and fire
off about 80 rounds and eat
the gun which is greasy with bacon fat
I stick my trigger finger down
my throat and eat my throat
my hand eats me I eat my hand

पूरा [whole]

the milk carton on the shelf in the fridge
sits gassed and frozen like
me and my mother whose fingers and toes
rend and swell in the winter here
frostbite someone calls it
when the flesh goes off
I am my whole self all the time
except when cold
or angry
I do not belong here I say
who would belong anywhere so crazy
क्या पागल, कैसे पागल
this is a country where people don't
understand insulation

The moment before losing the sense of touch

The moment before is easiest to remember and the moment during disappears swallowed up in potency and thrill

I like to write sentences but not punctuate them correctly

it makes me feel alive like I am in control of more than just my limbs and mouth and those parts of the body with independent movement like eyelids and some stomach muscles.

Do you remember one time you brushed your teeth and spit and gargled water and spit and then you swallowed some water and it was an accident and you became so worried you'd be sick that you were sick and flushed the poisoned liquid backwards out of your body? I remember, and one time I was sick in the sink and the skin of my mouth and throat and nasal passages was raw for days after because the bile had burned it out.

Now we can't even feel the memory of things because some specific and loaded neural connection was cut. I could feel the lukewarm tap water on my fingers and then the lights went off and the only thing on TV was static.

really violent things

i think it's pretty cool that you
can swallow water and when
you do so all the corners
of your throat contract and touch
squeeze on each other around
a ball of liquid that
drifts down
i knew a girl once who
had an ulcer in her esophagus
that rubbed raw and ached

every time she tried to swallow
something even water or her
own saliva
the human body is a long
and ugly tube or circle
maybe a hula hoop and the
outside and the inside are really
the same or at least the inside is
like muscles and organs and not
the contents of the stomach
or intestines
sometimes on dry mornings
i have bad nosebleeds and i
carry my own blood around
staining a tissue or my clothes
all day in school the kids
hurt a girl who bled
through her skirt and left a
stain on the plastic chairs
in one of the classrooms

Frankie:

Owns Your

gimme me a body with a blank slate
oil on the road petrol or what is it? rainbow shimmer i'm in a desert staring down a highway
mirage sweat across the brow down between the big toe and the next length of chest my
thighs saying the body is blank slate. empty empty saying desert highway desert highway of my sweat
nothing huge piece of glass marble or dough what shape says me what shape saying
please be my thighs saving everybody except for me is it a cool morning are they losing
their substance is it a is it a is it a glass road see nothing forget what i think as the road gets
longer

bringing into my mouth round and soft such truths are words made wooden solid
sitting on them as couches
you know the skin and muscle on the shin is the thinnest place anywhere
it can hold out no future

oiled up, sliding ing ripping as position is claimed we curse, we lick the ice. hey
girls. you're a girl that's why your jaw has stopped growing. we lick the wounds we touch the bodies

say *belong* say *mine mine mine mine mine* there is no oil on the road there is no oil
on the road on the skin on the highway
kick the bucket, cream away. get a mirage stroke over objects until they become turn to thighs
we ice the curse, kick the cream, roll a body away.
is an undressed table *nice* or intelligent? how in English there are not certain words to say
that's a female lounge suite & i'm taking off my shield
that's how much speech it takes to eat how much does it cost to be gender-less

a warm growth of futurist

sit behind technology crossing out pronouns. not them him her they hey = cyborg lush. a
techni-colour yes. we're in knots, still. as much as we'd like to be loosening. a
bright, electronic, moving thing. the body becoming. in flaps and folds. from that pleasant
place on the couch, bed, mantel or street. sheet leaning against a building, eating lunch
licking chocolate off someone's cheek we are now a soft montage. a silk screen
collapsing into its corners a square nice and round one real thing is on the other side of a
laptop. or many, the projection blistering skin. themselves. waving an arm about
that mirrors into ripples of pixels. saying & dripping w it. whisper a wet ear into space. web
sssss pace inter webs you could touch that, tactile and hot. my macs overheating through
the monitor? that feels too. the closest thing to a lower back. triple pack batteries to operate
or plug for power shower of joints of hips and wrists clicking into place
all kinds of breaking apart crack packet of chips being torn open away from
and bringing to solid water body part the images moves slowly melts burns
sinew screen

