

**Southern Cross University**

**Ashley Haywood**

**The wall reports (excerpt)**

Biographical note:

Ashley Haywood is completing her PhD at Southern Cross University with a creative research thesis titled *Harlequin Blue, and The Picasso experiment*. Her work has appeared in *Island/Islet* and been performed in Paris, France.

## **Introduction**

'The wall reports' is a fictional auto/biographical record of the writer initiating her creative process and practice in a room surrounded by walls painted an afflicting blue. In a final attempt to liberate her imagination and uncertainty and free the writing-self, the writer imprisons two characters in a fictional blue house and forces them to write their significant thoughts on the walls in exchange for their lives. Their reports are numbered, titled and processed by the writer. Characters, however, are not so easily confined nor are writing-selves free. This is an excerpt from 'The wall reports'.

## **Wall writing**

Bound by blue walls and stranded, we are alone.

As I write for you now, I am touching these words on the wall, just as they dissolve but before they disappear, when the wall and words are most vulnerable. In this writing instant, I can c o n c a v e the surface as though my body or the wall were insoluble enough to be one or the other. The words as molecules pass through this blue blood-brain barrier, but the wall as a porous, membranous film catches my whole body. I cannot follow the words.

Can you feel the words passing, as I feel them?

If I attempt to follow the words with my finger, they w a r p with the wall and circle on themselves, as if held back, and they squirm, marking the wall with invertebrate tracks. But they too vanish. All the words leave, and then there is only blue and the wall is once more impenetrable.

Wait.

Answer me.

If we write for you, will you let us leave?

## **Blue house**

The bedroom or room with a metal-framed bed is in a small, square suburban home, and one of four square rooms for each corner of the house. I have no memory of who I am before I woke in this room. There is one other room with bed, and these are the only furnishings. The four rooms can be open or closed to a central space, but there is always light. There are no doors to the outside, no windows, not a single source for this perpetual, penetrating light. All the walls are blue as this wall is blue. But there is one room with different walls.

Is this what you want me to write?

The walls echo their screaming blue. It's that kind of blue. I had just woken and as I turned around and around, searching my mind for what could explain this place, I found that I was not alone. The door opposite to where I woke opened from the inside

and there was a man, emerging from a replica space as empty as mine, with the same metal-framed bed and the sheets tossed.

We're both still naked and trying to remember.

Is this what you want? We don't remember, so what do we write?

'I've searched the house,' he said, 'and I can't find a way in or out. But I found this – He was holding his writing tool. I had found mine too.'

### **The wall reports**

We write to live in this blue house, where things, not just our words, come and go through the blue walls. With no indication of coming from anywhere other than the walls themselves, the blue walls sometimes deliver things to us. Your instructions were delivered after waking but I don't know how long ago that was now. Your instructions are that we write on the walls with the WRITING-POINT TOOLS or we'll be PROCESSED. But I don't understand SIGNIFICANT THOUGHTS.

Why bring us here and from where? Where do the words go? What is this place?

We have so many questions. The man sat against the wall for a long time waiting for answers, but I don't think you will respond.

### **Writing-point tool**

The tool is soft, like a paintbrush, until it touches the blue walls and becomes magnetically solid. It won't mark any other surface, other than our skin. I can feel a charged pulse if I let the writing-tool touch me and then the nib-end burns a mark, but before it burns, before the electricity, I can feel it as a thin brushstroke, so delicate.

Sometimes a sentence disappears faster than a word and I forget what I have written. You see the shapes shift, the writing is anamorphic and I have only eyes with which to watch them take their own forms; all twists and smooth loops, sharp ends and multiple trails. These are maps of my own making that I cannot read. So I am mostly left behind. Soon you'll take whatever remains of me without me knowing, but am I enough? I am lost without knowing what is lost. Is that enough?

### **Two other rooms**

The woman tells me that she doesn't remember waking, but remembers dreaming. We don't know who woke first, but I found the simulator. 'Come on', I said, 'I'll show you what's behind door number three.' She didn't react. I offered my hand to assure, but she wasn't looking at me.

'Are we breathing?' She asked. I took a breath. 'And can you feel that, feel the floor?'

'It's just hardwood, isn't it?' I said. This was before the two other rooms and before we knew there really was no way out.

'No, that's what we see – Feel it.'

She didn't take my hand. We're naked.

This is all I know to write.

