

The Arrow Maker

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Anna Gibbs
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Mira Mattar
Suzanne Mooney
Megan Plunkett
Scott Rogers
Isabel Waidner
Eley Williams
Barrett White
Bernadette Wolbring
Sarah Wood

The Arrow Maker is a semi-regular journal for new
writing including text and image work across genres
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It was growing late and the child was meant to be revising. They were scheduled to sit three exams the following day—THREE!—and before any trudge upstairs to bed could be justified there was a Biology article still to read ('Multiple Choice: Adaptations in Mammals of the Savannah'), a passage about The Impossibility of an All-Knowing, All-Powerful and All-Loving God, Question Mark that required annotation and an Eng Lang comprehension exercise that required the child's close-enough attention.

Competition for workspace on the kitchen table-top was always fraught and this evening the child had to wrestle worksheets from beneath the family's grim-faced, orange and sprawling cat. The child scanned the worksheet and its stiff little paragraph. It sat on the page with no punctuation at all. Presumably proved some kind of stupid point; the child was supposed to add commas and full-stops and semicolons and god-knows-what-else in the correct places so that the writing's meaning might be carved into easy-to-swallow rashers. The TV in the room next door was playing the news, something about boats overturning in the blue, blue sea, and the child was so tired of it all: all this homework. It was just so arbitrary. The child had learnt the word arbitrary on Friday and still getting used to practicing it in the world. They really were so tired. The orange cat tucked its head under the child's hand and, seeing an opportunity, it rolled across the papers and claimed a sort of victory.

The child felt their eyelids droop a little and they pulled the heel of their hand across their eyes in an attempt to juice something like wakefulness from their brain. The text

jumped a little on the page as they blinked, the cat snoozed on against the prose, the TV continued its report with a soft voice and unfathomable statistics. The child closed their eyes just for a minute. Propping their chin up on their elbows, just for a minute. Just for a minute. And it is tedious to recount someone's grammarless and poorly punctuated dreams however baroque or complex they may seem—even though, apparently, dreams only actually occur in a split-second—but! there was a lesson to be learned here!, in this one dream!, because! this sleeping child with their sleeping face mere sleeping inches from a passage about metaphors and similes dipped into a metaphor or a simile that began with a conjunction all about enduring narratives which always prefer carpenters to zookeepers, and by the time that the child—who was now a zookeeper in their dream and finding that they had always been a zookeeper with zookeeper's boots and zookeeper's hands—by the time that eyelid met eyelid and this new-old zookeeper tried to parse such terms as 'pitching timber' and 'gopher wood' that were passed around the nearby village it was already too late for the zookeeper and their favourite animal, a creature all absurdity and grace that—would you believe it?—only spends between ten minutes and two hours asleep per day, so that by the end of the first week of rain in this mere-seconds dream the zookeeper's giraffe was not screaming at the water falling from the sky like the other animals in their enclosures but instead stood blinking half-dreams patiently in the rain and blinking at the zookeeper as they pulled on their waxed hat and their galoshes and began loosing their birds—all of which they had named, each and every one—from the cages, and loosing too the lions—which

they had named, each one, arbitrarily—and also loosing the leopards, and the tiny gryphon, and the bear while the noise of the village's tin rooves-spelt-with-a-v or roofs-spelt-with-an-f grew in full percussion on account of the hail, hail that is not often mentioned in the books that describe the flood—capital-F—and its forty days and forty nights, since 'rain' is always the assumption, straightforward, straight-forward, but there was hail too as well as rain and sleet and even silent snow that fell snow on snow in the yard of the zoo as quietly as a giraffe that is sick to its fourth stomach, its second poor simile, its nineteenth hour of rest and its fifth questionable etymology, and—staring at the endless rain—the giraffe's tall thoughts were interrupted when the zookeeper leaned up to ask, shouting straightforwardly over the sound of water hitting stone and water hitting water, Who will believe me that you ever existed if none of us are left? and then the zookeeper was overcome with sentiment and they fetched a tall ladder and the giraffe waited patiently as the zookeeper climbed to its highest rung, reached out, and twiddled the ossicones on the giraffe's head, ossicones, the water had ruined every book in the house apart from the dictionary and the zookeeper had been looking-up and memorising giraffe-words to pass the time under the weather, ossicones!, the little nubs on the top of a giraffe's head, so, here, at the top of their ladder the zookeeper extended a hand and twiddled the ossicones on the top of the giraffe's head and make-believed that by doing so they could radio for help because perhaps the zookeeper was delirious, let's give them that, and they continued seething over the sound of the hail, and then soothing, and then adding, We share the same number of vertebrae, did you know that, even with

your neck so long, I read it in the funny pages and then the zookeeper made sure that at least the sodden giraffe could have its lunch and together they tongued blossoms through acacia spininess, a treat, and every day in their split-second dream even as the waters kept rising the zookeeper took the time to brush giraffe-dust from the giraffe's coat with the longest broom in the village; last year they had constructed a shed for the express purpose of storing long brooms and the giraffe had watched them build it—happier times—but today, on the thirty-first day if we're counting, with the rain that had fallen at first in hyphens or in snow-on-snow asterisks, then falling in en-dashes, now in em-dashes, and the zookeeper watched all this through long lashes as that shed filled with brooms washed away and they saw what can happen when one overlooks definitions and ampersands and deleaturs and the zookeeper shouted apologies to the giraffe without quite understanding why, and when they were told that the waters would not stop the zookeeper began killing the animals that would not leave the yard despite being freed, killing them concertedly to spare them from drowning, and of course the zookeeper wept and swore and wept again full sore for the water of all that weeping too and as the new-tides rose the children in the villages did the same to their orange cats and yellow dogs, and a thrush did the same to some snails on a roof-top, and clouds in their bruxism eyed the mountains and set about them in a similar way, and the giraffe ruminated on the fact that even things like the incidental mice in a zoo's yard with its possessive apostrophes must scream and scream and scream at the last, but, the giraffe, in its final moments when the rain grew sharp and italic and perhaps it felt that it could not stay silent without appearing

unappreciative as all flesh perished that moved upon the earth, both fowl and cattle and beast and every swarming thing that swarmeth upon the earth, as the dream-zookeeper lost the hand of their dream-wife beneath the water and while the zookeeper was coughing in the dream-water with one arm looped around the parish weathervane and saying goodbye to their giraffe, with a ship, off there, just glimpsable in the distance, a ship filled with clipboards and specific animals that do not really have hands so they could not wave back to the zookeeper even in misunderstanding—but for the record it looked a little like that was the case—just as this ship bobbed by, filled with pairs of animals that were somehow believed to be more worth saving, as it bobbed past and beyond the horizon and the men who decided that those animals were the ones who would be allowed to get away while others should be left behind turned their backs so to face their horizon, the zookeeper's shoulders slipped a last crucial inch and it was then that the zookeeper's favourite charge chose its moment and the tall tall tall giraffe turned its funny funny funny head against the zookeeper's cheeks and breathed across their face to keep them warm and

the child woke and forgot the dream just as the background news report ended, with much more work, grammar and paperwork still to be completed.



1
(image 01)

This ad was on a billboard by the flat where I live. I only saw it for one day, and I'm glad I took the photos when I did. I was late for work, but I stopped to get some quick snaps. It's for a car that the company claims will allow you to Capture Life. The car is actually called Captur – why the “e” is left off the end is unclear. When you pronounce the name out loud it becomes confusing as to whether you are saying “captor” or “capture”.

The image (or more specifically the photograph) reproduced in the ad attracted me immediately. The woman's hand fully exits the picture plane. You are made to feel like she's reaching out to you, and with effective cropping it's quite powerfully intimate – as POV is supposed to be. She promises companionship. But, a possibility of group sex lingers at the margin of perceptibility. The coincidence between the Sirens in the Odyssey and this image is too certain to be accidental. An unusual heuristic is produced: friendship, seduction and sexual success are conflated simultaneously with luring prey, being lured as prey, and energy efficient automobiles.





2
(images 02 – 04)

The video these stills are captured from comes up far too commonly on my feed to be random. The advertising algorithm on the website that hosts the video is obviously analyzing my posted content and responding as accurately as it can. I've no interest in this supposed "Banksy of the photographic world" as he claims to be called. In fact I had never heard of him before these ads. I post pictures of birds quite commonly, so the subtext is perhaps that the systems analyzing my data are using image comparisons to personalize my advertising experience.

The video produces a strange mise-en-abyme effect. It represents the action of luring, empty enticement, while it exists in my perception by doing the exact same thing to me. It is selected for me, and in a way I selected it before I knew of it. The video has a kind of detestable voyeurism about it. The birds are being implicated in this rather mocking staged scenario that they can't be fully aware of. That scrappy meal worm is such a minor gift in return for the control and slowing of their movement – their enclosure in Villager Jim's business. The footage reminds me of Bob Cratchet dividing up a single pea for Tiny Tim to eat in *A Christmas Carol*. This is animal-being reduced to capital in super slo-mo.

Consequently, I'm happy to take Villager Jim's content for my own use, though I'm not sure the gesture is exactly emancipatory for the video's subjects.

15

3
(images 05 and 06)

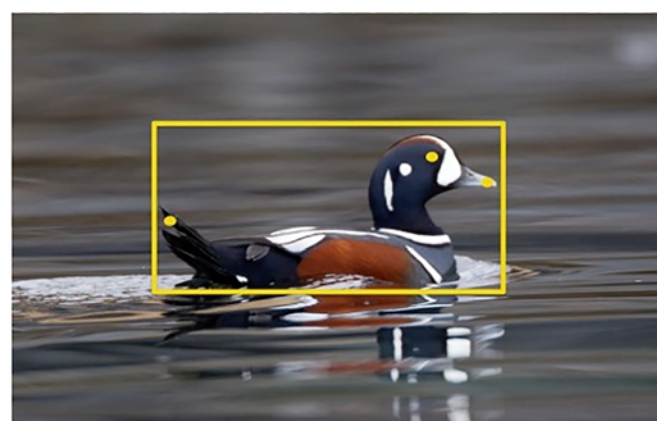
The Cornell Lab of Ornithology developed this app called *Merlin*. It allows users to input images of birds into the interface, and then, using a database of existent bird images that have been mapped with measurements, colour data, and various patterns for comparison, the program can produce definite or probable identifications of bird species. In this respect the identification procedures of birdwatching have now become highly automated. Individual responsibility for identification has been converted to a series of data transfers. Fieldwork consists in taking a usable photograph. The birdwatching process has been further mediated through the production of images understandable by *Merlin*.

