

# The waters, here.

Emlou Lattimore

*How are we to orient ourselves?*  
—Bruno Latour<sup>1</sup>



Walking through the door of *Pond Scum* feels like entering a pool of water the wrong way.

You are breathing—somehow—already submerged under a dull green light, with no view of the world above.

Three video works flash in conversation, threading a discordant loop that tugs from one end of the room to the other.

There are gleams of power, technology and the environments we inhabit. An entirely new era, where political and cultural ecologies spawn from the global elite, and the individual is intertwined with neoteric, unfolding crises.

I pick at a thought rolling over and over in my brain, of drowning under a filmy layer of pond scum. My mouth pulling in the mud and muck of stagnated waters, cyanobacteria filling my lungs.

I pick at the skin on my hand, thinking about the viscous mess of fluid beneath that I can never see. I have been worrying about the invisibility of my own body, lately. I'm attuned to the signs that I might be missing, the feelings that the mess of neurons and blood and nerves are trying to deliver.

I feel transient, and, the waters here are murky.

In the last four days, a downpour has sacrificed a month's worth of rain in one long continuous flood. Every time it rains my house leaks. This time, the water breached the roof, walls and floor of an upstairs room, before seeping into the lounge below.

In the last month before this, there were only two wet days (I notice the dry and wet days now).

In the last four days, I watched athletes slide down the first ever entirely artificial snowfield created for the Winter Olympics games. Forty-nine million gallons of water and two hundred snow cannons to create the most basic conditions for the event to take place<sup>2</sup>.

It is only in the practice of *noticing* that I realise the sun has moved, the seasons have changed. From where I am oriented now, the Noted is always distant, over-there. But, isn't this already happening here? Which reality have I chosen to inhabit?

I feel dislocated, unmoored from the line running from myself into the future.

In truth, the future is coming towards us.

The future is coming towards us in the form of a melting candle. It is earth, air, water—shrinking, capitalized.

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<sup>1</sup> *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/06/mounting-concern-over-environmental-cost-of-fake-snow-for-olympics>

It is Lake Wānaka and Lake Wakatipu, firmly in the hands of the global technocratic elite. A creeping sale to foreign billionaires with enough money to bypass democracy, quietly building private bunkers to ride out the climate apocalypse.

Peter Thiel, founder of PayPal and early investor in Facebook, was granted citizenship by the New Zealand government despite only ever having spent twelve days on this soil, and having no intention to live here. Thiel is a republican, an avid and outspoken supporter of Donald Trump's presidency, and has reportedly said that he dreams of purchasing his own country (pricing it at around \$USD 100bn)<sup>3</sup>. As a newly minted citizen, foreign land ownership laws did not apply to him, and he swiftly purchased a 477-acre section on the shores of Lake Wānaka, where he is now planning to build a luxury lodge (and private climate bunker)<sup>4</sup>.

Like others, he bought his way in with promises of investment<sup>5</sup>. Disproportionately responsible for the cumulative unravelling of our planet, the elite knows the climate crisis is coming, and it is a problem they think they can afford to avoid. Responding to a political system that prizes vague monetary 'gains' over fairness and integrity, they are turning to Aotearoa.

Where, is it, that I am?

Maybe, it is as Amitav Ghosh argues, that we are in the era of the *Great Derangement*. The planet is becoming a stage for our collective denial, the climate crisis is already here<sup>6</sup>. Our political and socio-economic organisation is propelling us into a future that has been forfeited to a notional 'market', where increasing catastrophes will be profit-generators, mostly benefitting a pool of the select ultra-rich.

If realism is devoid of the climate crisis because we are unable to accept it as reality, consequently, we are unable to see it reflected in the depictions of realities that we consume. An infinite loop of surreality.

It is in *noticing* that awareness can shift. To think of the climate crisis is to become aware of a paralysing anxiety that is mostly dormant, always endured.

I feel like I am sitting inside a house that is encircled by a giant python—a slow crush.

But there is movement, still. I walked past three felled trees after the storm the other day. The sunlight that broke through filled a new space, and I was breathing in a new kind of warmth.

The obvious choice is whether, in the face of all of this, we allow ourselves to become stagnate. To sit still and dark as the depths of the pond, hidden under the noise of those who rise to the surface.

Emlou Lattimore is a writer/editor/dreamer based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. They completed their Bachelor's degree in media studies, film and literature from Te Herenga Waka/Victoria University of Wellington in 2015, and after some time away in London, they recently returned to complete a postgraduate diploma in art history in 2021. Their work is interested in feelings, the future, queerness, and the environments we inhabit, pulling at the undertows of the thoughts we carry around. Since returning to this soil they have begun to enjoy climbing up rocks, crafting silly ceramics and making dj mixes inspired by nature, sweaty rooms, and the joy of dancing.  
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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/09/donald-trump-peter-thiel-top-intelligence-advisory-post>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/10/environmentalists-argue-peter-thiels-luxury-nz-lodge-will-destroy-lake-landscape>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/15/why-silicon-valley-billionaires-are-prepping-for-the-apocalypse-in-new-zealand>

<sup>6</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. United Kingdom, University of Chicago Press, 2016.