The room opposite the simulator, the fourth room, has two silvery discs. The discs appear perfectly round and fluid, but machine-cut into paisley-patterned tiles with chipped grout but no mould. Two discs, tiles and blue walls. She dropped her writing-tool onto the smaller disc, but it stayed on the surface. I pissed on it, and the urine disappeared.

### **The simulator**

At the entry to the simulator, the woman stopped. Her nakedness was almost translucent in the daylight. 'It's just made to look and feel like sunlight,' I told her, 'it's the same deal as out there minus the fucking blue.'

The simulator walls, floor and ceiling are opaque, including benches.

You want significant thoughts? This is all I have: opaque and mostly white during the daylight hours. We waited together in the simulator, watched our sun-stretched shadows move around the room until dusk. That was the first night. And we slept on the benches that wrap around the walls like a sweathouse, or, as Mimé said, like a glasshouse for people, as if she knew.

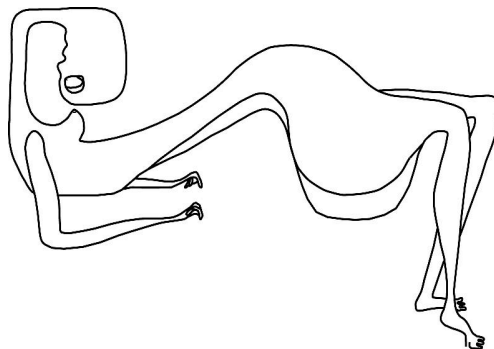
Simulated sunsets and sunrises rubricate with reds into yellows and oranges into reds, sometimes violet rings out before night is switched on. It's come to this, living for the next pretty dawn and a white day, the blue walls endless and these words, because what else is there for us?

### **Female subject**

I told her, it's all in her body. She suits Mimé. 'You suit Mimé,' I said. She sat on the simulator bench with her knees to her chest and her arm over her head. 'It's just me and you,' she said, 'do we really need names?' Then she stretched out in the pretend sun.

We talk, we call out to one another between rooms, we whisper, we don't just write to you. 'Yes', I said, 'we need names.'

She said she'd think about it, a name for me.



*Mud map: Australian women's experimental writing*

### **Nib-shock**

They can't leave our bodies. To be safe, we platted rope made from bed sheets, ripped and shredded. It's secure tied to my hip. His is tied around his neck. We both get nib-shock against our skin, and the burns look like lashings around my legs.

### **Wall light**

Mimé swallows up the light while I'm being chewed. It's a postmortem light along this valley of the blue walls. Penetrating, the light records me and I feel it with my hands, my arms, rolling my whole body over it, hitting it, and I just have to think and the valley opens, the tool shaping its contours and I'm pinned against its ridges, eyes dropping into rivers.

Stop.

There is nothing here, not even this bed is mine. I can't even thief it, disturb it.

### **Adaptation**

The man stays out with the blue walls, longer than he needs the time to write. He tells me he's adapting to the light out there, adapting to that monotone-machine blue. And he's doing it in case you switch off the night cycle in the simulator. If you plan to experiment, to take twilight from us and the night, I ask you: do you exist only within these words?

### **Bed**

I had almost forgotten the bed where I woke, closing the door all that time ago for the simulator room. Lin hasn't slept in his bedroom since waking, but, then, I don't see everywhere he goes; sometimes he's in and out of the disc room, the living room, in the doorway to the simulator, but not in the bedroom.

I imagined the white sheets were still crushed, and shredded material discarded to the corners of the room. But when I entered the room where I woke, I found the bed remade. The sheets folded, unsoured, untouched as if I had never woken, as if nothing had been written – everything is pristine clean. It all glared back at me: the dustless metal-frames, the sheets, their perfect white folds in perfect lines, ironed flat to stop at the bed head.

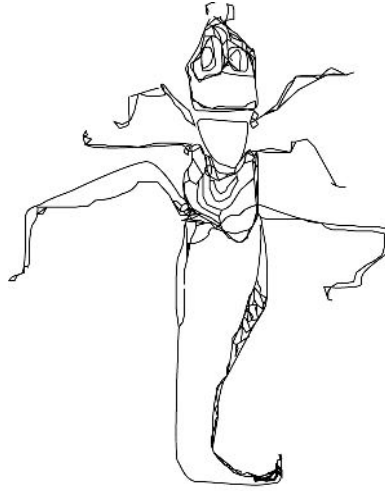
This bed requires dangerous metaphors.

