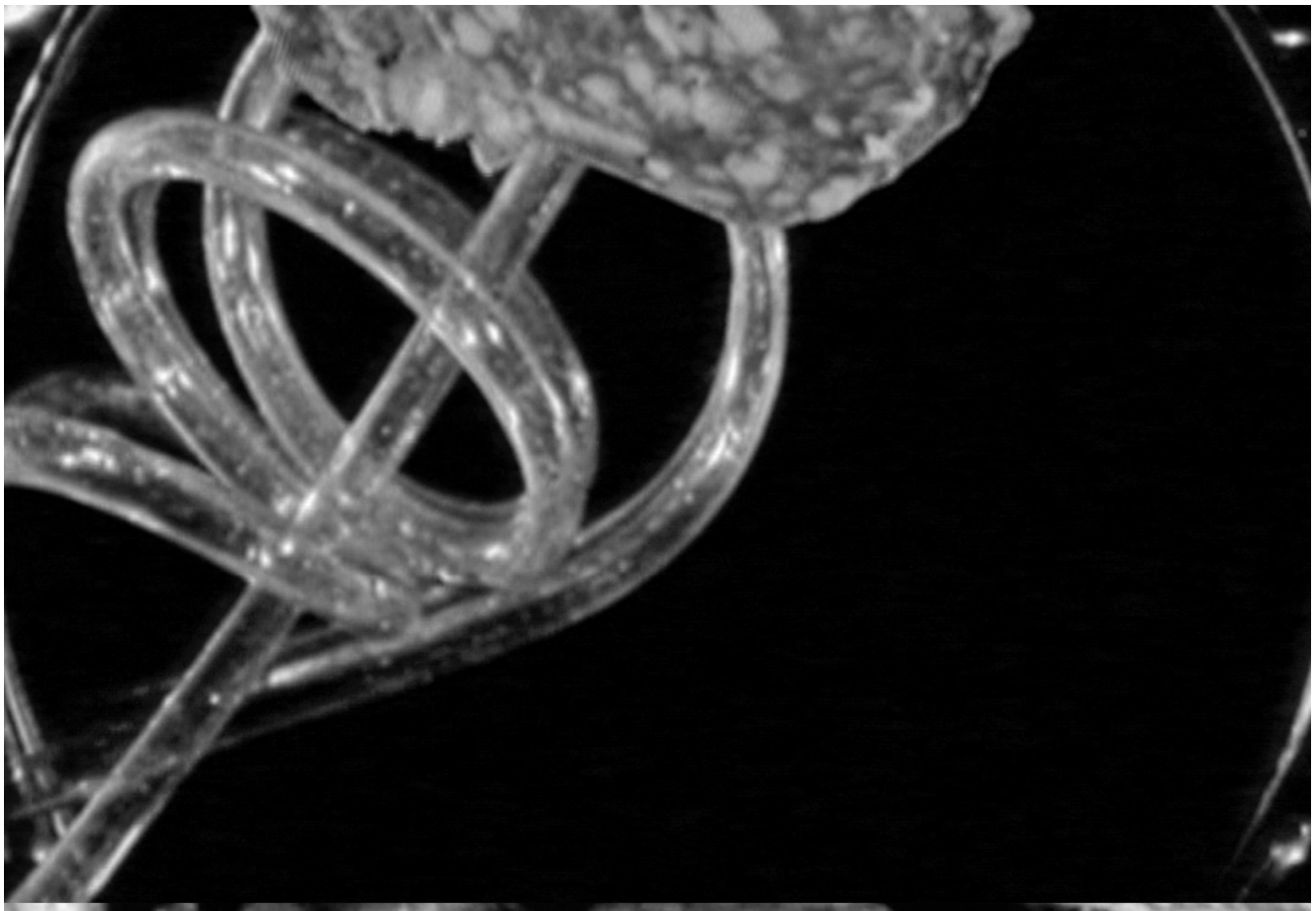
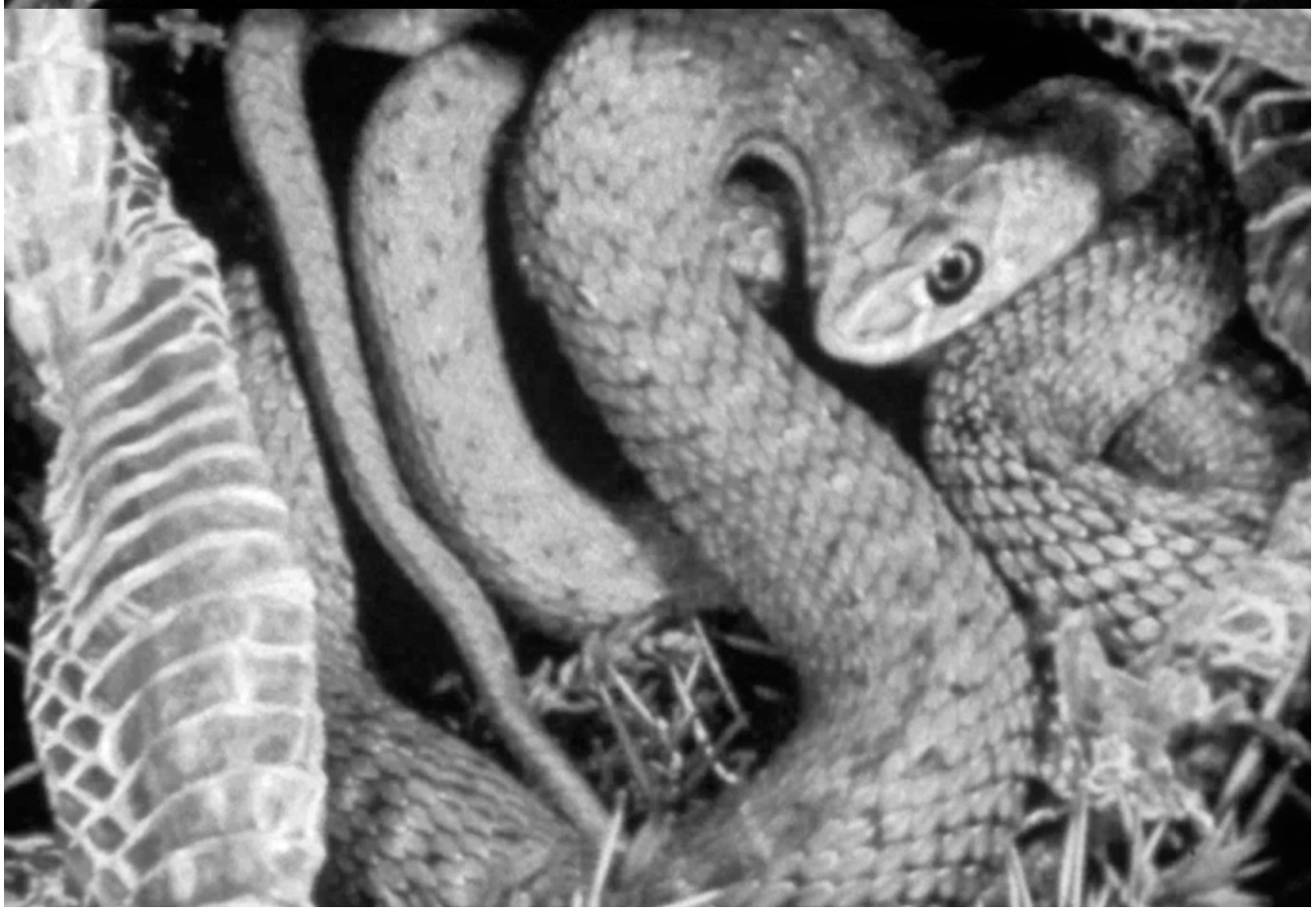




