

EXCERPTS FROM THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF  
**UNDERWATER INVESTIGATIONS**



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**UNDERWATER INVESTIGATIONS**

by Rob Kovitz

**Treyf**

BOOKWORKS AND ONLINE PROJECTS

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Official U.S. Navy Photograph

## A DROWNING

Offshore, a fisherman is tapping on lake ice  
And calling to his son.

...

The fisherman, lifting his nets, whispers  
A question to each pickerel, each pike.

*W. D. Valgardson, A Drowning*



*Interlake Spectator*

*Rob Kovitz*

## INSTRUCTION MANUAL

There is a saying of the wise man: "When all things lay in the midst of silence then leapt there down into me from on high, from the royal throne, a secret word."...

But, Sir, where is the silence and where the place in which the word is spoken?

*Meister Eckhart, On Detachment*

Gazarra opened the book. The first page swam with crooked, twisted, backwards-leaning letters.

"Darkness was on the face of the deep," he began.  
"I know," she told him. "I've been there."

*David Homel, Get On Top*

We all live in the same world's sea.  
We cannot tell a story that leaves us outside, and when I say *we*, I include *you*. But in order to include you, I feel that I cannot spend these pages saying *I* to a second person. Therefore let us say *he*, and stand together looking at them.

*George Bowering, Burning Water*

The biggest secrets are the ones spread open before us.

*Don DeLillo, Underworld*

*Underwater Investigations*

## THE DROWNER

Gimli—A 22-year-old Winnipeg man drowned Sunday afternoon at Gimli Beach after apparently suffering a seizure while swimming, police said.

Officials estimated more than 7,000 people were at the beach during the incident.

Two doctors on the scene, along with beach safety officers, applied CPR on the shore after family and friends pulled him out of the water, said RCMP Const. Jamie Slukynsky.

██████████ was prone to seizures and disappeared under the water while swimming with a group of family and friends, he added.

He had been under water for several minutes before his companions found him and pulled him to shore, Slukynsky added.

An ambulance took ██████ to Gimli General Hospital where he was pronounced dead, he added.

██████'s is the 14th water-related death in the province so far this year.

Manitoba has Canada's highest per-capita rate of preventable water-related deaths. In 1995, 33 Manitobans drowned, seven in Lake Winnipeg alone.