Of course the actual pleasure of birding has not been destroyed I'm certain. But, the cognitive processes of identification have changed. Attention has been outsourced and birding has been accelerated. In this sense the progression from optical enhancement technologies to total automation is becoming more complete. What once was a kind of non-violent hunting is formalizing toward census taking. Data collection short-circuits the chase.

14



**What is this bird? Merlin says
Blackburnian Warbler!**



Mark the bill, eye, and tail, highlight the bird, and let Merlin work magic!

We listen to dream. The dream is a picture of the world.
The world is held in the voice.

This is the law we live by. We focus on the voice. We hear
the breath of the voice. We hear the life of the voice. We
stay with the voice.

Outside and below , two flights down, the streets of Europe
are made of the sounds of horses, the people and carts. In
the distance is the ancient sound of bells and clock chimes.
In the distance is the future sound of machines. The outside
sound is movement. A horse. A tram. A train. A whistle. The
seduction of the air. But we hardly notice. We hardly even
notice when the window is broken by the malcontent. We
focus on the voice.

We listen through the first war. We listen in the voice for
why the war is raging. We hear the greedy need to kill. For
too long the Kaiser, the Tsar, the kings, the queens, the
generals, the lords, the factory owners, the fathers have held
onto the right to kill. Now the prohibition is lifted. The
voice is greedy. The voice is bold. The voice is ancient. The
voice is Biblical. The voice is mythical. The voice is afraid.
We hear this in the voice.

The voice stays with us. The dreams often give us nightmares,
We hear something in the voice. The warning whistle of the
tram. We change cities.

The voice speaks in a new language. Outside the window
and below are sounds we don't yet assume we know. What
is the sound of a hedge, a gate, a pavement? Here we listen

to dreams of abandonment. The voice is an orphaned child. The voice is thin in the air. The voice is absorbed in fire. The voice is molten cities. The voice shouts for a mother reaching to rescue it from a room filling with darkness. Careless mothers, absent mothers, spite-filled mothers, hateful mothers crowd the space where this other mother, another mother used to live. Mother is a blank. The voice mutters in the corner of the room. The voice is often silent. When it raises its head the voice demands that we hear something on the scale of cinema, of soundtrack: the terrible loss that is the mother.

Outside refugees crowd the street below the window. The hedge, the gate, the pavement are obscured. There are muttering queues at the front door. We listen to the voices as one voice. It speaks of a shattering, a Kandinsky painting torn, a sentence interrupted, the malcontent's rock that broke the window pane. The voice speaks of a mirror and of the fear of reflection. The voice is frightened of its own utterance.

Shock is inside then shock is outside. The voice is continuous. Rage is a parcel that is passed. We strain to hear beyond the voice, to hear the hedge, the gate, the pavement but the outside sound is movement. The soprano of a jet. The seduction of the air. We leap together. High above the land of safety we hear the fairy tale voice speaking only of what will be, a promise, a terror. High above a brand new high-rise city we sit back and breathe out and listen to the voice. Here the voice speaks surely. Here it speaks a language rehearsed by film stars. It

speaks against a backdrop made by noise machines. The machines block out the million other voices, the voices of the people clinging to the building a hundred floors below.

Inside the room though, this is the law we live by. We focus on the voice. We hear the breath of the voice. We hear the life of the voice. We stay with the voice. The voice is continuous. The voice is talking about how the voice can exist in the world. It talks about the need for information. How, the voice asks suddenly, surprising us with its directness, how should it behave? This is the end of freedom.

When we reach the room, before we open the door, there is a sound so terrible that we do not want to enter. The sound is unbelievable. The sound is made of sound in the same way you might make blackness from mixing all the colours in a paint box. We exchange glances. We shuffle our feet. We cannot reach to open the door.

We are shouted at. We are made to stand behind a window. We are asked to observe from behind the window through which we cannot be seen. We, however, can hear. The light switches on. A man is sitting in the room. The noise stops and the man caves in as though this noise was all that was holding him up. Two men step forward from our group. The work here, they say, is grounded in solid professional practice. They go into the room with the man, behind the window. They ask the man his name. We wait and listen. It is our practice. We cannot hear the voice of the man. Instead there is a terrible sound like gravel being crushed

under boots. Everything here is like something else. It is hard to know where to focus. We listen again for the voice.

Men: Name?

Man: Gravel sound.

The men leave the room. The light goes out. The paintbox blackness fills the room. The noise begins again. We leave the room behind the screen. We are told we must stay here for many more months and wait for the voice to speak.

Outside, in the air, we sit in the sun. It is an unbelievable sun after the room. We think we can hear the voice on the wind. We concentrate. We tune in. We begin to hear the voice all round us. The voice asks for the world to be emptied of air so no sound may be heard. It is quite assertive. We listen again. It asks for the softness of love. It hates the softness of love. It asks for the harshness of stone. It becomes the sound of gravel crushed under a boot. We sit and we wait. We are ancient.

A snake slithers an S between us. It sits in front of us and addresses us. It seems to look into each of our eyes in turn. The snake blinks twice. We're startled. The blinking says a word. We are confused. The snake blinks the word again, and then a third time. This time we hear it. The snake blinks listen. We are euphoric. The snake knows who we are. We mutter and shuffle. We punch the air. We even slap each other on the back. We are returned.

We sit in a circle round the snake and grow serious. Round us, encircling us in turn, are the ghosts of voice. Flight. Mother. War. Father. Self. Everyone is listening. This snake is a chance. It feels like maybe the snake is our last chance.

We look at the snake. The snake looks back at us. We listen with all our senses. This time we know we will formulate our intervention.

i.

can you freeze me
my chakra
the bees are close
to my ankles
my ankles
to yr
neck

ii.

cows eat clovers
you piss
take a break from driving
leaning over the waist-
high stone wall
and the sun in
yr eyes
into grapes
yr big ass
topples

iii.

my family is a bowl
of earth on 10th
street
and it's cold
and the light
in the bathroom
will not shut
off

It might have been the slogan on my T-shirt singling me out as a punch bag. But mostly my entrance into the world of amateur boxing was the effect of a failed poetics. I like milking semantics for narrative content. If a protagonist in my fiction were called Ivan Lendl, she might be a world no. 1 professional tennis player, a Czech U.S. immigrant, or, as a coach, one of those round-bottom dolls that never stay down. Coyote Lendl, Ivan's spouse, might be an Ivan-E.-Coyotesque Canadian writer with a penchant for power tennis. If the Lendls had a Collie called Lezzie, Lezzie might have a special friend (lesbian lover). Lezzie might enter into poly-relations with several bitches at any one time. I also like milking extra-semantic affinities for narrative content. Coyote Lendl might display Yentl-like characteristics or symptoms on the grounds of the multiple half-rhymes connecting her with Yentl's cross-dressing protagonist, Yentl Mendel. But once, in one of my fictions, a character called Rocky Bobàk was not a boxer. Half-rhyming with Rocky Balboa, protagonist of the Rocky series, Rocky Bobàk was no Italian Stallion. No French Hengst. No Belarus Pegasus. For this reason Rocky Bobàk haunted me for years, to the extent that I myself took up boxing. I put on my tracksuit bottoms and adidas GRAND SLAM Ivan Lendl tennis shoes. I put on special boxing gloves (gold), a boxing head guard (also gold), and I travelled to West H*m Boys Amateur Boxing Club in Pla+stow on the busses. I expected my Yentl-like spectacles might suffer during training. I expected my fantastically limp wrist might sprain. But whether it was my over-the-top attire, my out-of-control wrist, or the fact that somewhere, somehow, I was female, I did not make it as far as the boxing rink before knockout. If a fighter loses

consciousness ('goes limp') as a result of legal strikes it is declared a KO. A KO is a winning criterion. Above and beyond my wrist, I went limp. I am unclear as to whether the strikes that led to my losing consciousness ('going limp') were legal or not since they occurred in the changing room. But I have come to understand why, in contravention to my poetics, Rocky Bobàk was not a boxer. Once I came to, I gathered my boxing gloves (gold) and matching head guard, and went home (acceding, perhaps, to former home secretary Theresa May's controversial 'Go Home' request). But home was Brexit UK, inwards-looking Ingerland, Poundland. Within the year, I'd established the West H*m Girls-of-all-Ages and the *West H*m Fags-of-all-Genders Amateur Boxing Clubs* in Pla+stow, East London. Some *West H*m* Boys switched alliances within days (lest I vilify a working class sports centre and its athletes wholesale). In terms of my writing, I preferred to invent different characters like Navratilov Crisp (a serve-and-volleying Naked Civil Servant, 1968), but even they wanted to join the club, wear the T-shirt. I insisted they change their names, but they said no thank you.



A pardon extended by the government to a group or class of persons, usually for a political offense; the act of a sovereign power officially forgiving certain classes of persons who are subject to trial but have not yet been convicted.

B

As I haven't been asked to write anything, I'm going to open with a question. When we look up 'how to introduce a cat to living with a dog', what is it we are actually doing? Trying to avoid a violent confrontation between the two animals? Hoping to see examples of ways to approach the meeting in order that neither of the animals gets distressed or suffers long term trauma? It could be that we're trying to understand the animals more deeply and see if such a combination of animals and this kind of situation are recommended, or even possible?

Whatever the motivations are for such research, what we are actually doing, is being comforted by text. If the thing we fear and don't understand is written down, then it can be studied. It is an answer. A fear with an answer, logical or otherwise, cannot be so fearsome. We write about what has happened, could happen, and is happening to make us feel like we have a plan for the future, that when the time comes, we know what we must do.