Events

Free entrance, full program on *www.betonsalon.net*

· From Thursday 11 to Monday 15 June

I shone, mica-scaled, and unfolded to pour myself out like a fluid
Program inspired by Sandra Lahire's "transcorporeal" cinema, curated by Lotte Arndt, Maud Jacquin and Émilie Renard.

With Myriam Bahaffou, Vincent Enjalbert, Victorine Grataloup, Simon Ripoll-Hurier, Kyveli Mavrokordopoulou, Aram Lee, Elena Lespes Muñoz, Katerina Thomadaki, Basyma Saad And films by Karel Doing, Barbara Hammer, P. Staff, Ana Mendieta, Adrian Kahgee / Odeimin Runners Club, Elke Marhöfer with Mikhail Lylov, Alisi Telengut, Ana Vaz.

In partnership with Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, HiCSA: Cultural and Social History of Art.
More information on our website.

· Monday 15 June,
from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
At mk2 Bibliothèque x Centre Pompidou

Plutonium Blonde
Screening of four anti-nuclear films by Sandra Lahire.

· Saturday 20 June,
from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Exhibition tour within the TaxiTram, in partnership with Le Cyclop (Milly-la-Forêt).
Registration: *taxitram@tram-idf.fr*

Parallel programs

· Friday 19 June
from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Parties prenantes #10: revisiting the archives of Candice Lin's exhibition "A Hard White Body" (2017) at Bétonsalon, in the presence of Lotte Arndt, curator.
from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Workshop on collective translation and writing of texts by Essex Hemphill and Gregg Bordowitz, proposed by Lou Rappeneau and Vega Royer-Gaspard, with DykeFag4FagDyke.
Registration:
dykefag4fagdyke@gmail.com

· Friday 5 June,
from 2:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Béton Book Club: collective reading of Stacy Alaimo's book *Exposed, Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times,* ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016 (in English).

· Wednesday 24 June,
from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

"The campus during the occupation: one of Drancy's annex camps": collective reading of the archives collected by Dominique Dehais.

· Friday 3 July,
from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Writing with Mittens: "Irradiated Hearts", writing workshop proposed by Manon Barbe.
Registration:
publics@betonsalon.net

Workshops

Free, registration :
publics@betonsalon.net

· Saturday 30 May
from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The Furrow Opens
Stop-motion workshop for children, from age 8.

· Wednesday 24 June
from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

A Burning Hand
Poetry workshop for adults.

· Saturday 4 July
from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Crossing the Water
Suminagashi workshop for families, from age 5.

Tours

Tours are led by a mediator and adapted to all audiences. Tours in a foreign language or in LSF on request, within 4 days.

Bétonsalon team: Manon Barbe, administrator ; Sarah Bidet, communication assistant, intern ; Vincent Enjalbert, head of exhibitions; Camille Berthelin, Clément Gaillard, Héloïse Lorenzo & Kevin Gotkovsky, technical team; Elena Lespes Muñoz, head of public outreach; Hugo Mahnes, administration assistant, intern; Tess Mazuet, public outreach officer; Terne Kirkegaard Ebdrup, Louise Olive, coordination assistants, interns; Coline Piccinno, public outreach assistant, intern; Émilie Renard, director.

Bétonsalon's team, together with Maud Jacquin, thank: Jagna Ciuchta; Sarah Pucill; for LUX: Hanan Coumal, Charlotte Procter; the participants in the events programme: Lotte Arndt, Myriam Bahaffou, Charlène Dinhut, Karel Doing, Victorine Grataloup, Aram Lee, Elke Marhöfer, Kyveli Mavrokordopoulou, Odeimin Runners Club – Adrian Kahgee, Simon Ripoll-Hurier, Basyma Saad, P. Staff, Alisi Telengut, Katerina Thomadaki, Valentine Umansky, Ana Vaz; the guests contributing to the poem on the centre d'art's windows: Léa Cuenin, Stéphanie Garzanti, Noah Truong, Ketty Steward.

Cover : Composition Catalogue Général. © Courtesy of Sandra Lahire and LUX, London.

The exhibition is developed with the support of LUX, London.

SANDRA LAHIRE: EXPOSED

Maud Jacquin & Émilie Renard

Sandra Lahire (United Kingdom, 1950–2001) was a feminist experimental filmmaker whose work has had a lasting influence on numerous artists and filmmakers, yet remains insufficiently recognized to this day, particularly in France[1]. Like many of her contemporaries in London, she was affiliated with the London Film-Makers' Co-operative (LFMC), a self-organized structure dedicated to the production, exhibition, and distribution of experimental film[2]. Active from the late 1960s onward, the LFMC constituted a key center for a dynamic cinematic movement united by a shared commitment to exploring the materiality of film, notably through direct interventions on the film reel.

