

*The Ocean Forests: an elegy and lament*

As the gleam of growth  
stills in harsh, cold sunlight,  
and trees tap inner heat  
through fibre-optics,  
it starts to filter  
through here—an earthquake  
miles below the ocean's floor,  
plate slipping under plate,  
the massive release of energy  
and surge of water  
running the gradient  
of landfall: forcing entry,  
as deftly as fire, an elemental  
crossover on the edge  
of all that's living,  
or catching sight  
of where play or a conversation  
rolls in the swell  
uprooting the tree as body, as water  
is the body we are, and when water  
pulls back the soul escapes;  
what do we see  
in the whitewash,  
the island wreckage,  
the passing urge to push out  
from the point of our disruption?  
Calibrating prophecies  
of the living, some look for signs  
of punishment—there are none,  
and those who want such outcomes  
condemn us before we wake—  
animals moved to higher ground.

Truth annuls our own disasters:  
a local freeze or heatwave,  
the light of the ocean forest  
absorbed by warmer currents,  
ice encasing an entire depth  
at once pushed and drawn out,  
swept with a rush to reshape,  
supplant; this melding, curving,  
heaving re-alignment . . .  
the fulsome atmosphere  
imprinted with cloud,  
the seaweeds of new oceans,  
new shorelines, haphazard burials,  
an air pocket in a basement  
as light and air saturate  
wishful thinking, a choice  
we make in a medium  
of earth, water, air—no country  
declares ownership in the bloom  
of hot coral forests, ice forests  
and memories of mimosa  
from the driest parts.  
We reflect from where we are,  
where we were. The melting  
and piercing of the earth's crust—  
made viscous then fragile  
then unstable? We search  
for answers. We watch  
sunsets with iridological  
intensity, an emollition  
of the planet's static,  
a mirror stripped of its backing  
we stare up at the swimming,  
the molten, the chilled, the drowning.

Cold and calculating:  
rupture, megathrust . . .  
absolving the apocalypse?  
Language betrays disaster,  
and makes culture  
of the brutal fact: tsunami.  
Twenty years ago  
on the northern tip of Sumatra,  
we reflected on direction:  
the choices we might make.  
Locals and visitors  
brought together:  
the warm winter-jaded  
visitors linked over a meal  
with those knowing each foot of ground,  
grown fluid in the wobbling  
of the earth's rotation,  
shortening all our days,  
bringing palm trees and ice forests  
under the same cut-glass sky,  
salt etching rock and wall  
and metal strewn  
about an epicentre,  
boundaries of touch and impact,  
lament and bubbles caught  
on our face rising up to sight,  
across the transparent divide  
of blue fish and white birds,  
infusion of haze  
and light rebounding,  
the swirl of those close  
and lost already,  
known even in the shock,  
thoughts hovering where the body was,  
is not . . . and we who know not how

to deal with others lost;  
so this is all that will come out  
of iced or burning forests?  
How do we write: "happy new year"  
without the sharp  
cut of water,  
the burning wash?  
How celebrate  
seasons when winter  
has reached down  
into the warm,  
torn shores of an ocean  
so close, so distant...?