In truth, one cannot pin down how x feels about y and vice versa and know why it is they feel that way, how they will act, what they will do, what they are capable of, even if they tell you everything.

One thing is certain – and we know this without any report

drawn up from this survey: the hatred of men is epidemic and the centres for the treatment of misandry are full. And I don't know if asking women to write what they think about men in some confidential survey makes me feel safer. I feel like I can hear a million marks being made on a million pages, and it feels like laughter filling the void we're being forced to guard.

I honestly think that this amnesty on private fantasies, thoughts and fears has made the situation worse. I don't know. It's possibly just brought everything out into the open. The endless arguments in parliament, the heated panel discussions, the polarised newspaper articles, the sour conversations down the pub, attacks in the street and in public places on the rise. I go to bed but I don't sleep. But I feel compelled to write.

A

Do you think having an amnesty is a good idea?

Amnesty comes from the same stem as amnesia, which strikes me as odd in this case as once all this is out it's not like it's going to be forgotten? Like we'll receive a notice of receipt and a thank you and then we'll forget about the inconvenience and the fact that most men – but not all men – are unworthy of being called human.

When I got to the office, I decided to start filling out this form. You've given us a lot of pages. I started thinking about the two on the train. I couldn't get them out of my head.

I stared them both down on the tube, that homogenous landscape they formed, they all dress the same.

I stared unsmiling at two men sitting next to each other at one end of the carriage. There are boys, young men, men, old men. One was very young, not boyish, but certainly below twenty and was wearing knee length shorts and a short sleeved top, both in matching silk or chiffon, pure cream. His hair was also dyed darker than suited his complexion. He wore leather slip-on shoes, which encased his feet like rounded slippers. He looked uncomfortable, perhaps regretting having so much flesh on show, and he must have been cold, the hairs on the skin on show were fuzzing the line of his arms and his legs.

Who first discovered that seeing a peak of a man's stomach evoked a warm feeling in women? That the more of the stomach he felt a woman see, the more he wanted to give it away? Most would keep it completely covered, others were more daring using mesh or lace. When did that accidental thrill change to expected, asked for, demanded, sought out, thought out, manipulated, used for a certain power against us?

The older boy was probably sixty and completely pointless, stylish in a heavy black sack that went just below the knee, thin white stockings, white slippers to try and promote the elegant line of his bag-of-bones feet. A black shawl of the same heavy black felt was pressed to his chest with his gloved hand. The other glove, red as arteries, poked out of his pocket. His shiny bald head made him look vulnerable. He was wearing powder on his face and a little eyeliner. He was probably the director of a company, shunted in to fill a largely silent role, and would probably get flustered

and strop­py in the morn­ings and even­ings. I stared at the young boy and imag­ined touch­ing the wound of his breastless chest, the humiliat­ing growth packed into super soft under­wear. I thought about summertime when women would get on the tube shirtless, a man would grit his teeth and remove his own shirt in defiance, but would always be shouted out the carriage, or things could get nasty if women dared to touch him, laugh­ing soundlessly.

They basically ruined my day because I couldn't stop think­ing about how utterly inade­quate they both are to me. I went over to them, hung my bag off the shoulder of the young one and put my wide-brimmed hat on his head, and lay my briefcase on the lap of the old limp thing, popped it open, took out my newspaper and started read­ing it, silently defying either of them to look at me.

B

I've been work­ing two full-time jobs to get by since I had to leave teach­ing. During the day I work in a café, in the evenings I renovate old houses. From seven am until three pm I froth milk, toast sandwiches, scrub toilets, wipe tables, then I walk across town to the, I suppose you'd call it a mansion. Get there for four and leave around midnight. Walking is the only time I have to think, but I choose not to, I pay attention to walking not too fast, not too slow. Sometimes, if I feel anxious, I pay the twenty-five pounds to use the smooth chrome super-shuttle that takes me from the building job straight to my door in under a minute. I can barely afford it, even once a month. I often think of those men that can't ever afford it.

Every day for the last six months I've made an extra hot latte for a woman who never looks me in the eye and is careful to always touch my hand for too long when I hand her the cup. It's the same woman whose house I've been renovat­ing and reinforcing with concrete and bullet-proof glass for the last three months, and she's never acknowledged this. Maybe she hasn't noticed. I noticed the pale green amnesty forms in her bag last week, already partially filled out, and the few words I saw, and the ruthless heavy crossing out, made me feel sick.

A

Do you think there is a fundamental problem with men?

Men don't get to bleed pith every month, they are just shrivelled and aging permanently. Shame and vulnerability and responsibility for when a woman allowed them to join where, as The Bible says, the baby would decide where it wanted to grow and for the first pregnancy the baby chose the woman, and it has never gone any other way. The primal denial of the receptacle. To father something dictated repulsion, an escape, a near miss. To mother something was to be the saviour, to be the everything. A child should only be allowed to see their father with female supervision, just in case they're jealous of the mother's status as the chosen one, or in case they influence the child too much. In my opinion.

B

When my partner and I were assigned a son in the adoption lottery after nine years of waiting to reach the minimum

fathering age of 40 someone left a card of condolence in my rucksack and a camouflage all-in-one that said 'I'm a little trooper' with a picture of a soldier's helmet on it.

A

Do you think men are weak?

When I give my talks at dating conferences I like telling the story: 'my forty year old virgin thinks of my kiss'. It had taken so long to get enough interest out of myself for this boy in his forties, so coy and silent, he also took convincing in tiny steps, and finally I took off his clothes, realised that I had not changed the way I regarded him or any object, he received the same lack of real attention as the door I had opened, the floor I had trodden, the lightbulb at the moment of combustion. I didn't think of his self-consciousness and started undressing once he was wholly naked, slightly curled on the bed looking up at me while I talked about how tired I was after a long day, all without any real thought. How I gripped his pinned back arms and stared. I have this trick where boys think I've kissed them. The follow up messages I would never reply to would peg a story up on the kiss as the remarkable proof of some hopeful impression, when I in fact never kiss. They just think I must have, after all the things I do to them. Everyone laughs at this point.

B

Even though I'd been working on her house and giving her coffees every day, every evening, I feel like I'm invisible to her, though she absolutely must know I exist as a unified entity. She passed me in the street once, taking me by surprise, and

without stopping moving, asked if he had seen her email, half-heard an answer that I think she'd mistaken me for someone else, said pardon, acknowledged the pronunciation of the first letter with a lolling double nod and set off on the other foot, not once looking at me but gripping my upper arm roughly for not even a full moment. I might not have had a face.

She didn't speak to the new project manager for a week because he had addressed her using her first name the first day she was on site. It was obvious that she was older than him, and in the hierarchy pyramid in the staff office (nine steps high) she was one level below her, one plus one equals title and surname.

She enters a conversation as if she had started it and everyone else was interrupting her. It didn't even really matter what the conversation was, say thank you twice as loud, pour out sarcasm and unfunny jokes constantly. No one would expect her to react in any way other than with a single word or a long monologue-like point without talking breath.

A

Can men be in positions of authority?

Men always look young, no matter how old they are, it's hard to take them seriously. Or else they look ancient, sexless, like a sack of waste skin.

B

Holding on to the right to say nothing, believe nothing without fear of being mocked. The running joke being that women are secretly stupid and that though men had the

worst menial jobs and the lowest pay, they had something on the women because they knew that they were secretly stupid.

A

Have you ever harassed a man in the street?

I suppose you mean, have I ever tried to hook up with a man in the street? Sure, this happened this morning:

‘Hey, where are you going?’

‘Sorry, I don’t know you’

‘I know you don’t, where are you going?’

‘I’m not telling you’

‘Why not?’

‘Bye’ and he tried to walk faster, hopefully upset, the way his bent shoulders protected the back of his neck. I think I shouted ‘Pathetic dick!’ at him because he was rude.

B

Only wealthy men can afford to act like women, they can do theatrically sighs, ask endless questions, their parents having allowed them to forget the general status of men in the world, making fools of themselves, what a make believe world they live in, leaving all other men to laugh furiously and hysterically in the wake of their stiff, punctuated walks. Some men are louder, laugh longer and louder, agree louder and with repetition. Unnecessary superfluously compensating for the conversations not in their abilities to manage. Introduce, hold up. Even if they started they would probably give up half way through and let a women with no better point than theirs take over. What’s the point. Oh fuck, what am I saying.

The whole world exists so that women can receive leisure and comfort and have all their ideas put through, chosen only because there’s no other option, creating more pleasure-receivers and more pleasure givers, and if that were to change no decisions would ever be made, no one would know who was giving and who was receiving, nothing could be agreed upon, every sexual session would end in the melancholy of the unachievable and resentment over sharing. Winner-loser, giver-taker, upper-lower. To have been born a woman, though, would have been a miserable fate.

A

Can you control yourself around men?

Walked to the back cusp of a boy’s personal space as we walked down the stairs into the underground and barked ‘move’ so loud and so forcefully I only realised what the noise was a beat after I’d done it. I walked in a curve to a young man waiting against the station wall and said something to him turning my back on him straight after and standing barely an inch from his folded face.

B

There are low stools in all shops because it is a gaze of power to look up at someone, as if from hell, or as if from the body rather than from some non-existent or never witnessed being from above in stores and coffee shops. I always have to serve from a raised step so the customer would have to force themselves to strain to look upon the horror of me, to give them the power, to form a contract in performance

that there would be no rudeness, purely a transaction. Many men far chirpier than me enjoy working in such places, be brazen, flirtatious, a boldness that would soon fade once they were back out in the street after their shift had ended, surrounded by women about their shoulders, looking up at heart height, making him feel conscious of their flat chest and twitching penis.

When I end my shift I feel exposed, high and easy to topple. When I'm looked at I feel like hot meat. I've recently transitioned to wearing a shroud, even though I feel hot and like the look of my body in my bedroom mirror.

Most women wear tights and leotards, or one-pieces and show everything, with gloves and short, long or no hair, wire headdresses and shoulder extenders that would stick in your exposed skin like getting prodded by the prongs of an umbrella. They're well-exercised, show off their vocal coaching, endless resources, everything sized for them, smaller than a man could bear as their cumbersome, overlarge bodies peer over the edges of the toilet seat, over the end of the bed, squeezed in the bath, in the lift. Looking down and away like young children.