From the mid-1980s, while continuing her formal investigations into the material properties of the film medium, Lahire incorporated autobiographical and documentary dimensions into her practice. She situated film in constant relation to other forms of matter: human and non-human bodies, landscapes, and the flows that traverse them. Through a wide range of experimental techniques generating stratified, textured surfaces, she gave form to the co-implication of bodies and the physical continuit connecting herself to other living beings—human, animal, and vegetal—conceived as organic and perishable matter. Drawing on her own bodily vulnerability—Lahire suffered from anorexia—her work gives form to what feminist theorist Stacy Alaimo has termed a "transcorporeal space"[3], in which human corporeality is inextricably bound to the environment through a shared condition of permeability and contamination.

The exhibition title, "Overexposed, like an X-rays "[4], borrows from the work of American poet Sylvia Plath (1932–1963), whose voice resonates throughout Lahire's films . While not directly drawn from a specific film by Lahire, the phrase frames the exhibition through an overlapping of entities—Lahire herself, women workers and residents living near nuclear facilities, the film strip, and the earth—subjected to processes that penetrate and erode its material integrity. Under exposure to X-rays, flesh, emulsion, and mineral matter are attacked, hollowed out to their fragile supporting structures. X-rays operates on multiple levels: literally, as a reference to clinical imaging and nuclear radiation; and metaphorically, as an index of the invasive power of medical authority, the military-industrial complex, and, more broadly, the patriarchal, colonial and capitalist system. In Lahire's films[5], "exposure" speaks to the material vulnerability of both human and non-human entities, not only as a means of critiquing relations of domination and exploitation, but also as a way of affirming a contingent, porous corporeality inseparable from the material world that constitutes it. This perspective aligns with what Stacy Alaimo, in *Exposed*, describes as an "ethics of exposure"[6], grounded in the recognition of our material continuity with our environments. "Dwelling in the dissolve", as Alaimo suggests, is to acknowledge permeability as the basis for an ethical relationship to the living.

The exhibition brings together four key films from the early phase of Lahire's practice in the 1980s—she would go on to produce ten films between 1984 and 1999. These works trace a progressive expansion of corporeal concerns: from an exploration of her own bodily vulnerability, shaped by anorexia and fostering an empathetic relationship to other living beings, to an engagement with

1 Maud Jacquin dedicated her thesis to feminist practices in experimental cinema, particularly within the LFMC. In 2016, for their 50th anniversary, she curated a programme at Tate Modern and Tate Britain, *From Reel to Real: Women, Feminism and the LFMC*, which made it possible to (re) discover Lahire. In 2021, the Courtisane festival devoted a focus and a monograph to her. In 2022, an exhibition was dedicated to her at the Grazer Kunstverein (Graz), with the artist Celeste Burlina. In France, her work has only been the subject of screenings: at the International Women's Film Festival in Créteil in 2007, with a retrospective curated by Klonaris/Thomadaki; in 2024, a programme curated by Charlotte Procter of LUX with Lightcone, and then by the Collectif Jeune Cinéma.

2 Founded in 1966, the LFMC merged with London Video Arts in 1999 to form LUX. This exhibition coincides with its 60th anniversary.

3 See in particular Stacy Alaimo, Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

4 Excerpt from Sylvia Plath's poem "Medusa" (1962). This was already the title of the text Maud Jacquin devoted to Lahire's cinema, written in 2016 and published in 2019 in *Women, Feminism and the Moving Image*, ed. Lucy Reynolds, then in 2021 in *Living on Air: The Films and Words of Sandra Lahire,* (ed. Courtisane Festival, Ghent, 2021). That text already laid the groundwork for the argument underpinning this exhibition, which is why we have chosen to republish it here, in its original English version and in French translation.

environments affected by the invisible toxicity of nuclear radiation, power plants, and uranium mining.

The first two films, *Arrows* (1984) and *Edge* (1986), approach film as a body—as a "skin" (Laura Marks[7])—establishing parallels between cinematic editing and surgical procedures through a deliberately discontinuous montage. They also introduce the figure of the animal, tracing a shift from metaphor — the animal as image of freedom — toward an acknowledgment of shared suffering. Lahire draws connections between the objectified female body within dominant representational regimes—extended through invasive medical practices—and the animal subjected to human domination, both fragmented into slices, evoking Sylvia Plath's expression of "pathological salamis"[8], cited in *Edge*.

Terminals (1986) and *Serpent River* (1989) respectively open and conclude a series of four anti-nuclear films. *Terminals* examines the working conditions of women in a nuclear power plant and their exposure to radiation. Its title refers both to monitoring interfaces—pervasive instruments of control—and to the terminal stages of illness. The image is held at the threshold of disappearance, as though the film itself were subjected to the same radiative forces as the bodies it depicts. *Serpent River,* the final work in a trilogy shot in Serpent River, Ontario (Canada), addresses the ecological and human consequences of uranium mining by the multinational Rio Tinto Zinc. Lahire renders perceptible the otherwise invisible toxicity of radiation as it circulates—fluid, diffuse, and chromatic—across mined landscapes, through living streams, into human bodies, and onto the filmic surface itself, whose textures and colors evoke the entanglement of bodies and the substances that permeate them.

Across these works, bodily fluids, blood circulation, underground waters, and tidal movements converge into a shared substrate of contaminated matter. The materiality of film mirrors the entanglements it articulates: the filmmaker's body, those of local inhabitants, the depths of the earth, the filmic medium, and the spectators are bound together in a shared vulnerability.. Lahire thereby suggests that an awareness of the mutual porosity of bodies and environments—and of their interdependent fragility—may constitute the foundation for an ecofeminist ethics grounded in embodiment, challenging Western conceptions of the subject as fixed, bounded, and autonomous.

The exhibition design is conceived by artist Jagna Ciuchta, whose practice– characterized by processes of permeability, contamination, and the incorporation of other artists' works– extends and reactivates key gestures and motifs present in Lahire's cinema.

5 Sylvia Plath held a central place in Lahire's thinking, to whom she dedicated a thesis that remained unfinished. Plath's poems, often read by the poet herself, appear in a large number of her films; Lahire also dedicated a trilogy to her: Living on Air (1991–1999).