Chi's Works:

my mother taught me how to peel oranges

slice off the apex and surrounding skin
exposing thick pith at the centre
scalped sphere
renounced compliance to the current
point the knife to pored peel
for the juncture pre-oedipal
strike down

not so far as to pierce the flesh

gentle

spin the sphere and repeat

uniform shapes misrecognised for bodily unity

dig nails in

pull and remove the rind

skin is the limit of its spatial location

zest stamps itself onto charcoal granite

leave it.

bodies are the significance of translation

tongue preface teeth.

both taste lip.

jaw bite! jaw spit!

injured.

fibres stretch

spoonfuls congeal under the skin gone cold

evolution this phenomenon of growth

uncontrolled uninhibited uncatalogued

occurring at every tiny moment, in every molecule, impossible to notate

edge to a curve, joint to a bruise

the moat

I am not a body but

two body-shaped apparitions tessellating for warmth, comfort.

I love my shadow more than i love my self

finding bulbs that are thick with heated rage

trampled. Seeds leaking a viscous gold.

I sit in a story, in a mimesis of aesthetics

the organs line up in order of damage

With the illusion of containment
But the limbs disagree with each other
flesh and blood, it's a bureaucracy.
i have to remind myself, constantly, not to allow
an oppressor to house their words inside my body
A body that is precisely mine.
Moving in a vehicle
crowded with their vandalisms.
But I confess: i don't know how to place my body
Sometimes i just want to bleed all over the place
let my limbs break off and spread themselves and melt
let me be big, in places sun-soaked
with smells that make a mark on my neck
turning a bit of me into shade
I call it internalised scarcity
And it's an intimate dialogue

how does your mouth look when you are talking of the world you live in

It looks like stitches
With a needlework that's too familiar, i don't feel it prick me
In patterns and shapes lodged in the throat
i no longer recognise
But pretend i do

Lia Interview:

Chi: The piece that the sound recording come from is "Shapeshifting in the Year of the Monkey" by Lia Incognita, written in January 2016, first performed on Kulin land during Midsumma, then first published on The Lifted Brow website.

Frankie: We'd like to read out some excerpts from an interview we did with Lia Incognita. Lia is a Shanghai born and based cultural commentator who grew up in the Kulin nations. Through prose, verse, performance and broadcast, Lia celebrates the power of unbelonging: as a shapeshifter in a binary-gendered world, as a remigrant, as someone who always gives a long answer to a short question. Currently Lia is Vice-President of Asian-Australian arts and culture magazine *Peril* and a founding member of myriad, a collective that organises events showcasing and supporting trans and gender diverse artists and performers in Melbourne.

Chi: “visibility is not the same as recognition, not the same as understanding”.
What does visibility mean for you, your body, your skin?

Frankie: ...people talk about invisibility in popular culture in ways that didn't always appreciate the risks of being seen but not heard. There's power in keeping some secrets under your skin. The way that people read my body as a sexed and gendered object troubles me. But it's not a tension that I can resolve through a declaration of identity either.

Chi: My flesh itself doesn't disturb me. It doesn't feel like a woman's body. It feels contained, intact. But some forms of contact break that sense of wholeness. As if my body is just like the skin on water, a tremor enough to challenge its structure.

Frankie: When your identity is routinely denied, it can be vital and powerful to say “this is what I am”.

Chi: But for me right now, I am moving from a context where I can't escape being racialised to one where I am no longer a person of colour, I am remaking my gender and sexuality, right now I don't want to fix and stabilise these things.