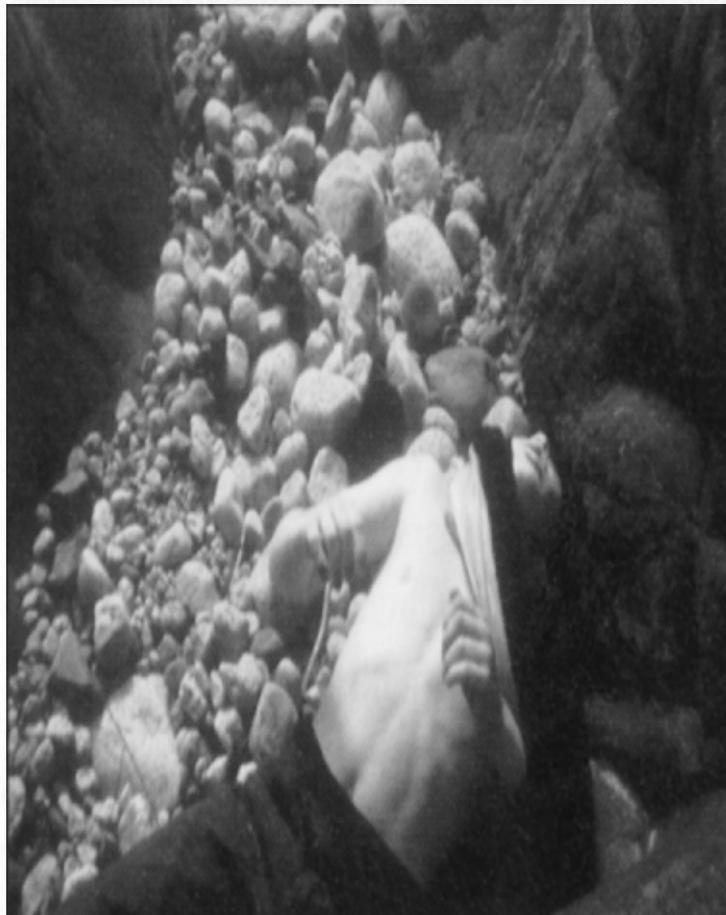
*Andrew Maxwell, Winnipeg Free Press*

“So,” he says, for want of anything better.

“I am an actress,” she says, raising her chin a little, and looks it.

“I’m a drowner.”

*Robert Drewe, The Drowner*



*Robert G. Teather, Encyclopedia of Underwater Investigations*

## TAKE A DEEP BREATH

All right, let's put our cards on the table. I assure you I'm quite conscious of my position. Shall I tell you what it feels like? A man's drowning, choking, sinking by inches, till only his eyes are just above water.

*Jean-Paul Sartre, No Exit*



*Robert G. Teather, Encyclopedia of Underwater Investigations*

*Rob Kovitz*

Unnoticed by his friends, who are now nearing the far shore, he slips quietly below the surface. Sinking slowly at first, he loses his ability to hold his breath and an ever-increasing carbon dioxide buildup forces his diaphragm to contract uncontrollably. A deep inspiration of water follows. With his lungs nearly empty, he has lost ten to fifteen pounds of buoyancy and he sinks faster. The water now in his lungs allows the carbon dioxide in his blood to leave quickly through the alveolar bed. His burning desire to breathe is now satisfied but the blood returning from his lungs to his heart has drastically changed its chemistry. His heart will not continue to function for very much longer.

*Robert G. Teather, Encyclopedia of Underwater Investigations*

Lord, Lord! methought what pain it was to drown:  
What dreadful noise of water in mine ears!  
What sights of ugly death within mine eyes!  
Methought I saw a thousand fearful wracks;  
A thousand men that fishes gnaw'd upon.