6 Stacy Alaimo, *Exposure, Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

7 Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

8 Line from the poem by Sylvia Plath, "The Surgeon at 2AM" (1960).

"OVEREXPOSED, LIKE AN X-RAY": THE POLITICS OF CORPOREAL VULNERABILITY IN SANDRA LAHIRE'S CINEMA

Maud Jacquin

"Overexposed, like an X-ray." This line is borrowed from a poem by Sylvia Plath whose life and writings have had a considerable influence on Sandra Lahire's oeuvre, even inspiring her final trilogy *Living on Air* (1991 to 1999). It crystallizes some of the formal and thematic concerns at the core of Lahire's films by expressing a sense of profound vulnerability through an image that evokes the intersection of the body with technology. Sandra Lahire was one of Britain's boldest and most important experimental feminist and queer filmmakers. Like many of her contemporaries who started making films in the 1980s, she entered the world of experimental cinema through the recently established and truly innovative film and media departments at St. Martins and the Royal College of Art in London where she studied with such ground-breaking filmmakers as Malcolm Le Grice, Lis Rhodes and Tina Keane. Simultaneously, she started working in the context of the London Film-Makers' Co-operative, an artist-led organization founded in 1966, which brought together the activities of film production, distribution and exhibition. Despite the relatively small corpus of work that she left behind — she made ten 16mm films between 1984 and 1999 — Lahire expanded the boundaries of what feminist cinema could be by challenging established categories (in particular the separations between personal and documentary, narrative and non-narrative, the body and language), forging a singular film language that fused formal experimentation with socio-political commentary. In her work, and particularly in her films from the 1980s, which are the focus of this essay, Lahire examined the many ways in which the female body is exposed, trapped and infiltrated by the colonizing forces of our technological and patriarchal culture. Through a deep engagement with the materiality of both body and film, she explored the vulnerability of women's bodies to various forms of patriarchal violence and vigorously denounced this violation of their bodily integrity. In addition, I will argue, her own experience of pain and bodily suffering led her to recognize the ethical and political value of acknowledging corporeal vulnerability as a shared aspect of human, but also non-human, life.

Lahire's first film *Arrows* (1984) explores both the artist's own experience of anorexia and the cultural causes of an illness against which she struggled for many years until her untimely death in 2001. The film's effect depends upon a metaphorical parallel, established from the first sequence, between the artist's suffering body and images of caged birds. Other images such as those of Egyptian mummies or of the artist screaming in anguish like the vacant-eyed character of Edvard Munch's iconic painting, also convey a sense of imprisonment and suffocation, one heightened by the frenetic and often overwhelming rhythm of the editing and rostrum camera work. This sense of imprisonment not only evokes the anorexic's relation to her body and to her condition, but also the oppression of a patriarchal society that pressures women into conforming to masculine desires.

Many scenes in *Arrows* indeed underscore the role of the media in women's body-image disorders, such as when magazine cut-outs of female models are animated to the rhythm of aerobic instructions. In addition, the gruesome depiction of invasive medical procedures such as liposuction, combined with the recurrence of grid-like patterns throughout the film, point to the complicity of medicine and science in the shaping and disciplining of women's bodies.

Lahire's second film *Edge* (1986) expands on this idea of the infiltration and fragmentation of the female body by science and technology. A collage of excerpts from poems by Sylvia Plath recounting experiences of hospitalization and surgery ("The Stones", 1959, "The Surgeon at 2am", 1960–61 and "Facelift", 1960–61) serves as the inspiration — and voice-over — for a fractured film that conveys, in a profoundly visceral way, the violent breach of bodily integrity entailed by the technologisation of society. The film abounds with measuring and cutting instruments (compasses, rulers, razor blades, knives, etc.) and with female body fragments often shown through the screens of medical machines or amongst an accumulation of surgical tubes, gauze bandages and viscous materials evoking oozing wounds. Here, the female body is exposed in all its vulnerability in the literal sense of the term — the word vulnerable indeed stems from the Latin word *vulnus* meaning wound.

Women's corporeal vulnerability and exposure to techno-patriarchal culture is also at the heart of Lahire's four films on nuclear power, which, with their focus on female workers, echoed the feminist discourses circulating in women's anti-nuclear activism in the 1980s.[1] Whether they are operators at nuclear power stations (*Terminals*, 1986 and *Plutonium Blonde*, 1987) or uranium miners in Canada (*Uranium Hex*, 1987 and *Serpent River,* 1989), the women workers in these films appear to be ensnared in technological apparatus of exploitation and control, as figured by barbed wire fences, looming helicopters, overpowering drilling machines or walls of computer screens. This sense of claustrophobic entrapment is conveyed through the images but also through the restless camera movements and the unnerving sounds of electronic machines and industrial work. In addition, Lahire's anti-nuclear films call attention to the very real and harmful effects of computer screen rays and nuclear radiations on women's bodies. In all of them, voices of women and children describe their heightened exposure to the risks of lung cancer, miscarriage, Down's syndrome or neurological damage, while deeply affecting images and sounds attempt to give tangible form to this intangible threat. In *Terminals*, for instance, the filmmaker draws the names of radioactive elements, as well as arrows pointing at her breasts on her own vulnerable naked body. In *Plutonium Blonde* and *Uranium Hex*, the acid-hued smoke clouds appearing near people and the incessant crackling noises on the soundtrack materialise the chemicals' invisible circulation and their contamination of the workers' bodies.

"In Lahire's films on nuclear power, the "overexposure" of Plath's poem quite literally becomes that of the women's bodies affected by radiation. But this term also evokes light's inscription of the image onto the celluloid and thus the material processes of filmmaking. As I mentioned earlier, Lahire was part of LFMC, where she worked alongside filmmakers such as Jean Matthee, Anna Thew and Tina Keane with whom she collaborated on several occasions. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s, the LFMC was the anchor of a vibrant filmmaking movement, characterized by a shared commitment to experiment with the language of cinema and, for a majority of filmmakers, to explore the nature and materiality of film. In her work, Lahire arguably adopts the vocabulary of this material exploration of cinema — super-imposition, re-filming, colour inversion, changes of speed, etc. — to articulate her own conception of film as a body, itself subjected to various intrusive interventions and exposed in its vulnerability. Here, the exposure (both literal and figurative) of the film's body comes to reflect the female body's exposure to patriarchal power.

1 For a discussion on the intersections of feminism and antinuclear activism, see, for instance, the chapter "Personal Politics: Radical Feminism, Difference, and Anti-Nuclear Activism" in Kyle Harvey's *American Anti-Nuclear Activism, 1975–1990* (London and New York, 2014), pp. 68-92.

