

Paul Knight – *Soft Furniture* – August 2021

Neon Parc, 1/53 Bourke Street, Melbourne 3000

The Comfort of Company by Rob Crosse

- Disinfect the knife before each new cut to help prevent diseases from spreading.
- A clean, sharp cut close to the stem of the unwanted branch will ensure it doesn't grow back.
- Distribute each cut evenly around the trunk to help maintain its natural umbrella like shape.

One of the seeds I stole from the Berlin Botanical Garden's arboretum two years ago has flourished, and now I'm staring out the window onto my sixth floor balcony as a storm threatens the flimsy trunk of my *Albizia julibrissin*, already flapping violently in the wind. I've been reading instructions online about how to care for my young potted tree. Apparently if you cut the main stem it will stall its rapid growth, but that seems cruel, particularly as it's recently been repotted. Once fully grown it will develop a sprawling canopy with bright feathery flowers that spring out above, it's dainty finger-like leaves. At two years old but already over five feet high, my tree is still too young to blossom, but will soon be too tall to bring indoors.

Peter Wohlleben in *The Hidden Life of Trees* describes how mother trees in densely packed forests restrict the passing of light through their canopy, reducing the amount available on the forest floor. With less light to photosynthesise, younger trees grow at a much slower rate, meaning their trunks become sturdier and more resistant to fungal attacks. By the time a mother tree dies and falls to the ground, creating pockets of light for the younger ones to reach into, they have a much better chance of surviving storms and infections. This process is called light deprivation.

On a scorching hot summer day in Berlin, I'm grateful for Paul's white bedsheets haphazardly stretched across each large window, filtering the light into his studio. "It's a shoes off space", he says, as I enter, treading carefully over remnants of woven material splayed out across the floor. My eyes are immediately drawn to a large hand-operated loom with patterns of woven cloth draped over its frame. It looks a bit like a piano made from a skeleton of wooden beams, held together between rows of thread. I'm reminded of my mum's attempts to teach me to play the piano, and the fact that I could never sit still long enough to learn.

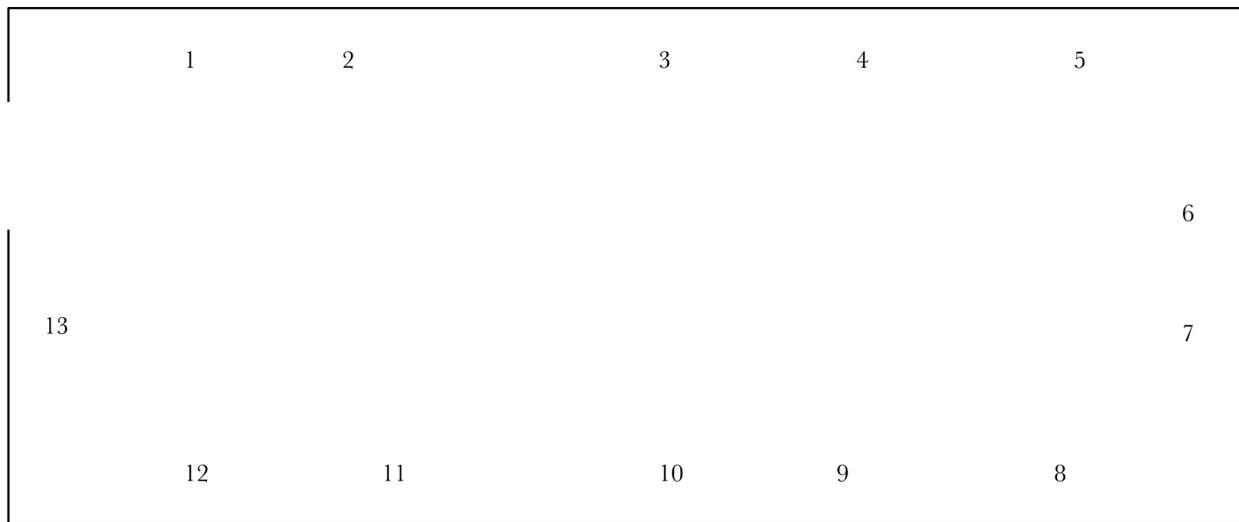
Paul picks up a piece of elongated wood, curved at each end with a gap in the middle. "This is called the shuttle", he says. Whilst clutching the shuttle in his right hand he motions left and right in front of an area of the loom called the castle, which houses the shafts, while he places his left hand on a wooden bar with hinges called the beater, which shifts backwards and forwards as it compresses the new thread against the already woven one. It's clearly a very laborious process that not only requires hand and arm movements but also feet for operating the peddles at the bottom, called treadles. If I didn't have the patience for the piano then I'm definitely not about to start weaving.