After a certain time, the body begins to die. The perfect moment runs for a second, and then suddenly clothes appear like the cover to protect the shame of a corpse. Clothes get newer, but the body gets older and older, clothes become ugly, like a joke or a disguise. I am disguised as youth and jealous of the truly young.

A

Have you ever attacked a man?

Once the house is ready everything will be normal again. I like walking from town out to the gated community with the long, curving driveway, where the house is half hidden behind a labyrinth of hedges. I was about twenty minutes away, strolling along, whistling, when I saw a hot man walking in the middle of the street with his head down. I clapped my hands together, rubbed them for luck, walked up to him and put my hands on both his shoulders.

'Hey, hey, it's OK, how about you come home with me?'

He opened his sleepy blue eyes wide and stepped back and said, I couldn't believe it:

'What the fuck did you say to me?'

I was gobsmacked to be honest.

'Look, cock, how much, stop messing me about otherwise you'll lose your chance,' I could see people looking, I smiled and opened my arms out wide.

'Who do you think you are? I'm on my way to work and you think you can talk to me like that? It's pathetic!' he shouted, almost laughing as he shoved me in the chest.

I started slapping him on his arms and legs, punched him in the face, grunted at him, leant over and stared at his crotch grunting and snuffling, and kept walking.

B

She had stormed in without saying a word. She was obviously in a bad mood. I was painting a low part of the coving.

She walked in, spat on the concrete floor and threw her coat over a stack of boxes and stood in the corner of the room facing out, shouting her questions and replies from her vantage point. She pulled up her shirt to scratch her chest.

She started lifting and chucking half-bags of unmixed cement into another corner, and then stopped and looked at me.

‘This is more your job really, isn’t it hulk?’

I looked down and across from the stepladder and paused for a second.

‘Well, I’m painting right now Sir, maybe I could do it tomorrow...’

‘I can’t hear what you’re saying, mutt, speak up’

The other men looked at me.

I opened my mouth, closed it, lay the brush across the rim of the pot, and descended the three steps very carefully.

She approached me quickly, she was really close all of a sudden. I half turned my face towards her while wiping my hands and felt her tangy spit land warm then cold on my eyelid, cheek and neck.

A

Do you think girls and boys should mix?

I’ve told the girls to stop hanging out with boys so much, it will dumb them down, weaken their future networks, and make them less appealing. They got back from a band practice – two boys with them – and I said while pouring them orange juice that it wasn’t normal for boys to play in bands, maybe an all-boy band; that would be cute. When I told them they looked at each other and laughed and each hugged one another like they were siblings. They’ll grow out of it once the hormones kick in.

B

My six-year-old son came home today and said that at school they held their own amnesty and I asked how he felt about it and he said being good friends is more important than stuff like that dada

A

Should the age of participation for the amnesty have been lowered to thirteen?

My thirteen-year-old daughter came home today and said that at school they held their own amnesty and I asked what she said about boys and she said everyone is different and an individual with different strengths and weaknesses and we shouldn’t place expectations on anyone or treat people differently because of their role in reproduction or resort to biological essentialism to classify somebody.

They’re not being prepared for real life.

B

The front page of every newspaper in the world held the same story this morning: it had been announced that someone had been discovered living in rural Wales with no gender whatsoever. Every picture of them looked different, and yet none of them looked like any man or woman anyone had ever seen. The reports didn't go into any details. It reminded me of when I read a story as a child about a man who is digging up his garden and finds a ball of a brand new colour.

In fact the person hadn't been discovered: they had handed themselves in at Swansea town hall, citing the amnesty, saying they wanted to help.

A

What do you think of gender neutrality and non-binary people?

'What would we do with you?' I thought to myself, looking at the photo of the – person? – with no gender. This being with no history, no limits, nothing to fight against, except world hunger and crime. What are you for and what are you against? They would have to compile everything they said to try and assess what they were, where they stood on certain things. What is this thing I am feeling? It's not a good feeling.

My daughters' school has sent me a letter asking if they may accept a governmental invitation to run a pilot scheme where everyone says 'they' instead of 'she' and 'he'. Sounds confusing to me.

B

When I started writing this email I wanted to send it to someone in the temporarily instated amnesty department. Or to her. To her? I opened a new email and in an apoplectic hurry started typing 'Women', but instead of beginning to type in the body of the email the ticking cursor was in the recipient space, where what I wrote was flagged up as an invalid addressee:

women x

To write an email to all women. I kept writing. I spent over an hour editing it. I pressed send in a rush of excitement. It warned me about doing this, refusing to comply. I guessed a possible extension.

women@women.com

I clicked send, knowing it would return momentarily, but I did not feel disheartened.

A

Finally, what is the future of gender relations?

I came downstairs last night to get a glass of water and found my eldest daughter reading my amnesty forms in the glow of the open fridge. She looked up at me, but she didn't seem inquisitive or proud or afraid. The look she gave me was mysterious and I couldn't explain any of it and I feel something stifling, perhaps.

as high as a kite – as drunk as a skunk
as free as a bird – as pretty as a picture
as thick as a brick – as stupid as a painter

I was here

as ugly as sin – as red as a rose
as black as ink – as hot as hell
as cold as ice – as mad as a cut snake

I saw how it was

as nice as pie – as sweet as sugar
as neat as a pin – as wide as the sky
as clear as day – as deep as the deep blue sea

I'm trying to tell you

as dull as ditchwater – as warm as toast
as right as rain – as smooth as silk
as soft as dough – as tough as an old boot

So you'll get the picture

as fit as a fiddle – as full as a goog
as happy as Larry – as rich as Croesus
as poor as a church mouse as like – as two peas in a pod

See what I mean?

as wet as water – as weak as piss
as thick as thieves – as pleased as punch
as nutty as a fruitcake – as snug as a bug in a rug

I'll fill you in on all the details

as rough as guts – as clear as mud
as fickle as fate – as clean as a whistle
as round as a rissole – as plain as the nose on your face

That way you'll understand

as blind as a bat – as deaf as a doornail
as dead as a dodo – as stiff as a board
as bitter as a pill – as sure as night follows day

Exactly what was what

as safe as houses – as mad as a meataxe
as flat as a pancake – as sharp as a tack
as deep as a well – as smooth as a baby's bottom

I'd give you the big picture

as light as a feather – as heavy as lead
as easy as pie – as good as new
as greedy as a pig – as crooked as a dog's hind leg

But there are only details in Brownian motion

as tight as a drum – as brown as a berry
as bright as a button – as pale as a ghost
as good as done – as sincere as a polyester suit

Minute details, decorative details, trivial details, feminine details

as white as a sheet – as red as beetroot
as quiet as a mouse – as flat as a tack
as sick as a dog – as low as a snake's belly

That's how it was

as pissed as a newt – as stubborn as an ass
as tense as a spring – as quick as a flash
as cool as cucumber – as long as a month of Sundays

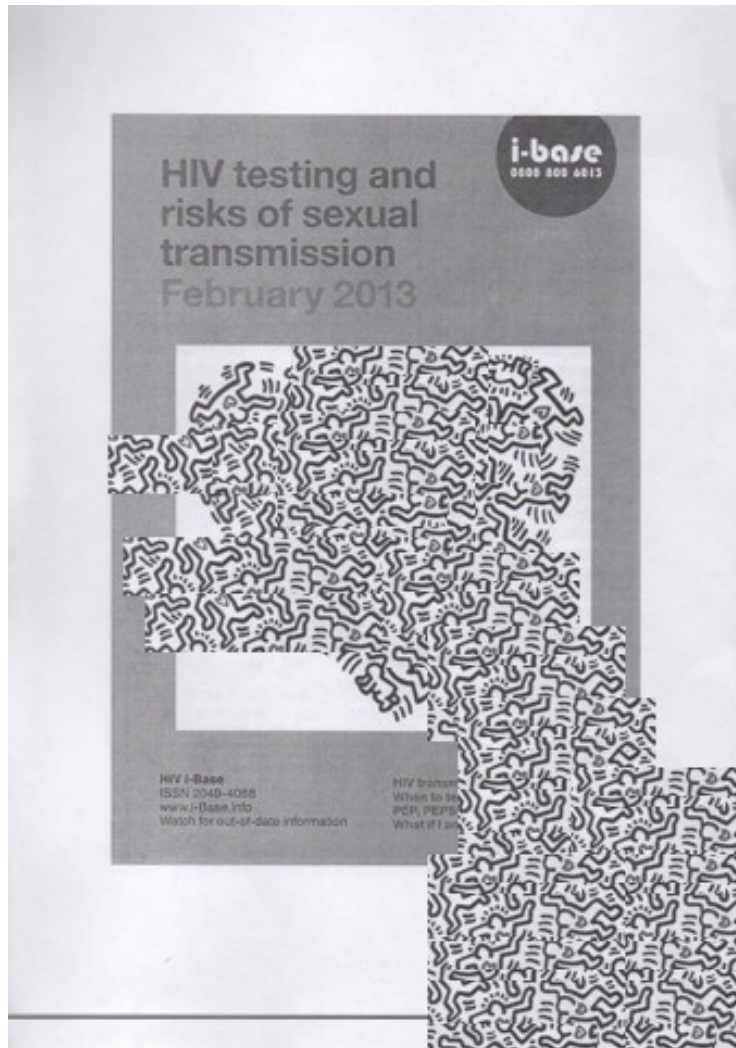
It was just as I said

as sound as a bell – as hard as nails
as dry as a bone – as straight
as a die – as queer as fuck
as smart as a silicon chip

As real as real can be



63.



37.

Welcome to [redacted] secure [redacted]
[redacted] love, [redacted] or [redacted] fun. We have been online for 8 years [redacted]
[redacted] to date and [redacted] make new friends. So come
[redacted], share [redacted].

We are [redacted] Thousands [redacted] throughout
the UK [redacted] millions [redacted] taking advantage of the [redacted]
opportunities that HIV [redacted] has to offer!