In *Edge*, for example, Lahire's style of editing cuts like the scalpel of a surgeon. Images follow one another at a frenzied, spasmodic rhythm; the body of the film is sliced to pieces, left in a state of dismemberment. Several times, the screen is entirely covered with gauze bandages as if to protect the underlying image. Accompanied by the sound of a heartbeat as heard through a doppler machine, the filmmaker's hands appear over the dressing and make an incision, letting some blood flow out. The body of the film becomes one with that of the female patient, as the protective surface is breached, and the boundary between interior and exterior dissolves. In the nuclear trilogy, film is also conceived as a vulnerable body but this time through the act of being burnt rather than cut up. Echoing the way that the nuclear workers are harmed by penetrating radiations, the filmstrip is constantly overexposed, eroded to the point of the image's near-disappearance. Finally, through the negative and acid-coloured shots that recur throughout, Lahire's 1980s films evoke the imagery of X-ray and MRI machines. Actual radiographic images also appear in several of the films, and once again present a form of bodily exposure not only to electromagnetic radiations but also to the penetration of the medical gaze — a theme taken up explicitly in *Edge* but that traverses Lahire's entire oeuvre.

Through her singular use of experimental film techniques, Lahire thus conveys a visceral sense of women's embodied vulnerability to various forms of patriarchal (and technological) violence. In so doing, she hoped to help "the silent scream become audible" and encourage the fight for women's rights to control their own bodies.[2] But there is something else at work in Lahire's films that resonates with a different (and not necessarily contradictory) feminist position on vulnerability that has emerged in recent years: an intuition, presumably connected to her life-long suffering from anorexia, that the genuine acknowledgment of one's own bodily vulnerability can become the ground for an ethical relationship to the other.[3] In *Undoing Gender* and *Precarious Life*, both written in 2004, partially in response to the United States' highly militarised reactions to 9/11, Judith Butler argues that the experience of corporeal vulnerability does not only imply an acute sense of powerlessness and dispossession — one that can generate pain, fear and rage — but also the visceral recognition of the co-implication and mutual exposure of bodies. Without denying the traumatic impact of terrorist attacks and other violent actions, she contends that one's capacity to viscerally extrapolate the vulnerability of others from one's own experience of vulnerability can prompt an ethical response and become the foundation of a different kind of politics. Butler writes:

> Mindfulness of this vulnerability can become the basis of claims for non-military political solutions, just as denials of this vulnerability through a fantasy of mastery [...] can fuel the instruments of war. We cannot, however, will away this vulnerability. We must attend to it, even abide by it, as we begin to think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself.[4]

To "attend to" and "abide by" her corporeal vulnerability is precisely what Sandra Lahire did in *Arrows*, exactly twenty years before Butler wrote these lines. And like the American philosopher, this experience seems to have enabled her to recognise that the fragility and porosity of her body "establishes a field of ethical enmeshment with others and a sense of disorientation for the first-person, that is, the perspective of the ego."[5] Indeed, through language and through elaborate montages of images and sounds, Lahire manages to convey an embodied understanding that her own corporeal vulnerability is a channel to other suffering bodies — anorexic bodies like hers, but also less close ones who suffer from famine, war or the inconceivable horrors of the Holocaust.

"I am so aware of my body. It hurts... If only I was not alone in this big

2 Sandra Lahire, as quoted from luxonline, an online education resource by LUX, the British non-profit organisation that distributes Lahire's films. See http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/sandra_lahire/edge.html (accessed 28 March 2016).

3 In recent years, many feminist theorists in various disciplines (philosophy, law, political sciences and other fields) have explored the ethical consequences of the inherent vulnerability of the human body. See, for instance, Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, 2006); Martha Albertson Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition", *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, Vol. 20, no. 1 (2008), pp. 1-23; or Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (New York, 2008).
For a rich introduction to the diversity of perspectives on this issue, see Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers and Susan Dodds (eds.), *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy* (Oxford, 2014).

4 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York, 2004), p. 29.

5 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York, 2004), p. 25.

empty skin. If only you could enter and comfort me."[6] Uttered by Lahire in the film's voice-over, these poignant words express a piercing need for a bodily communion with an other. Importantly, these words are not those of the filmmaker but of a teenager named Kate who responded to Lahire's letter published in a feminist magazine in which she invited women to share their experiences of anorexia. In borrowing the words of another, and simply ending her reading with the sentence "Dear Sandra, I'm Kate, seventeen, just getting over anorexia," the filmmaker expresses more than just the awareness that anorexia is both a personal and a political condition. She also performs something of the bodily encounter, the slippage between the "I" and the "you" that the anorexic teenager so urgently calls for. This slippage between self and other is also reflected in the images. In one particularly striking sequence accompanying the voiceover reading of Sylvia Plath's poem "The Thin People", close-ups of Lahire's emaciated body — her jutting spinal column, exposed ribs and raw-boned face — alternate with a blurry scene of a ragged woman staggering among what looks like barbed wire, a grainy newspaper photograph of a man's face in agony and various images of Egyptian mummies. Like in Plath's poem, and through the skillful use of visual parallels, Lahire's own thinness is made to resonate with that of other vulnerable bodies.[7]

Judith Butler describes corporeal vulnerability as the condition of "being given over to the touch of the other."[8] In an almost literal manifestation of this idea, an animated scene shows photomaton portraits of Lahire being manipulated and later engulfed by large drawn hands. But in *Arrows*, the image of touch is also used to express the physical reaching out to the other that the recognition of this vulnerability might entail. During the sequence described above, and also during the reading of Kate's stirring words, silhouettes of hands appear over the images to slowly touch and caress them. Here, Lahire's recognition that our bodies expose us to one another fosters an attitude of care and empathy. As intimated by another appearance of a hand, but this time pressing under the transparent surface of the image, this physical reaching out also extends to anyone engaging with the film, whether the filmmaker or the film's viewers. Indeed, and this is something that can be generalised to Lahire's entire oeuvre, both the act of making and of viewing *Arrows* seem to emphasize the co-implication of bodies, their connection through surface contact. In the words of Sarah Pucill, Lahire's fellow filmmaker and partner: "[I]n Sandra's films, closeness is arrived at through focusing on texture, through the surface. Then, the inside and the outside are that much closer. The surface of the body is so much closer to the surface of someone else's body."[9] In her films, Lahire uses an array of experimental film techniques such as colourisation, time-lapse and multiple superimpositions done in camera or on the optical printer to create richly-textured, multi-layered surfaces. This emphasis on texture not only suggests a very physical, hands-on engagement with the material body of the film from the part of the filmmaker,[10] it also appeals to the viewer's sense of touch, activating what Laura U. Marks has described as a mode of "haptic visuality" in which "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch."[11] In other words, Lahire's focus on the film's surface, on what Marks has called "the skin of the film," establishes a sensuous or tactile exchange between the bodies of film, filmmaker and viewer, thus underlying the fact that they physically impinge on and transform one another.[12]