Spread across a wooden table in the centre of the room are methodically organised strips of fabric that appear ready for assembling. Hues of a cool blueish pink thread and a yellowish white called Ecu have been woven together in blocks of colour that when stitched together appear to mirror each other in their symmetrical forms. One colour acts as a border to contain the other, with lines either stitched or formed through a fold to create a division. I inspect a selection of completed pieces from the series *Analogue* [noun] hanging on the wall and notice slight deviations in the edges of the shapes, subtle allusions to the labour of care involved in producing each interwoven line.

Bedsheets and curtains predominate the selection of his images from the ongoing series "Chamber music". With their faces concealed, bodies either cling to each other or are imprinted through the traces of lines in the sheets. An obscured window offers no reprieve from the domestic setting, as though the light, a reminder of time's measure, is a threat to be blocked out. How long have these sheets been in this state? The smell of sweat and bodily fluids is usually a reminder for me that it's time to change mine. As sites that occupy much of our lives, beds can be both spaces of blissful intimacy or reminders of devastating loss, as in the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, whose billboard series *Untitled* (1991) consists of a black and white image depicting an unmade bed made in the same year the artist lost his lover, Ross Laycock, to AIDS.

Processes of care require constant negotiation. A co-existence based on an understanding of individual wants and needs. Interdependency suggests a symbiotic relationship whereby connections are acknowledged, whilst “dependency” evokes a sense of imbalance, a dependency of one on another. Within the logic of neoliberalism, both forms of dependence pose a threat to individualism, but what is lost when they are denigrated in this way. The worlds contained within Paul’s work are shaped by gestures that reflect these negotiations: the comfort of one person’s skin folding into the creases of another, a touch that feels all the more powerful for the knowledge that it won’t last.

The storm has calmed and thankfully my *Albizia julibrissin* has been left unscathed. I insert a six foot bamboo stick into the bottom of the earth adjacent to the main stem of the tree, and use string to secure it along the height of the stick. By the time winter arrives the tree will have outgrown the height of my living room ceiling, meaning it will stay outside with the other plants. In late autumn I gather the outdoor plants closer to the living room window to give them a little more protection—huddling them together in a group where I can see them, and wrapping them in a shroud of hessian cloth to help survive the harsh winter months. Whilst in his studio I asked Paul about his obsession with cloth and material and his answer was quite simple: “we all need it to survive”.



1.
Untitled (Chamber Music), 2009-2021
Type C print
31 x 31.5 cm (framed)

6.
Untitled (Chamber Music), 2009-2021
Type C print
31 x 31.5 cm (framed)

10.
Untitled (Chamber Music), 2009-2021
Type C print
31 x 31.5 cm (framed)

2.
Untitled (Chamber Music), 2009-2021
Type C print
31 x 31.5 cm (framed)

7.
Untitled (Chamber Music), 2009-2021
Type C print
31 x 31.5 cm (framed)

11.
Analogue [noun] #08, 2021
Handwoven fabric, sewn (cotton)
57 x 65.5 cm

3.
Analogue [noun] #07, 2021
Handwoven fabric, sewn (cotton)
47 x 47.5 cm

8.
Analogue [noun] #06, 2021
Handwoven fabric, sewn (cotton)
54 x 44 cm

12.
Analogue [noun] #12, 2021
Handwoven fabric, sewn (cotton)
43 x 70 cm

4.
Analogue [noun] #09, 2021
Handwoven fabric, sewn (cotton)
53 x 32.5 cm

9.
Untitled (Chamber Music), 2009-2021
Type C print
31 x 31.5 cm (framed)

13.
Untitled (Chamber Music), 2009-2021
Type C print
31 x 31.5 cm (framed)

5.
Analogue [noun] #13, 2021
Handwoven fabric, sewn (cotton)
57 x 64 cm