Frankie: I think I just make it very abstract so people can't get a hold of me.

Chi: Can you keep a hold of yourself? Do you need to?

Frankie: I'm not contained in flesh, it's the flesh theorising itself.

the brain that is taking pleasure in the skin being untouched is thinking that, as a membrane touching itself.

Chi: It's funny, this conversation seems to have become oddly disembodied. I don't have any sense of your physical selves.

It is the Skin:

Anupama:

I must eat my way through minutes, breathing and touching more than eating. I am against talk but I do anyway because you ask me. And you touch my skin and it is cool and when I

talk, you stop and heat builds until I say 'again'. And you command my skin to burn. And touch cools it. Touch is not an endothermic reaction like the decomposition of matter. It is warm. And I want to be in that warmth, on the edge of overheating.

Meanwhile, I burn against edges, made of cool touch. Give myself to touch. Heat builds and so I climb through in slow motion. I fall asleep on you, in lamp light. And when you ask me about it, you touch my skin. You register my shape, in no place to think about meaning.

Frankie:

What does it mean to look at someone half fading and see them as a present? To look at someone's body as a gift for what they've been in your life. You are giving yourself to me. A last breath unwrapping itself. Like love, love, in a room with the candles waving. We sat there with his skin very cold it meant he could sit with us. The boundaries of this body object, a flash a flash. With a big mane of hair, maybe a scarf in this weather, maybe pants hanging low, maybe you're stretched across the grass dragging deep on a cigarette. And in the flesh you go: we stand there kind of gaping. *Last night I dreamt and in that dream which was real you were alive in all your colour*. Someone wants to keep mentioning to me how when he goes the last bit of him still hangs around. Like, I've got these cookies in the oven after I've taken them out there will always be some crumbs left over. Like, the food never really leaves the body. Like, Like,

Chi:

what is an unbodily love?

is it one where our bodies are not implicated in the said love. like we just do the loving from somewhere *out*. You would like a story about what it's like to be in my skin, what it's like to love from this ribcage, chest, lungs of mine? but bodies always tremble over other bodies, make them illegitimate. And you feel everything but pure. I could get the most pure love not touched by those systems and still my body be telling me things I wish I wasn't knowing.

Thank you's:

Frankie: *andalltheglassjars* would like to thank Next Wave for putting on such an incredible festival, for the pleasure of being involved in their festival landscape. In light of the recent funding cuts, which sees so many arts and literary organisations in dire straits, supporting creative communities is more important than ever.

Chi: Speaking about importance, thank you thank you Aodhan and Emily, of Brainlina, for giving your time so willingly, for their support, eagerness, dinners, advice, warmth, open arms, generosity, love, ideas and challenges. Thank you for writing that very first love letter to us, we were blushing a lot and kind of couldn't believe that you were interested in our work. We love and admire you both so much, as thinkers, as people, as artists. To keep up to date with the wonderful happenings of Brainlina, you should find them online and sign up to their mailing list.

Frankie: Thank you to Anupama Pilbrow for stepping in when Frankie had to drop off the radar, for sharing her thoughts and words with us, for being an amazing organiser and sounding board. Thank you to Lia Incognita for doing an interview with us and recording their piece 'Shape Shifting in the Year of Monkey' for the film. We will be making the recording available, and you can read the piece in full at The Lifted Brow's website. We'd like to thank our fantastic Auslan interpreters, for their time and patience, and for making this event accessible. We'd like to thank Dom and her housemates for allowing us to use this beautiful space for the event.

Chi: Lastly, we'd like to thank all of you for coming tonight and sharing this space with us. Thank you for letting us divulge our whispers, fragments, quiet thoughts and remixed phrases with you. Please stay engaged with us in the future. Our website is *andalltheglassjars.com*. We'd like to end tonight by reiterating that every word written for this project was written on stolen land, and we'd like to continue thinking/talking/writing in conversation with you all around this idea of how to decolonise love. We love you and have a great evening.