In *Arrows*, Lahire thus manages to convey a sense of her corporeal connection — or intercorporeality — with other vulnerable bodies by working with and through the material of film. The ethical nature of this connection is made even clearer in her subsequent films on the human and environmental cost of nuclear power. In these experimental documentaries, Lahire always puts herself in front of the camera, sometimes making brief appearances (as in *Plutonium Blonde* or *Serpent River*), other times playing a more central role (as in

6 From the author's transcript of the script of *Arrows*.

7 The image of the concentration camps and the Holocaust runs through "The Thin People" but also through many other poems by Plath, most notably "Daddy" (1962) and "Lady Lazarus" (1962). For a discussion of the various responses to Plath's use of the Holocaust, see Deborah Nelson, "Plath: History and Politics" in Jo Gill (ed.), T*he Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 21-23.

8 Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, p. 32.

9 Sarah Pucill in discussion with the author, February 2016.

10 This relationship of physical proximity between the filmmakers and their films had a particular significance for several women filmmakers at the LFMC including Annabel Nicolson, Sarah Pucill, Nina Danino. See for instance: Lucy Reynolds, *British Avant-Garde Women Filmmakers and Expanded Cinema of the 1970s*, Doctorate Thesis, (University of East London, 2009); or Susanna Poole, "Touching Camera" (2003), published on luxonline: http://www.luxonline.org.uk/articles/touching_camera(1).html (accessed 28 March 2016).

11 Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham and London, 2000), p. 162.

12 *Ibid*, p. 162.

Uranium Hex). This refusal to maintain the supposedly objective distance with her subject can obviously be understood in the context of the discussions on the ethics of documentary filmmaking that were happening at the time, particularly in feminist circles.[13] But there is more to it than this: When Lahire appears before the camera, it is often to perform her fleshy vulnerability and expose herself to the same physical dangers as the workers she films.

This exposure plays out in different registers across the trilogy. In *Terminals*, she appears outside a nuclear facility and engages in a disturbing dance, with her naked skeletal body partially wrapped in strips of linen and her head sometimes covered with a black bag. In *Uranium Hex*, she stages the contamination of her own body by filming herself in the uranium mine amid clouds of coloured smoke or drinking a glass of water as the voice-over states: "You can't drink it because it's filled with uranium; you can't drink it to save your life."[14] And in *Serpent River*, in an attempt to share the bodily experience of the members of the Serpent River First Nation (in Ojibwé: *Genabaajing Anishinaabek*)[15], she walks through a zone identified as the "sulphur circle", while images of devouring flames appear in superimposition (the accumulation of sulphur residue in areas inhabited by native communities produces skin burns and other harmful health effects). By unveiling her own corporeal vulnerability as a gesture of empathy, Lahire does more than search for a compassionate identification with her filmed subjects. She also suggests that crucial ethical and political possibilities emerge from the recognition that vulnerability is constitutive of subjectivity, resonating again with Butler's view that "the way in which the body figures [...] in the struggles for a less oppressive social world [...] is precisely to underscore the value of being beside oneself, of being a porous boundary, given over to others."[16]

But whereas Butler's discussion of the ethics of corporeal vulnerability remains centred on human beings, in Lahire's work the other to which the self "is given over" extends to the non-human. Her films indeed underline the co-implication of human bodies not only with each other but also with animals, and with the environment. Both *Arrows* and *Edge* draw connections between the bodies of women and animals. In *Arrows*, for instance, a close-up on an owl's talons is followed by a shot of Lahire's hands clenched into claws while the bird's round eyes echo the shape of the camera lens. Later, a frontal shot of Lahire pointing the camera at the viewer while slowly raising and lowering her elbows evokes the recurring scene of a seagull flapping its wings. But while *Arrows* establishes a largely metaphorical connection between women and birds — one that allows Lahire to express her feeling of imprisonment and her desire to find some kind of freedom through the act of filmmaking — in *Edge*, this relationship appears to be of a metonymic order, in the sense that metonyms express not just a similarity but a relation of contiguity between two terms. When in *Edge* Lahire superimposes her own screaming face with a seal's head just after a scandalous scene of seal slaughter, she is not simply trying to voice her own and other women's desperate feelings. She is also taking a stance against animal violence — a fact made even more obvious by the inclusion of footage of demonstrations against animal testing — and attempting to provoke an ethical recognition of one's human body as made of the same flesh and exposed to the same vulnerability as that of animals. Throughout the film, images of cats with cables hooked to their heads, of monkeys howling in scientific labs and of massacred seals abandoned along beaches are interspersed with bloody scenes of medical procedures performed on women, thus underlining the community of suffering between human and non-human creatures. In addition, the film's focus on the female body as meat — "a pathological salami," says Plath in one of the recited poems — emphasizes the material sameness of human and animal bodies and draws attention to the contiguity existing between them. And here again, an ethical and political call stems from the awareness of this bodily contiguity.

13 On this subject, see "Part II: Filmmaker/Subject: Self/Other" and "Part IV: Innovative (Auto)biographies" in Diane Waldman and Janet Walker, *Feminism and Documentary* (Minneapolis, 1999), pp. 117-183 and pp. 267-338.

14 From the author's transcript of the script of *Uranium Hex*.

15 The Serpent River First Nation, signatory to the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850, is an Anishinaabe First Nation located in the Canadian province of Ontario, along the North Channel of Lake Huron. This First Nation was heavily affected by uranium mining in Elliot Lake, due to the contamination of Serpent River.

16 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, p. 25.