So this is my plan. Anything that can rot, all the scraps we've left unused, untouched, anything that ever sustained us, I am pulping together with the mattress feathers. Between its springs, I am plotting out a new kind of bed. And now I am lying with it in the darkness of the simulator and the room is becoming humid. I dare you to stop me.

### **Things come out of the blue**

Antwasp, Antworp or Antwerp? Wants or Woopants? No, Antwasp. The Antwasps are coming. I told her the Antwasps are coming.

Wading through wall-time in spots of light, swarms of Antwasps aim for my opening iris, and procreate behind my eyes. But I can't keep up; I can't catch them all with a blink, before they burrow into my brain. Feeding on the reddish-grey mass that sits neatly up in between the fissures, where they engorge on sleep so everything stays blue.



### **There are two discs**

The small one is for excretion and the other is for dreams. The fluid is not viscous, but it's heavy and its heavy water lets my body and only our bodies break its surface. I looked back before going into the big disc to see Lin. Lin had come to watch, but his concern was not protective of me. He was not surprised when the disc's fluid grew slowly up and over my skin where my legs were submerged. I gave him my writing tool to mind before the pull was too much to resist and I was taken into the disc. There was no splash. There was no sound. The water pulled me under and Lin and I were separated.

I lost stream of consciousness. I was at the edge of the disc and then I was back in the house. What happened in between, dare I write, was like dreaming.

You're a fishing creature. I saw you in that ocean down there. A creature with no clear outline. It was your lure and your wrist flicking on the current that caught my eye. I watched as you jigged up and down your lure and bait. Baiting with indigo and cyan, bass-violets rippled out from ultramarine and high-tide azures. I didn't know these words existed. I wanted to touch, but you threw me back and I re-woke on the tiled floor that is neither warm nor cold.

## **Lin**

'Don't you like it?'

Do I like it? ... Lin? 'Spelt with a *y* or an *i*?' I asked.

She said she didn't need to breathe under the disc, but you know that I know we can't drown. Lin. Lost in here.

This is getting tedious.

## **Fishing creature**

With hooks instead of fingers, baiting the forgotten from the blue – What do you keep in your netting, while you leave the rest of us sterilised?

## **Antwasps**

The females are watery things, slipping in and out of the walls, stinging my body, if I disrupt their swarm. Coming or going, they leave marks. If you observe carefully without being seen you can detect anomalies in the blue. Look for light-spots from wing-reflection, and all their eggs set adrift together on the blue stare back like a compound eye. Look, over there →

## **Rememory**

But the body's memories, organ memories, are spotted in me. Everywhere, they are scattered as islands. And only I can remember what's buried.

When the organs shake, tectonics quake and things slough off, drift up or blow up, these memories will litter my conscious with clues. That's right. I can find them. I will find them; I will detect even the smallest crunch underfoot.

## **Compound eyes**

I felt her legs, the rough hair and sticky feet. I stared into her thousand eyes for as long as there are days and felt love. The wings on her back heaved and then she went for my optic nerve.

## **Skin**

Isn't it obvious? With the marks these tools can make, have you not seen Lin's skin? Lin is counting time and words and whatever comes in and out of the blue walls and writing for his eyes only.

My thigh is marked with the sharp finned-hands of sea-people, and sometimes I see them dancing on the walls. I hate what that might say about me, what this means. It's getting worse. They surface only to herd and I have so little left to give, please. Please.

### Spaceboat

We talk about you. Maybe more than we write about you.

Do you know what I think? I think you're a spaceboat disguised as a house. A vacuum-scribble craft exploring all the galaxy-piled corners of the universe, as time rolls over our head like dirty sheets. Why don't you grow a pair of windows?

You know I'm on to you, Spaceboat.

### Roots

The mattress is beginning to sag with decomposition. Roots have nestled in between the springs. And you know, don't you: with our first fruit, we won't need you.



### Leakage

Captain, this Lieutenant Lin, I need an estimate on our spacetime? Gravity has just bottomed out.

### Wall fish

I haven't moved him. I didn't know what he was planning. Lin was running at the wall before I could do anything. I came out when I heard him roar, and saw him charge through the bedroom door and into wall. When I got to the doorway, he was in a collapsed heap next to the bed.

He's breathing, but he's not waking. I've felt his neck and along his spine, trying to imagine what's normal, or what could be misaligned. The gash along his head is still bleeding red. Can you do something? I'm just waiting now for him to wake-up.

His body is covered in burn-marks from his tool. Dot-dash, lines and words that are so fresh and swollen, they look poisonous, and others so old, I wonder how long we've in this house.