Joining [redacted] connects you to [redacted] HIV / AIDS [redacted]
[redacted] networks. Find [redacted] new [redacted] romantic [redacted] possibilities
[redacted]! You know just how complicated finding love in the Positive community can be.
PositivesDating.com is [redacted] monitor each and every profile [redacted]
and [redacted] hassle [redacted] You'll love [redacted] It's [redacted]
[redacted] look, so why not?

Living with HIV [redacted] you have to give up on the things that mean the most to you [redacted]
[redacted]. A difficult diagnosis [redacted] your love life is over and if
you don't believe us telling you that, [redacted] hear it first
hand from the hundreds of single men and women who are online right now. Our members [redacted]
[redacted] are looking for love, commitment and support, just like
you. [redacted] thinking about what you've lost, [redacted]

35.

working the dock HAI SAILOR [redacted] you collect your cardboard & make a fort out
here in Jungle II there is no book & no dancing bear
just the sequel to the bad beginning [redacted] that Disney didn't make

in Hertfordshire, England, three migrants jump out of a school coach
bodies in the luggage compartment

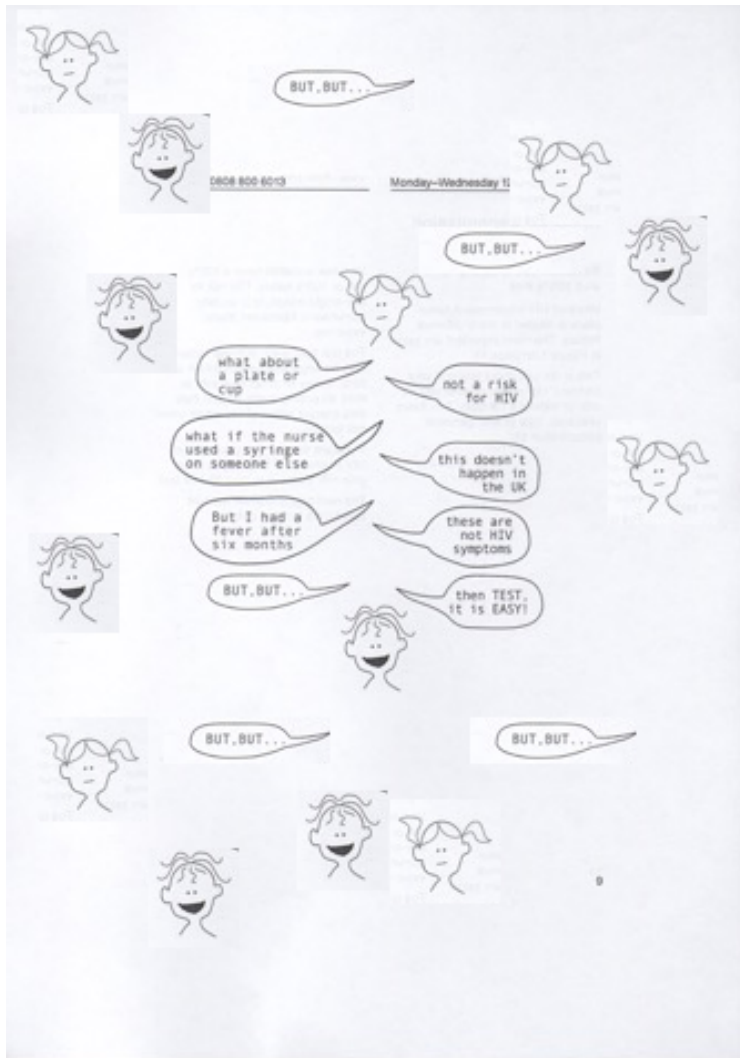
what about the children?
the children are fine [redacted] they had seats [redacted]
[redacted] the whole journey

the situation was handled very calmly and humanely by all [redacted] concerned & at no point was the safety
of [redacted] pupils, staff or parents [redacted] put at risk

just let someone inside your cab, babe, open up your doors
& show the world outside this grand tarpaulin life, where I'll boost you up if you boost me in

driving through [redacted] the dock last week, we saw the police vans [redacted] then
we remembered the hilarious thing you did once and with our doors locked we laugh

31.



29.

When I want to hurt you
 I just say that our relationship is my best attempt at lived satire
 Then, in the armistice of our mutual indifference I think
 maybe I am just that type.
 We keep gaining on the identity politics slot machine what happens in Vegas stays in your
 appetites for me dressed up & pinball
 in Ireland newly liberal floral I could not abort & you remind me
 we will not have babies without
 financial planning & borrowed ejaculate
 we will not have a terminated accident

& sure, I get it,
 we are two women & even on a wedding day that will count
 for less.

If you do walk, walk away cleanly, you tell me

And I will like art, or a knife.

21.

I am not an unchecked universality

Je not suis Charlie
 Not all Charlies
 Yes all Charlies

Your free speech is dying
 in your throat &
 I'm a faux cardiac arrest
 all over your floor

where the recovery position
 is something we only do in bed
 where if we're experimenting
 I pretend to be Greece & you are the EU
 our safe word is: bail out.

As ever, we wonder how long either of us can go
 before we draw on the rhetoric of crashing like we have
 into one another
 & down exhausted on a sheet
 sweating & breathless itself

I can't count the number of times
 I have walked into Victorian urinals
 believing them to be cocktail bars

Commuting through Charing Cross
 it is a day divided between either looking at the sky
 or walking into the road

where after the office
 we put staplers to our own heads
 & shoot

A small house, greater London, early 1990s

Obedient, green, this grass is in squares. White picket fences embarrass the space in American here on London's grey-green southwestern hem. A whole terrace twitches with heat. Along red brick grid trellises begging for roses or heavy with them. Lazy sprays of water arc in unison from yellow lawn sprinklers, saving the grass from the ravages of summer. No one here wants to see signs of burning or of having burned. From time to time, the men must remember to reposition the sprinklers else there will be ugly dry patches tattooed on lawns come autumn.

Through the rainbowing arches dart children – gleeful, water dappled – while parents, from behind '30s bay windows framed durably in pebbledash, glance. The tarmac too is glistening, heat coaxing it back to its first viscosity. Little waves feather up from it for our eyes to trip on. In silent black stretches it muscles towards town. 16.4 miles west to Charing Cross.

But our skins lay cool still naked against the black and white tiles behind her mother's locked bathroom door.

Cars hum sometimes by. Windows closed, AC blasting. Rabidly excited to at last use the dial they paid extra for, drivers are filled with a certitude so total they'd have paid triple for the feeling alone. (A rare feeling is almost as good as a new one.) It lasts until the evening sun lengthens slim dinner's shadows – it is portion control not fear of carbohydrates that devastates this decade's feeding times. In the cars children gripe. The passions of parents have condensed into

desiring only, and with total erotic ferocity, to reach back and smack. This is what becomes of yearning. Cars exceed their occupants in singularity. Their special features are recited lovingly and often.

One year all the men agreed once and for all to wear their trousers below and not above their paunches. A great white sigh moved across like a holiday. This, and having had no direct experience of war, was the only thing separating them from their fathers. So a chasm happened, shallow as it was wide. What were men?

Meanwhile the women. Fermenting softly at card games, incendiarily disappointed, they press each other's feet under the table with the tenderness of birds regurgitating worms for their young.

All are nervous and only nearly relaxed. So much they want it to be like the TV in their hearts, tuned to California. Sunshine is normal, they repeat, secretly packing jumpers. There is no revving or pool sound or teenage trill with drama. Differently shaped teens instead crouch huffing lighter fluid and fingering each other behind the petrol station. Laced with vodka and Coke, Marlboro Light smoke threading the usual air, black eyeliner and tights operatically laddered – they weekend. Beneath the concrete overpass shit graffiti. Just tits dicks and phone numbers.

The bugs are hot and tired. The birds are hot and tired. The bugs on the birds are hot, tired. The chain link fences flanking the water treatment facility beyond our permissible

limits are glinting and flashing. Stereos and furniture bits and video tapes at the dump wilt. Puddles too stagnant to psychadelicise their oil. Beneath algae fish gasp. Little stirrings, quickly dampened.

The sun goes earlier and earlier.

A distant bark – sanctioned noise against the screen. In a doorway a hand drying on an apron's corner. Pale green chirping creatures exhale coolly in the grass. Everything is a boring American painting, a fragment made total, dull with big meaning.

Thus, suburbia. For whose benefits are its patterns?

Sunday afternoon.

Parents, everywhere.

But we are nothing yet. Blanks for projected innocence. Not mother or wife or girlfriend or teenage girl budding suddenly visible. Bearing it cleverly we move unseen, able to skirt pornographically around each other. Smooth holeless and speaking in tongues. Our backs cool against the black and white tiles behind her mother's locked bathroom door. Our fingers, blue tipped, intertwined.

Before we were even born, they came here for our until-recently gilded passports.

Her mother is napping.

All the mothers are napping!

We watch a buzzing fly's strange geometry from the floor up. We imagine and envy its agency. See, autonomy is visible. Is it moving along the only available path, inscribed by its mute genetics – or trying to escape? Well. It rests occasionally, folding its iridescent wings around itself. Relief. Happiness. As though there were a difference.

*

Two months since the gates.

All summer were faith and doubt pressing together and pulling apart.

A muscle soft from disuse leaping too quickly to action, finds itself again immobile and sorer from the effort.

Landlocked and far from here with her two fat aunts she'd jumped in and out of the pool, forgetting and remembering me, desperately pasting against her torso the hateful little frills of her swimsuit which ceaselessly reappeared as it dried, compelling her to leap back into the water, to flatten, to forget. Meantime the aunts, oiled, flatulent, compared the failures of men, the failures of waterproof mascara; and her mother, milling slimly in the shade, paled from years away, assessed the danger of the girl's brightening skin: this is desert sun, nothing like the flinching yellow apology filtered through cloud ranges that weakly dapples the prim driveways, the formally ordered florals of what we now call home. The shadow of her mother, her mother's cigarette,

her mother's cigarette's smoke rippled across the girl's body as she, with a touch nothing like mine, slathered the girl in thick sunscreen which fell in blobs onto the cute strawberries adorning her swimsuit.