In the nuclear trilogy, this awareness extends to encompass the body of the land in ways that resonate with current approaches to ecofeminism, attempting to undo the nature-culture divide that enables the oppression of both female and non-human bodies. These films, and particularly *Serpent River* on which I will now concentrate, bring to light the mutual vulnerabilities of human bodies and nature in the hope of transforming our relationship to both. In *Material Feminisms* (2007, edited with Susan Hekman) and *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self* (2010), feminist theorist Stacy Alaimo introduces the concept of trans-corporeality, which she defines as "the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from 'nature' or 'environment'."[18] For her, the realization that human bodies are in constant interchange with the environment can only lead to a reconfiguration of nature as an active agent, which has fundamental ecological consequences. In her own words, "imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality [...] makes it difficult to pose nature as mere background for the exploits of the human since 'nature' is always as close as one's own skin."[19] *Serpent River* overflows with images that can be said to visually translate Alaimo's notion of trans-corporeality. Among the most striking is that of a chest X-ray superimposed with the underground cavity of the uranium mine. As a group of workers moves deeper into the mine to the sound of a heartbeat combined with machine drilling noise, it is as if foreign, maybe cancerous agents had penetrated the X-rayed lung. Another evocative passage, which brings us back to the etymology of vulnerability in a wound, is when Lahire performs naked in front of a "wounded" rock cliff while a miner explains in voice-over: "[T]hat's how the cut would break after it's been blasted."[20] The filmmaker's prominent spinal column visually echoes the deep crack in the rock, forming an image that epitomizes the common precariousness of body and land. More broadly, Lahire evokes the circulation of toxins in the bloodstream by representing the dispersion of radioactive substances through shots of trucks, trains and pipelines, and also of the river itself, which is often coloured in artificial hues, transforming the landscape into a vast venous network.

It is highly significant that these trans-corporeal motifs appear in the context of a film exploring the noxious effects of uranium mining on the bodies of the workers and inhabitants of the region. This context indeed moves us beyond a metaphorical relation between body and land to a more concrete figuration of the actual but invisible material exchanges between people and places (for instance, the much higher rates of health problems due to the intensity of radiation generated by uranium exploitation; the chemical contamination of the water and soil as a result of the careless treatment of hazardous waste, etc.). In her writings, Alaimo has been especially concerned with "toxic bodies" as she believes that they constitute a "particularly potent site for examining the ethical space of trans-corporeality."[21] Because tracing the effects of toxins forces us to recognise that one's health and welfare is inseparable from that of the planet, "toxic bodies may provoke material, trans-corporeal ethics that turn from the disembodied values and ideals of bounded individuals toward an attention to situated, evolving practices that have far-reaching and often unforeseen consequences for multiple peoples, species and ecologies."[22]

Thirty years before Alaimo's theoretical writings, and twenty years before Butler's, Lahire's relentless experience of bodily vulnerability gave her the intuition, or rather the corporeal knowledge, of the palpable interconnections between all things, human and nonhuman. Experimental cinema, and in particular the mode of filmmaking associated with the LFMC in the 1980s, provided her with the aesthetic vocabulary to express this contiguity between all sorts of bodies: her own body, the miner's body, the body of the land but also the body of the film and that of the viewer. Through a hands-on

17 Stacy Alaimo, "Trans-corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature", in S. Alaimo and S. Hekman (eds.)

18 Stacy Alaimo, « *Trans-corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature* », dans S. Alaimo et S. Hekman (dir.), *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington, 2009), p. 238.

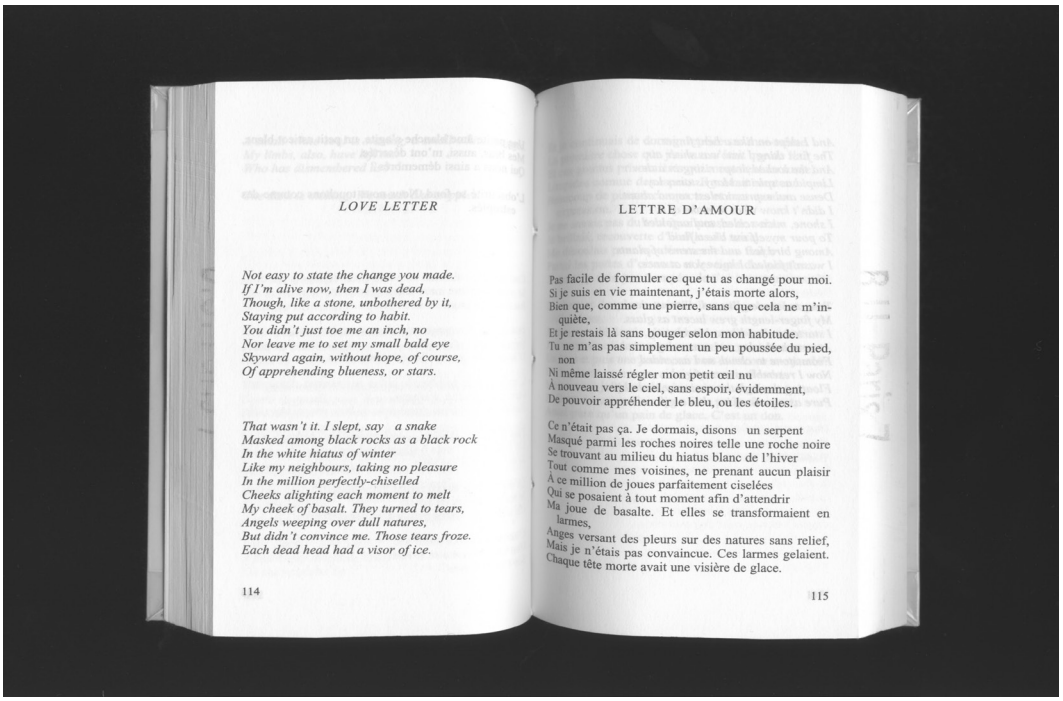
19 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

20 From the author's transcript of the script of *Serpent River*.

21 Stacy Alaimo, "Trans-corporeal feminisms and the ethical space of nature", p. 260.

22 Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington, 2010), p. 22.

engagement with the materiality of cinema and a focus on the film's surface, Lahire managed to give form to a trans-corporeal space that acknowledges the porosity of both human and non-human bodies and places. Her films make clear that this is also a space of shared vulnerability, which can become the ground of a feminist ethics that is anchored in the body and does not take a fixed, bounded subject as its basis.