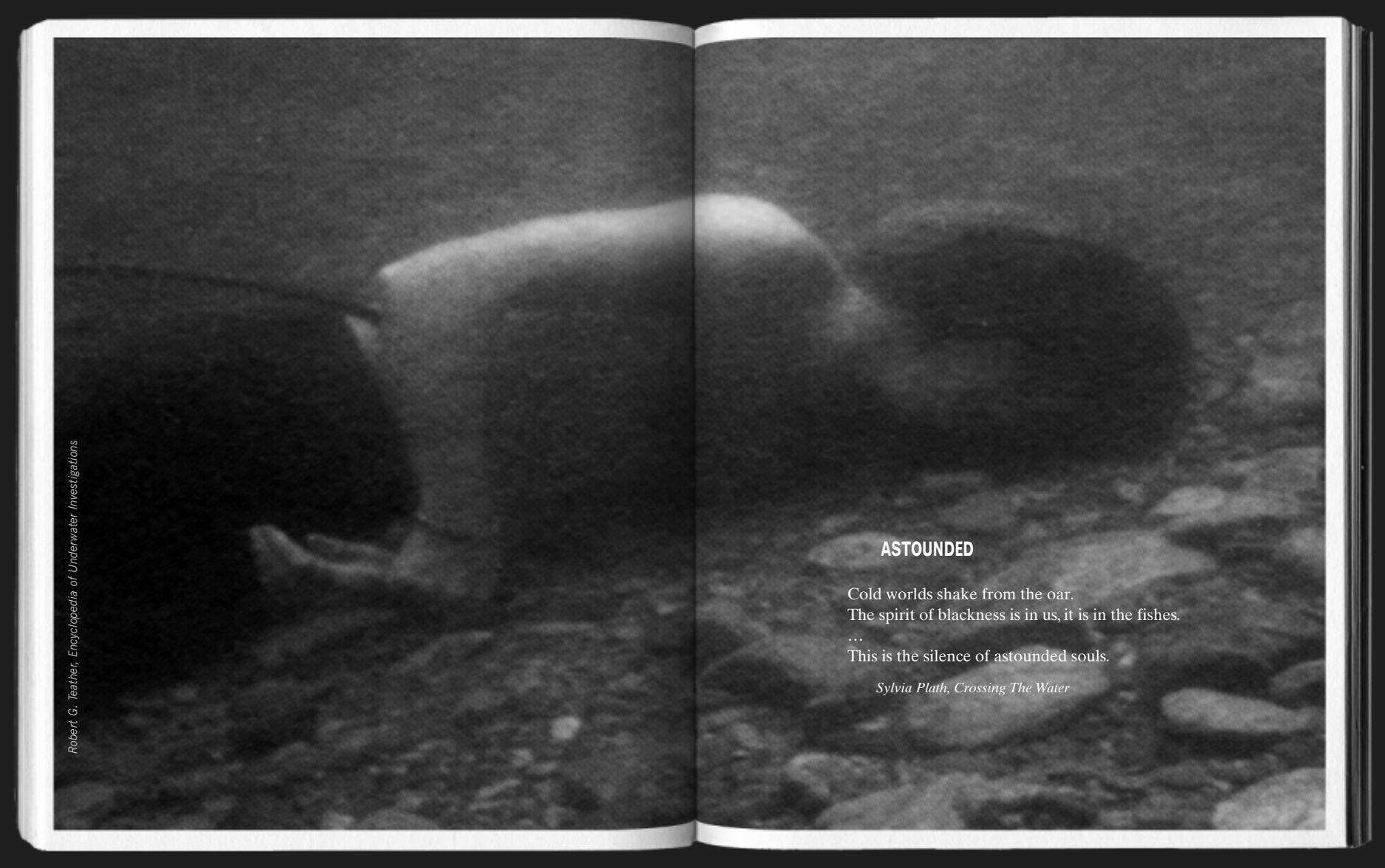
*William Shakespeare, Richard III*

To get a better idea try this: focus on these words, and whatever you do don't let your eyes wander past the perimeter of this page. Now imagine just beyond your peripheral vision, maybe behind you, maybe to the side of you, maybe even in front of you, but right where you can't see it, something is quietly closing in on you, so quiet in fact you can only hear it as silence. Find those pockets without sound. That's where it is. Right at this moment. But don't look. Keep your eyes here. Now take a deep breath. Go ahead take an even deeper one.

Don't look.  
I didn't.  
Of course I looked.

*Mark Z. Danielewski, House of Leaves*

*Underwater Investigations*



**ASTOUNDED**

Cold worlds shake from the oar.  
The spirit of blackness is in us, it is in the fishes.  
...  
This is the silence of astounded souls.

*Sylvia Plath, Crossing The Water*

## UNDERWATER CARPENTRY

Once I dropped acid three times a day for a month. It was the summer, my sixteenth. My family was taking our yearly vacation on Maui. I'd made this friend, Craig, a local surfer with great drug connections. Every morning we'd score a few blotter hits, hitch-hike to this remote beach, and spend the day zonked, hallucinating, babbling, and swimming around in the ocean. After several weeks, we started to lose it. We'd found this coral reef a short distance offshore. One day we robbed a hotel room, stole a truck, and transported the rooms's furnishings to the beach. We towed our loot, piece by piece, through the surf, underwater, and into this huge, cavelike nook in the reef, setting each chair, rug, et cetera, in place, then swimming furiously back for the surface. Our plan was to live in this cave, rent-free, far away from fascistic reality. It never crossed our minds that we wouldn't be able to breathe.

*Dennis Cooper, Guide*

or better to become un-  
astonished, your calmness showing  
the misshapen's your home:  
By a lake near Jasper a dozen scuba divers  
circulated among dripping wooden chairs  
set up in the sand.