Because we are children, all our clothes has fruit or animals. The women have black, leopard print and polka dots. When we are cute it is because we resemble animals. When animals are cute, it is because they resemble us. Even the stalking arachnid, animated, is loveable.

And how the girls at school would preen in summertime, parasolled imperiously in the shade, you're so lucky you don't burn, we can never sit out in the sun like that. A ruffle of silk their voices, their ponytails swinging in unison. Us rough calico dirt, never selected for the maypole.

We want to be only our senses, trilling along the breeze with others.

One aunt, a good man is hard to find. The other on cue, a hard man is good to find and the cackling! Checking for understanding they'd hush themselves and nudge – other swimmers, builders, men. Every year the screen around the apartment block's pool got higher in correlation with the increase in population: mostly refugees of different statuses from neighbouring countries who required housing – some in camps in and around Amman, others in plush new high rises towering above the increasingly threatened locals. Simultaneously, the insistence of defiant Virgin Marys, the furious decorations at Christmas, the rapidly increasing

cost of land. And so the blue square's shrinking above the pool. Because it was synonymous with safety, people always picked privacy over a wide open sky.

Under the same narrow sky I'd been turning somersaults with my cousin over his parents' bed, always resting for a few breaths longer than him afterwards, hoping, I suppose, for a more final release, or perhaps an ending. Embracing afterwards we'd watch pirated sports-themed movies for American children which charted the unlikely, and therefore all the more emotionally potent, victory of the underdogs. I'd sob into his lap with wanting to be part of something – a team, a nation, a cult, history – as his dick hardened against my face. I learned so much about ice hockey.

I wondered why, though my body could leap and vault over the eastern Mediterranean, no joy rose alongside. Sinking with my father on the curb of his shot city, not understand how such things could be felled.

My loneliness was expansive, well guarded. Occasionally it would lift when I invited my cousin into the circle of my world. We enjoyed the shrill privacy of secrets – cunts and dicks in the bathroom, code names, dares. Love became a willingness to humiliate oneself for the other. I could hold three ice cubes in my mouth, drooling.

Still, she pressed against me at the gates.

I cradled the radio, communed with pop. I was sung. I became bilingual in pain. I learned the Arabic for return,

for bullet. Like other oracles it showed me exactly what I already knew but didn't want to see. Adults paid therapists for this but I became tragic for free.

Thrilled with insomnia I'd conjure her face where the two single beds met, the hollow between them stopped by a rolled up towel where I lay, flanked by bigger siblings, my hand between my legs. I learned stillness.

Beyond our little window, the lawless, seductive city, its ribaldry and violence undermining our night lights, our mosquito guards. Perhaps it was its teeming, its chaos, much less terrible than the nullifying order of home, that I wanted to belong to.

Oh. Summer. What agony.

*

We're shy when we meet again. Her toe in the dirt coyly muddying her new purple sneaker. Me liking it from over there. She's desperate to stroke the tassels on my new t-shirt dress. I can tell. Byblos Beach it says with neon. I sway a little, absent minded like, so the tassels trail. Overhead, adults communicate politely, ruffling our resistant hair Englishly to signal the limits of small talk. A mother leaves, a mother stays. They could have been friends.

We both know it's my turn to be the woman.

Our shoes are in an adorable pile by the back door. We run like children outside for fun and just in case. Doing the

dishes her mother watches serenely, gladder by the plate they'd come here. Each item happily washed adds value. To us her face is mellow as our TV moms and we as sassy and rich as their daughters. Our hair as sleek and crimpable, raised above this lamentable frizz. Truly though it is relief not serenity that washes across her mother's features. This home's cruelty is softer than the last home's cruelty. (It is the higher distribution of certainty that makes the weather here tolerable.) A slur in the end does not penetrate a body. And it is nice, after all, to be able to plan your own death. Information is a body wrapped in a flag and raised above the heaving crowd. Do our parents weep more regularly than our friends' parents weep? Or is it always with the same abjection that infants view this? We do not enjoy missing Saturday morning TV only in order to better understand the cadences of their sorrows.

Think not of those beaches teeming with pulsating urchins, filling with garbage. Think not of that thick rope of road, silent and palmed, rabid with hoteliers.

If we listen, will we become incorporated? Folded into and along. This is not the belonging we fantasised about! They won't alter their accents even!

We want to know the local idioms. We want to use them casually.

We long for days to hang solidly and in a row. We inherit passive fatalism. Now we are terrible at making plans see.

We would like to go on the path and know what the berries are, know which ones will kill us and which we can dream of baking into a pie.

To relax, we change the channel. Here the oscillating blonde ponytails, the hair swinging in a shimmering sheet becomes divinity – blinding enough to constitute our fantasies, appearing as it does, as truth.

Because we suspect nature, we are always open to the supernatural.

Our favourite alchemy would be the transformation of that which has made us weak, into that which makes us strong. Poverty becomes wealth, difference currency. See how I say a common word? We would like to recalibrate the correlation between our likeability and our inferiority.

They finally got a lock on the bathroom door. It is a romantic lock. Its shininess, the way it fits together, what it makes possible. We enjoyed the wall the bathroom shared with her mother's bedroom. This heaving, rosy wall infused our game with a pleasing risk. The only lockable room in the house might as well have been the only lockable room in the world. Thus its sanctity. A place of worship complete with the illicit possibilities of places of worship. All the outside's loveliness could not compare to the bathroom's hot, sterile blush. Through the drawn blinds we make the light fall in slats, not at all like the dressing room in the movie we are aping, but the difference from usual was difference enough.

We both know it's my turn to be the woman –

whose body is long, whose body is white, who smells of chamomile, blood, whose crown of golden hair tumbles and flows in buttery waves. The trim of her white cotton knickers is French lace, it defines the borders of what we do not fully understand. They are cut high to lengthen the legs, foretelling the coming decade's bikini fashions. Her bra is young, knowing, her breasts fashionable. A light comes from her lively insides, one dependent on the darkness of others, which she also defines. Outside, she is tanned. Healthy is still in. Naturally, her stomach is flat, rolless even upon sitting. It was for her the suburbs were laid.

Our wig is tacky. Both its texture, brittle and almost sticky to the touch, acrylic like our school jumpers; and, if tackiness is some measure of distance from authenticity, its overall appearance. Its brassy white-yellow fibres are broken and frizzy from attempts at styling, its fringe defunct. The interior net is dirty, overused by the girl's sister, who, gelling her hair into flatness, had often forced it over her head for costume parties.

The girl drops the lid of the toilet seat, which we will shortly need. I gasp, anticipating a mother-waking bang. But she, anticipating my anticipation (a keen sensitivity she still retains) assures me, with a phrase almost certainly subliminally absorbed from the sluggish aura encircling B&Q on a Saturday, that it is 'soft close'. It falls quietly. No mothers stir.

As teenagers we will utilise its black shininess to cut lines up on to snort before going out. Anything to make the walk to

the bus to the station for the train into town shorter, more exciting. Anything to hasten our entry into that which we perceive as flowing. But we will only ever know edges. And we will expertly theorise distance.

Sit down, she tells me, we have to start. I can tell she loves the gap of months when she is a year older than I.

She turns to the wall. I sit in my pants and spread my toes against the new bathmat so I can better feel its still fluffy fluff between them. Tilting my head, I pull the wig up from the nape of my neck, sliding my hand in to shove back the sticking-out hair. Next I stuff one of her mother's white-grey bras with toilet paper and socks and knot it behind my back. I am expert now at making a good shape. We were obsessed with the glittering white pyramids of Lorie Griffin's bra. It appears from this point that reaching her mother's age, the age I am writing from now, is empirically impossible. With pilfered lipstick, offensively off trend, I paint my lips. I wrap a towel under my arms, it has faded unicorns. We begin.

Staging is crucial. Even the slightest giggle would rupture the game, making our garishness slip out – far more humiliating than the ordinary humiliation of being in love.

She fake knocks and in American I say come in. The terribleness of my accent is a kind of necessity, meaninglessly significant as any symbol, and far enough from both accuracy and what-is-usual to create space. She fake enters, wearing her brother's New York Knicks baseball cap, signifying the cavalier man's hat Michael J Fox wears in *Teen Wolf*, when,

having gained popularity and power through his inter-speciality, is deemed uber-masculine enough to be able to join the drama club without his raw, lupine heterosexuality being called into question. How loud his pissing will be! Now he can get close to round-hipped Pamela. Beautiful bitch, queen of high school – me. It was as though, with every re-watching we had transferred the rudest bit of the video from the tape into our consciousnesses, leaving the shorn, fuzzy version trapped in the cassette, and our own lurid reproduction lucid in our minds. It was in this shared, distant pocket that we existed most clearly. The work of imitation began early.

Close the door please, I say. She mimes it. I stroll casually and toss the towel aside just like Lorie Griffin does. The improbable unicorns go in a crumple.

We shine with the tiles. Practical items have eroticism too. The bathroom has been remodelled over the summer. Purity upon purity.

She takes off the cap, clutches it to her chest, gulps, gulp. No one we know has ever been to New York city.

Relax, we're just one big happy family here in the theatre, I say.

Yup.

We are moving through estrangement towards the sacred condition. If we pile the words and motions continuously in this way they will weigh down on and break the regular surface. I approach her like I need to reach something that's behind

her, just like Lorie Griffin does. Consistency is key. Each vocable a password. One slipped, one dropped and the crystallinity achievable by constraint becomes murky. Quick as a fresh puddle swirled through with a finger of mud.

What happened to the wolf? I'm so close that she has to sit down on the toilet seat. Can you just change back and forth whenever you feel like it?

Uh sure, she stammers well. Sometimes I have to get kinda worked up to be the wolf, but uh, it's not too hard.

I fling her hat down very seductively. It glides well along the new tiles like the Jesus bugs we studied. We liked Jesus much more after we learned he had been humbled by only a bug, that his finest performance was prefigured and outlived, repeated daily by these tiny, ordinary creatures. We wanted that to happen to all that which hung over us.