LOVE LETTER

Not easy to state the change you made.
If I'm alive now, then I was dead,
Though, like a stone, unbothered by it,
Staying put according to habit.
You didn't just toe me an inch, no
Nor leave me to set my small bald eye
Skyward again, without hope, of course,
Of apprehending blueness, or stars.

That wasn't it. I slept, say a snake
Masked among black rocks as a black rock
In the white hiatus of winter
Like my neighbours, taking no pleasure
In the million perfectly-chiselled
Cheeks alighting each moment to melt
My cheek of basalt. They turned to tears,
Angels weeping over dull natures,
But didn't convince me. Those tears froze.
Each dead head had a visor of ice.

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LETTRE D'AMOUR

Pas facile de formuler ce que tu as changé pour moi.
Si je suis en vie maintenant, j'étais morte alors,
Bien que, comme une pierre, sans que cela ne m'inquiète,
Et je restais là sans bouger selon mon habitude.
Tu ne m'as pas simplement un peu poussée du pied, non
Ni même laissé régler mon petit œil nu
À nouveau vers le ciel, sans espoir, évidemment,
De pouvoir appréhender le bleu, ou les étoiles.

Ce n'était pas ça. Je dormais, disons un serpent
Masqué parmi les roches noires telle une roche noire
Se trouvant au milieu du hiatus blanc de l'hiver
Tout comme mes voisines, ne prenant aucun plaisir
À ce million de joues parfaitement ciselées
Qui se posaient à tout moment afin d'attendrir
Ma joue de basalte. Et elles se transformaient en larmes,
Anges versant des pleurs sur des natures sans relief,
Mais je n'étais pas convaincue. Ces larmes gelaient.
Chaque tête morte avait une visière de glace.

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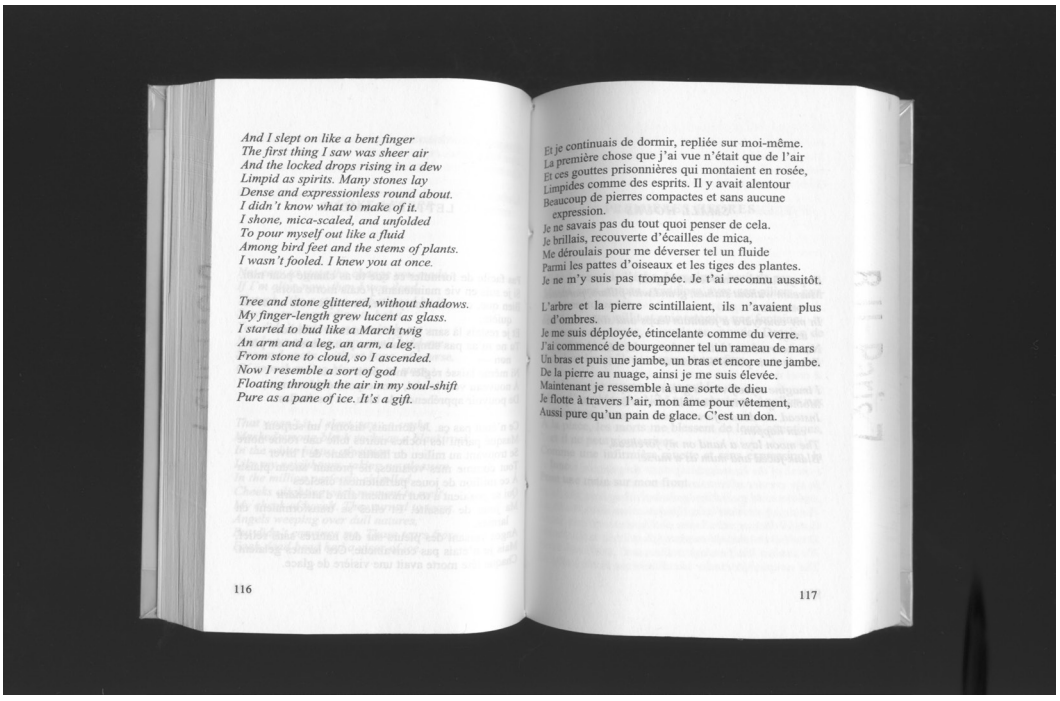

And I slept on like a bent finger
The first thing I saw was sheer air
And the locked drops rising in a dew
Limpid as spirits. Many stones lay
Dense and expressionless round about.
I didn't know what to make of it.
I shone, mica-scaled, and unfolded
To pour myself out like a fluid
Among bird feet and the stems of plants.
I wasn't fooled. I knew you at once.

Tree and stone glittered, without shadows.
My finger-length grew lucent as glass.
I started to bud like a March twig
An arm and a leg, an arm, a leg.
From stone to cloud, so I ascended.
Now I resemble a sort of god
Floating through the air in my soul-shift
Pure as a pane of ice. It's a gift.

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Et je continuais de dormir, repliée sur moi-même.
La première chose que j'ai vue n'était que de l'air
Et ces gouttes prisonnières qui montaient en rosée,
Limpides comme des esprits. Il y avait alentour
Beaucoup de pierres compactes et sans aucune expression.
Je ne savais pas du tout quoi penser de cela.
Je brillais, recouverte d'écailles de mica,
Me déroulais pour me déverser tel un fluide
Parmi les pattes d'oiseaux et les tiges des plantes.
Je ne m'y suis pas trompée. Je t'ai reconnu aussitôt.

L'arbre et la pierre scintillaient, ils n'avaient plus d'ombres.
Je me suis déployée, étincelante comme du verre.
J'ai commencé de bourgeonner tel un rameau de mars
Un bras et puis une jambe, un bras et encore une jambe.
De la pierre au nuage, ainsi je me suis élevée.
Maintenant je ressemble à une sorte de dieu
Je flotte à travers l'air, mon âme pour vêtement,
Aussi pure qu'un pain de glace. C'est un don.

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Images: Photocopies of Sylvia Plath's collection *Winter Trees*, included by Jagna Ciuchta in the exhibition's scenography and visible on the art center's windows from the outside.

OVEREXPOSED, LIKE AN X-RAY

SANDRA LAHIRE

Exhibition
from 15 May to 1 August 2026
Opening: Wednesday 13 May, from 6 pm to 9 pm
Temporary closure
8th to 11th of July
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