"Underwater carpentry"  
a bystander explained—each spring  
they take mallets and pegs into the lake  
to see who can build the best chair.  
When I laughed "Strange!"  
she flushed and barked "Not strange!"  
as if I alone had never witnessed  
the commonest of rituals.

*Brian Bartlett, Underwater Carpentry*

*Rob Kovitz*



Hans Hass, *Men Beneath The Sea*, photo by Flip Schulke

And the sister ... went and cast herself into the river  
and was drowned; and when the [other] sister  
perceived this ... she also secretly drowned herself.

*Palladius, The Book of Paradise (420 A.D.)*

*Underwater Investigations*

## GESTURES

Beginning moments before the cessation of a viable heart-beat, the body becomes a clock. As each minute, hour, day, week, and month passes, the human body, in death, becomes a “court-ready” exhibit—a “book,” which if read carefully, will supply critical information answering questions which have, in the past, remained a mystery.

*Robert G. Teather, Encyclopedia of Underwater Investigations*



*National Geographic*

*Rob Kovitz*

Because beyond their practical function, all gestures have a meaning that exceeds the intention of those who make them; when people in bathing suits fling themselves into the water, it is joy itself that shows in the gesture, notwithstanding any sadness the divers may actually feel. When someone jumps into the water fully clothed, it is another thing entirely: the only person who jumps into the water fully clothed is a person trying to drown; and a person trying to drown does not dive headfirst; he lets himself fall: thus speaks the immortal language of gestures.

*Milan Kundera, Slowness*

What does the body of an average drowning victim weigh underwater? How “heavy” is it? These are questions which are often asked. Even the experienced investigator may be under the illusion that a submerged human body is extremely heavy. This misconception is likely nourished by the emotionally charged situation of having to swim to the surface with a body in tow, and is reinforced by the drag felt when a rigor-stiffened, non-streamlined body is moved.

*Robert G. Teather, Encyclopedia of Underwater Investigations*

A vision returned of the floating woman. Staring downwards into the depths. What did she know, what had she seen?

*Michael Köepf, The Fisherman's Son*

Like a drowning man who goes down clenching his hands, the way one drowns for failing to stretch out one's body as peacefully as in a bed, in the same way ... but I know.

*Georges Bataille, The Impossible*

*Underwater Investigations*

## VIATICUM

Yes, there is no good pretending, it is hard to leave everything. The horror-worn eyes linger abject on all they have beseeched so long, in a last prayer, the true prayer at last, the one that asks for nothing. And it is then a little breath of fulfillment revives the dead longings and a murmur is born in the silent world, reproaching you affectionately with having despaired too late. The last word in the way of *viaticum*. Let us try it another way. The pure plateau.

*Samuel Beckett, Malone Dies*

This is a photograph of me.  
It was taken some time ago.  
At first it seems to be  
a smeared  
print: blurred lines and grey flecks  
blended with the paper;  
then, as you scan  
it, you see in the left-hand corner  
a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree  
(balsam or spruce) emerging  
and, to the right, halfway up  
what ought to be a gentle  
slope, a small frame house.  
In the background there is a lake,  
and beyond that, some low hills.  
(The photograph was taken  
the day after I drowned.  
I am in the lake, in the center  
of the picture, just under the surface.  
It is difficult to say where  
precisely, or to say

*Rob Kovitz*

how large or small I am:  
the effect of water  
on light is a distortion  
but if you look long enough,  
eventually  
you will be able to see me.)

*Margaret Atwood  
This Is A Photograph of Me*



*Robert G. Teather, Encyclopedia of Underwater Investigations*

*Kamchatka, drowning man not rescued for fear of water-spirit in.*

*James Fraser, Index to Ovid's Fasti*

*Underwater Investigations*

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*treyf, adj. [Yiddish] – not kosher*

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