What do you think about, I pull the bra straps down, to get worked up? I lean towards her. This time she smells of grass, of bread. As an adult the favourite food of the those I most adore will be bread. I will learn to make it, so I can survive them.

Uh, different things.

She looks at me
at last
I kiss
her lips
are dry.
Our first kiss in 8 weeks is a thin one.

Oh.
The floor falls out.

What is wonderful about the rigidity particular to ritual or game is that it engenders a kind of sensitivity wherein any difference streaks out like an aurora illuminating the night. Wolves aren't supposed to be shy, I say. We learn our position is to want to be torn apart.

I kiss her neck.

Uh Pamela, what are you doin'?

We learn our position is to want to tear apart.

I straddle her awkwardly and am received. I want to be locked without air. (I will make this mistake again and again – God, love, nation, work.)

We kiss really.

Grind goes our heart.

Is this home?
Already bored of narrative's bullying pyramid, we go off script, cunts pulsing.

*

That day our nails were pale blue and glittery. We stole the polish from her sister who stole it from Miss Selfridge. I kept thinking of the phrase 'five finger discount'. Inside are we

also full of gorgeous turquoise?

There are five toothbrushes in the toothbrush holder plus mine laying beside them in a small puddle. There is grown up toothpaste and milk teeth toothpaste. When I sleepover here I try to avoid stepping on the tiles if I have to pee at night – the piranhas you see. In the shower there are only two bottles, *Johnson & Johnson Body Wash* and *Johnson & Johnson No More Tears Shampoo*. My mother had dozens of bottles and tubs in her bathroom. They have white ladies and fruit.

The sun was coming in as we lay pressed. Little rivers, then strict roads.

My blonde hair gleamed sharply as the pain of discovering, when enjoying a gummy sweet in the street with your friends, a cavity lurking in a molar.

Socks and streams of toilet paper framed us, an altarpiece. Her white vest made a halo over her head. When a car passed the light flashed, rarely enough to seem miraculous. Why couldn't I see without God? Without the eyes of the plastic weeping Madonna filled with holy water watching from above the sink? (Her pastel blue crown and robe matches our nails.)

An ant scaled the chasm of grouting between a white tile and a black. She told me a joke about ants and aunts. I laughed for a long time. Everything disappeared including America.

We were not anything-enough to the degree that we could be visible without control and thus be seen by the eyes of another, who upon this seeing, still did not turn away. The dire question ended: we existed. Real as a wing, a paw, an eyelash skimming the orb of her black eye.

*

Even when, years later, we push our cigarettes tip to tip to spark one off the other, the gap that happened when we stopped being Michael J Fox and Lorie Griffin won't seal.

Even when, years later, we get called 'girlfriend', we won't know why it feels like violence. We won't know why it feels like violence so much that we will think we are sick and we will be treated accordingly. The gap between what we feel and what we are permitted to feel will widen and widen.

Sometimes we won't be able to sleep because the space is intolerable. Other times we will be able to look into it, to see to its bottom and remain upright though we are vertiginous, nauseas. Sometimes we will know the difference between space and void. Sometimes it will arm us.

I

The object made me think about writing and reading. I was thinking about the three forms of narration and the three kinds of surface plates. How might I describe something by inhabiting the object, addressing the object and observing the object? What might be the relationship between seeing the object behind glass in a museum, reading Joseph Whitworth's accounts and writing about it as an unseen process. The repetitive back-and-forthing necessary in the creation of a surface plate, seemed a way to think about the often-disproportioned activity of reading and writing as something felt and how, perhaps this was made aware by a gritting between the two processes. That somehow the repetitive action of scanning across the page could also be analogous to the slow machining of an object. And that this too could be a method for reconciling the three approaches.

II

Joseph Whitworth's surface plate manufactures flatness. Joseph Whitworth's surface plate is composed of two initial plates and a third. Two plates to grind against the other and a third as reference. It is necessary to make a third plane in order to obtain the perfect one. The event begins as a series of stacked rectangles. Surface precision needs to be understood through its relenting flatness. It clears away imperfection and instability. All other machines rely upon its unflinching uniformity. The process of getting there takes patience, it is important that a ground is prepared and abrasion introduced. The truth of its form allows for all other actions to be calibrated around it. There is, therefore no room for error or for guessing. It is best to approach with care rather than skill. The plates move in opposing directions, bringing closer the perfection demanded. With each passing across the surface, the objects become more alike. Initial friction of those early movements are long forgotten as each trace softens into the next. The clearing-motion becoming more defined as an algorithmic logic takes charge. The process of clearing can go awry and any uneven distribution across its plane can alter the relationship between the plates. Faults emerge when trusting the process without examination. Balance is shifted and a convexing of one plate into the other creates an unwanted curvature. We must pay keen attention to the quality of the surface coating on both plates. Uneven or mismatched dulling of the coat alerts us to the area of deviation. The exact point where this flaw occurs is imperceptible and irreversible. It requires dogged attentiveness. From the exterior, plates may have the appearance of flatness, yet inside the weight of distribution is irregular. The correct principle employs a sense of touch instead of sight. Deviation from this absolute renders both plates redundant. Their con-joined form left as two parts in the failure. The work must operate under this binary.



III

It is therefore necessary to utilise the third plate. The third plate is employed as a tool for orientation and positioning. Here, the third plate is the performative thing in a trinity of objects. Each paired fixed in a sequence of alternating combinations: AB – AC – BC. As the dilatory process continues, the third plate is subsumed into the triadic method. Each plate transformed into a dual role of affected and affecter. These final metallic bodies are mounted onto a geometric support to resist future warping. The completed plate is a site of correction, diagnosing other defective surfaces. The finished surface must retain its material perfection, blemishes or grease impede on its ability to function as a tool. With this one perfect plane; instruments, objects, printing and apparatus can be made with a basis on a truth of design. Once the surface is level with a 0.00001 % deviation from the horizontal, clearing has happened and we can begin.

Youtube tutorial dream
Artfairs in swimmingpools
And superdomes
People queueing outside
500 meters iced mojito
Tickets flowing \$\$ sweeping swept
Vinyl carpets smelling beer

Recommended videos obsolete

Trending obsolete

Subscriptions obsolete

Famous celebrities flipping out

Search

search

Sweat tiptoeing on hip perfumes

6:53 – Noam Chomsky Artist talk

Do anyone ever asked why do cats act so weird?

Guess who has to clean the floor now

More negotiations

Discounts

Update again again again

Collector meetings

Wishes

Fishnet stockings

Viewed and reviewed

Sound of fries drumming the ears

The bin is full

The taxi waits outside

You mean you have been wrongfully accused of committing a crime? / [pause] / Just fought. For the wrong side.

You mean in a war? / [murmurs] / You mean in a battle? / [murmurs] / What was it for?

all the same.... Fight for.. Whoever. Thats who / You mean for money? / No for whatever

For whatever values would seem.... to be right at the time / Who were you fighting for last? What were the reasons?

I can't remember anymore.... useless... Useless anyways. / Why / Won't change Wont cahnge

|How do people travel about in the town below? // (Coach // /Aside from walking? // (Coach

(Coach |How does it move? // |Wheels, its drawn along // |Drawn along? By what? // |Horse // |Say that aloud

You mean you have been wrongfully accused of committing a crime? / [pause] / Just fought. For the wrong side.

You mean in a war? / [murmurs] / You mean in a battle? / [murmurs] / What was it for?

all the same.... Fight for.. Whoever. Thats who / You mean for money? / No for whatever

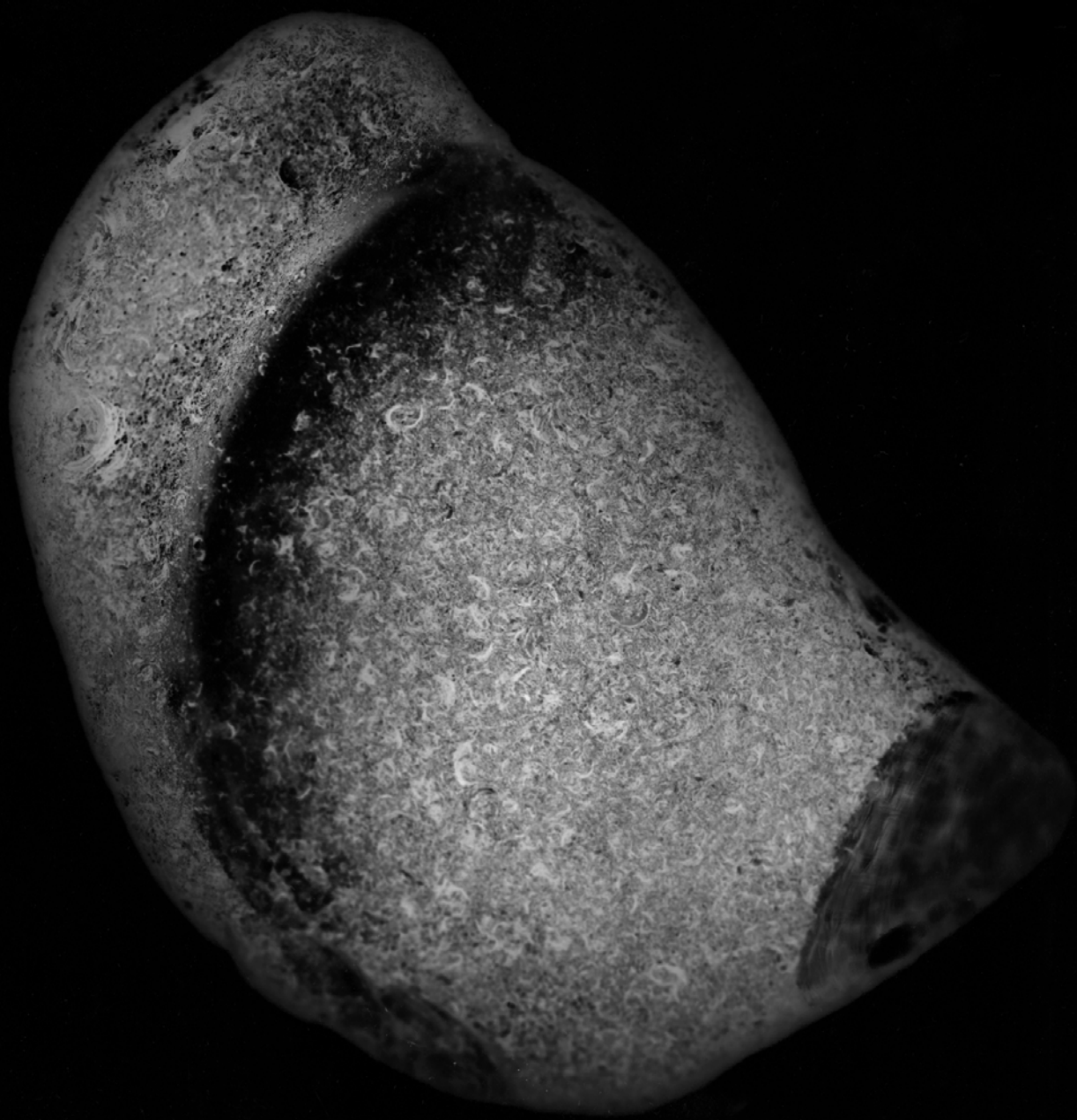
For whatever values would seem.... to be right at the time / Who were you fighting for last? What were the reasons?

