

Abdominal migraine

The cavities of biological structures such as intestines or arteries are known as lumina. What we're dealing with *from the lumen side* is an inside, an underbelly. If you were to cut through the gastrointestinal tract you'd find the lumen entertaining all kinds of digested matter along with other things that shouldn't be there. Elizabeth Wilson likens the gut to a tunnel, a kind of passageway through which microbes and antigens traffic. This internal organ *has a remarkably intimate connection to the outside* – which makes it sound capable of breaking out in sweat and having hot flashes, the whole menopausal lot. From this dank interior space it's hard to imagine envioning with the outside, but the lumen is a boundary between self and world; *whatever is in the lumen of the gut is thus actually outside of our bodies*.

I imagine the cyanotypes as portraits of ossified organs. Arctic populations (such as the Yup'ik and Cup'ik people) have historically used animal matter to produce water and windproof clothing. The gut parka (*imarnin*) made from mammalian guts is one example of such a garment. Gore-Tex – the now ubiquitous technical fabric first made in 1969 – owes its inspiration to the innovations of indigenous Arctic populations. Waterproof, windproof and breathable, Gore-Tex is a staple component of garments for all major outerwear brands who aim to equip those who spend time in challenging atmospheric conditions with the right sort of laminated apparel. With some nine billion pores per square inch, the Gore-Tex membrane is the fabric's unique characteristic. It's a sad irony (but perhaps unsurprising) that Teflon, the fluoropolymer that made Gore-Tex possible, is harmful to the environments it is designed to protect us from. Beyond outerwear, applications of Gore-Tex stretch to the microbial – its porosity allows it to be used in surgical procedures as a suture. The body's soft tissue can grow through, grafting the material onto the circulatory system.

These cyanotypes could be chest radiographs – lungs tacked to the wall in an examination room. But instead of pulmonary clouding between bands of white rib, the thick bones and tangle of veins are reams and scrunches of cloth. Maybe each one is a blueprint for a city with its own nexus of highways colliding: a topography of sinew; zippers snaking like trails. Between the roads, farmland. Stretching out the jacket on the exposure bed has created a series of ridges like freshly turned soil – marks of a rotavator inked in Prussian blue. I want to spread my hands across the surface and iron out the folds. It would be like kissing the mouth of an inamorata's smiling photograph with no teeth to curl around.

Hervé Guibert described his teenage fascination when presented with an x-ray of his own torso. He eroticised its opacity – one which only medical professionals could decipher. Having fixed the x-ray to a window he described how sunlight filtering through produced a *bluish network of bony lines and blurry organs as through a piece of stained glass*. In full view of all his neighbours, *I was displaying the most intimate image of myself*. Pressed to the glass like that, the details of the image quickly fade: I imagine his torso becoming gossamer, whitish, like the skin you pick out from your mouth after a burn. Unlike Guibert's fading images, cyanotypes are relatively long lasting. Guibert contemplated playing doctor to fast-track their degradation, but these threaten to outlive us.

Exposure to strong light is a crucial step in cyanotype imaging. These had a whirlwind exposure time of two minutes. For the migraine-prone, all it takes is a few minutes of exposure to certain qualities of light before the walls begin to thud. Joan Didion describes her fugues as *migraine auras*. The flora of suburbia imprints on her retina, *a flashing light, a fire drill* causing her skull to throb. Each migraine arrives like a cyclone, incapacitating her for ten to twelve hours at a time. Not only does light-sensitivity induce a kind of hallucinatory waywardness – a *wrongthink* – but migraines threaten gastrointestinal disturbances.

The term *abdominal migraine* seems something of a misnomer. As a medical disorder it tangles psyche and soma, gut and head. Whether it should be classed a psychogenic condition isn't entirely clear, and that positive effects of anti-migraine treatment have been reported only complicates the clinical division of mind and body. *Properly speaking*, a positive result would make it a migraine mobilised by the brain. We tend to think of the two, even colloquially, as working at odds – mind over matter with a douse of the involuntary – a gurgling stomach followed by flatulence. The gut is an organ with little social skill or intelligence. After all, what does a rumble tell us about the particularities of our appetite? We clutch our stomachs during bewildering abdominal pain and hedge bets on offending comestibles.

Those used to chronic bouts of pain are often diviners, they know the best preventatives and the worst triggers. Wilson endows a gut feeling with more than intuiting knowledge: *the gut is an organ of mind, it ruminates, deliberates, comprehends*. We feel a bad day curdling our gut like we do the ache of food poisoning, distinguishing between the two isn't easily achieved. With the pores tiny camera obscura for information to pass, an image creeps into focus: Didion recumbent with the curtains pulled shut. Her body aches from her contact with the world, the afternoon's *contretemps over a parking ticket*. Routine experience has equipped her enough that she can wheedle out the malefactor, but who to charge when the entire city doubles down on you.

Haruspicy was the Roman divination practice of reading the entrails of sacrificial animals. As a self-styled Haruspex I have a go at reading extinction in these images: early makers of the gut parka, the whales whose guts explode from plastic oversaturation, the expiration date of packets of aspirin, the Gore-Tex patent and poly-fluorinated chemicals, the atrophying skin of this hand thudding against plastic. The gut sloshes these vicissitudes around with the dressed crab and Caesar salad, all piled in. Later, when we're damp with guilt and shame, we'll release tiny roads of traffic headed north.

Gabriella Beckhurst