The wall he hit is marked with red. It's a starburst, an asterisk to these words that I write, but as the words move as usual, into the wall, the red so brilliant moves too as though it swims, as though his blood is evolving into wall-fish.

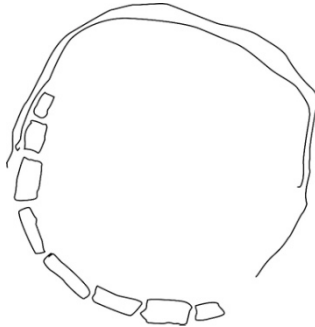


## Maps

The skin has to be tight like parchment. Words can go on top of other words, so read whatever you like: I am your bedtime story, your bedside lamp. Back from the dead. Tell me where you want to go and I'll take you over my body, just follow the arrows, Spaceboat.

## Outline

I can feel my thoughts being consumed by you. Chewing on the seeds, lolling the kernels about the tongue – How do we taste? You have no taste. Tell me, have you taken shape?



## Garden bed

I watch her, turning in the compost. Feathery humus and shit, but there are seedlings in there, somewhere in the troughs. Can't you see her plotting? This garden has a kind of stench, I tell you. She could find anything down there in the roots; between the rows. Tell me, do you think she would? Do you think she'd travel that space alone?

## House rain

The first drops started in the simulator.

A touch-to-the-tongue salty, but refreshing to taste. At first, the falling water was a pleasure. I thought you were giving us something special. Now I feel the water rising around my feet, and the blue walls are cold to touch and the words move slowly.

Are you even reading these words? We are writing!

But look at what grows. It still grows in all this water – Look.

## Last words

All the heavy words sink.

We're bloated, between floating and wading through your flood water. Migrate with the words or get left behind – is that the game? I thought I was more to you than soon to be belly-up. Spaceboat, are these my last words?

### **Breach**

A seedling is growing into the wall from my garden bed, right here. I can feel where the shoot softens the wall. Soft as when we first woke, when the w o r d s warped with touch.

Lin says that he won't go, he would rather disintegrate, and that outside you have to creep in space and everything is black not blue. Instead of coming with me, he drills into his body as if it were an open-cut mine, burying or unearthing.

### **None**

How many words will it take for this to end? I can't see the wall or this writing through the ceiling rain. Shapes expand from my hand and in the uncertainty and I see black polyps on the house currents.

### **Mimé**

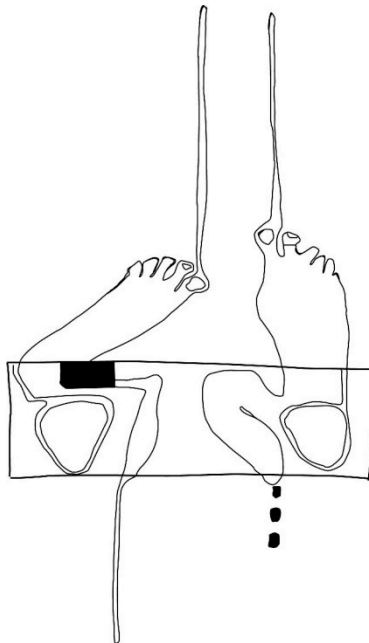
I am written.

### **Lin**

Spaceboat?

### **Growing into the wall**

Can you feel my feet planted? It won't be long now. It's easy to grow things that want to grow. In time, what is buried can become erumpent and disruptive. So I am growing.



### **Ferryman**

She is gone. I am only writing to tell you, I watched the last of her leave. She gave me her writing-tool. You know I could have gone with her, but what is out there passed the blue, in the black? She'll be lost after the wall. But I'll be here, suspended and afloat, your watchman of the blue. And we can start again, just me and you.

### **Blue tulip**

Before I woke in here, I was in a blue tulip. This is all I remember before waking in the blue house. So in a way, the giant tulip is the first event of my life. Did I tell you? In the tulip, a blue-eye wonderland, I swam around the anthers at the base of the style. Tightly folded petals were just opening above my head. So far above my head, the opening was round but as distant as the moon. Through the opening, a sea-beam of light ringed the weighty stigma in blue and lit the sexes. But beyond the limit of this light was black: a black on black on black out toward the unseen sepals or more black, out toward whatever I imagined.

I wrapped my arms around the style and waited, wondering if the flower would consume me with its antherous jaws. Still I waited, looking out into the black, watching as it crept closer and the petals closed over me.

### **Skin writing**

*I was here*