

**Artspeak Postscript 66:
My Mineral
(For Derek, Deborah, Aleesa and Marina)**

**VANESSA KWAN
on THE ACCURSED SHARE**

If we think about heat as a process, starting from low and climbing steadily (say at the rate of your stove, when you turn it to high and watch the element begin to glow red), we could imagine a proximal relationship to the Earth's core as progressively scorching. One third of the way to maximum temperature, the human body would have turned already to ash. Halfway through, bronze melts. At peak temperature we transform; I, protolith, become you, mineral.

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Spinel is the Great Imposter of the world's gemstones. Approximating the deep tone of a ruby or the airy lightness of a sapphire, spinels have spent centuries assumed by nobility to be something they are not. The world's most famed imposter was the Black Prince's Ruby, a 170-carat monster (in my opinion it looks a bit tacky, but tastes do change) adorning the front of England's Crown Jewels.

Everyone knows it's a spinel, but still they call it "ruby."

Spinel has become a sought-after jewel in their own right. They come in a variety of colours: rose pink to cabaret red, lavender to little boy blue, bear brown to butch black. Black is the most rare of the varieties; it is, in ring settings and necklaces, a coveted void.

Rubbed between the pads of the fingers, finely crushed granules of spinel create an eerie stain, richer by far than graphite or charcoal. Deep space on your fingertips.

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Unfocussing the eyes while regarding a chunk of apophyllite can sometimes assist in astral projection. Blinking in this context is both an interruption— an involuntary assertion of the body when you're trying to get out of it—and a necessary middle ground: it is in the interstitial zones of wakefulness that out of body experiences (OBEs) occur.

Both Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla—warring inventors of modern electrical systems—had intimate knowledge of out of body projection. Tesla, of course, had the more spiritual nature, citing spontaneous prophetic visions of some of his greatest creations. Edison relied on a more pragmatic approach, manufacturing the experience by holding stones in his lap as he fell asleep. The sound of the falling rocks would keep him from descending entirely into sleep-state, and opened the door to flight.

Devotees in the new age community will define astral travel as a near-magical confluence of light-energy and vibrational transmissions, when in fact it can be a sum of parts: chemical induction, physical and psychological exhaustion, binaural brainwave manipulation, confusion of proprioception and so on. A spiritual component persists, of course, as OBEs are often cited as reassurance of transcendental peace after death.

The image refracts through the ocular jelly; a mineral object in a yearning, blinking eye.

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Gastroliths reside in the stomachs of crocodiles, ostriches, axolotl and prehistoric Sauropods, among many other creatures, to assist in digestion. Once eaten, it is a life-long commitment to ballast. Looking at fossil remains of dinosaurs, the profusion of rocks in the abdominal region boggles the mind. Smooth, clustered, not unlike spilled gumballs, gastroliths burst forth out of prehistoric ribcages. Fossilized gastroliths show unique wear patterns, often resembling worn animal teeth, and hair-line fractures where they came into contact with other, less eroded stones. Smooth specimens in particular may have been ingested several times, salvaged from the remains of one dinosaur to inhabit the guts of another.

As humans we have no real excuse for eating stones, except in the case of particular psychological conditions. Pica describes the compulsion to eat “non-nutritive” objects such as dirt, chalk, sand, paint, and sometimes shit. I understand something of the impulse: can’t we be more than self-sustaining? Who are we if not bodies that want to be more?

Swallow the stone, shit it out. Swallow the stone, shit it out. You in my throat, my stomach, my asshole.

* *

Have you ever thrown rocks into a still lake? Of course you have. Since I was small, I’ve always done that thing—carefully chosen rock, stiff arm swing—with a guilty feeling.

Who am I to banish you from shore?

VANESSA KWAN is a Vancouver-based artist and curator. Art projects include a permanent public artwork called *Geyser for Hillcrest Park* (with Erica Stocking); *Sad Sack*, collaborations on the subject of melancholy; and *This Creeping Root*, a moonlight garden. She is currently a curator with grunt gallery, and producer/curator with Other Sights for Artists' Projects.