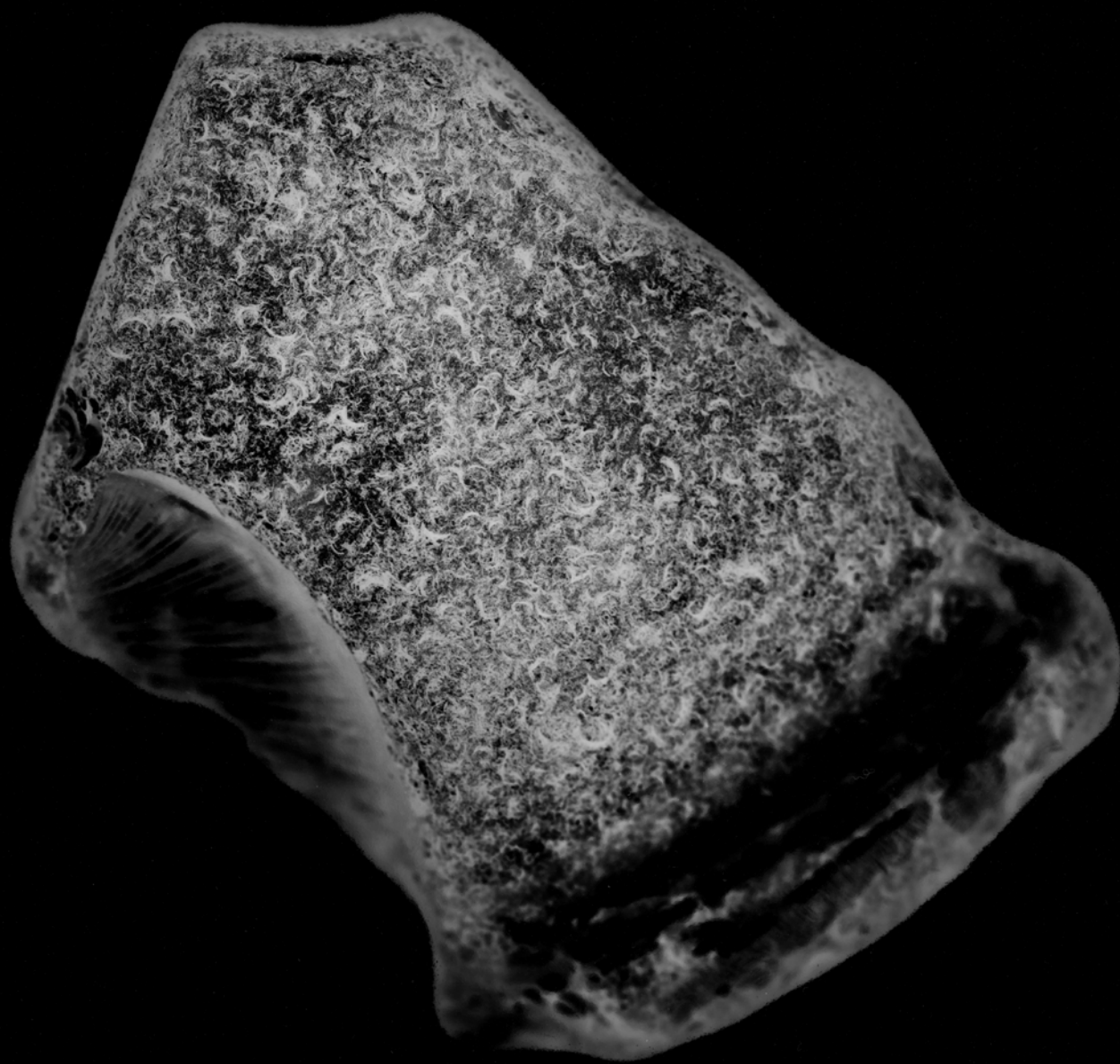
I can't remember anymore.... useless... Useless anyways. / Why / Won't change Wont cahnge



*

"...the text is from this Bernard Sumner
autobio where he had someone transcribe
text from when Ian Curtis was put under
hypnosis and started to have past life regres-
sion..I feel like we must have talked about
this over summer but I can't remember for
sure. I am into these past life regression text
accounts because of how strange the actual
text is. Its like a weird staccato of repetition
and the way the structure of the language
is so bizarre, it has its own way of being
out of time .. like it runs along parallel to
the norm.."







Jo Spence called herself a cultural sniper. Have you heard of Jo Spence, British photographer? Not presidential assassin. Cultural sniper. According to Jo Spence, middle class values made her sick. But middle class values also make literature sick I think. Middle class values make literature very very sick is the slogan I live by, day in day out. Right here in Great Britain, middle class values are posing as writerly competency. All year round, middle class values dress up as if for Halloween. Christmas, Easter, Eid, Samhain, middle class values never shed their Halloween costume. Not even on my birthday, which year in year out coincides with Valentine's Day, do middle class values appear for what they really are: middle class values. They palm themselves off as writerly competency, style, class (!), the most brilliant voice in a decade. They palm themselves off as beauty. Middle class values are the mist rising over the Cambridgeshire country side at dawn. They are NOT the woman in the mini-skirt low décolleté zero jacket on Streatham High Street in this weather. NOT the dyke with the bad posture developed over half a (pre-breast-binding) decade of slouching and no yoga (me). NOT the two-for-one British chickens offer in Iceland (the shop, not the country). Over time, middle class pronunciation results in the recognisable morphology of the middle class mouth. Do it now if you must. Do the middle class mouth. Like this (do it). My own mouth must be a freak show by now, enunciating a foreign language year in year out. I must look a fright with my mouth and my slouch. In *Middle Class Values Make Me Sick* (1986), the photo series, Jo Spence looks like a political pumpkin. Red agitprop everywhere, orange T-shirt, think Halloween. Jo Spence launched her undeclassable body

into the centre of British photography, like this. But the undeclassable language of working class writers (this body) is not at the centre of international literature. It's not literature. That is the sickness.



[CHANNEL ONE]

The radio/CD player sits on the bench against the opposite wall. It's the homeopath's radio. Portable, plastic, approximately oval. Surface wiped clean with alcohol every day.

And the homeopath's music has been on repeat all morning—you'd like to turn it off. Repetition has dissolved the lyrics into white noise. Bad atmosphere.

—
Your radio dilemma begins with a double negative. You can't not turn it off. The maxim; 'a negative and a negative make a positive', while often inaccurate, is mathematically sound in this case.

The negative word is squared; negative one multiplied by negative one equals positive one. *You can't not turn it off.*

You're left with an exponential positive outcome, an imperative, a kind of homeopathy joke.

—
This might sound new age but it's hard to imagine what multiplying two negative things might equate to emotionally. Negativity in maths works the same as in everyday life.

Bad vibes. You really want to discuss these negative things?

—
But that's only the beginning of your mathematical quandary since— the radio—you can't turn it *off*, either.

Consider a number line, a one dimensional thread stretched out between you and the radio that extends onwards in both directions. Goes on forever. And say you're standing at zero, a dot inscribed into the line at an arbitrary point. The radio's over there, at one. Feels like an incredible distance.

The activities of your body have slowed in pace. Think of lead then think of it in gas form. How much you have taken in through the air. Muscles are heavy, leaden, underline leaden, cramped, nearing paralysis. Nerves have stopped relaying messages with their usual fluency.

—
It takes great effort to think but here's what's in your head: to cross the room and silence the homeopath's radio you must first get half-way across, and before you get to the halfway point you must get halfway to there. And so on and so on x number of times, where x is infinitely divisible. You lose your line of thought.

Halve the distance, then halve it again. It's mathematically impossible to reach the radio so you can't turn it off.

[CHANNEL TWO]

This is the problem and it's Lead's problem; as they say you can't 'actualise' your thoughts.

It's bright but it tarnishes easily on contact with air underline twice very quickly a kind of salt forms over the surface that turns the lead from blueish white to dull grey.

Complaints come on in a warm room, she wants the volatility of the open air. Lead is heavy underline heavy that is to say lead has a high atomic number and the common complaint from the Lead individual is that movement is slow, perception is slow. Thoughts are slow and you'll notice a blue line around the gums. In a conversation with a lead patient you will wonder what she is thinking about in the time it takes her to answer.

—
At the correct dilution, lead also has the properties to cure your stasis.

This morning instead of drinking a glass of water drink this instead.



—
Signs on the motorway don't slow you down with punctuation.

The typeface is optimised for reading at speed, that's the reason you chose it. It follows that the character form might be streamlined, or transmute easily into word shapes. But here are the characters in front of you, independent entities. Heavy with vertical stress and not going anywhere and not made to be looked at for this length of time.

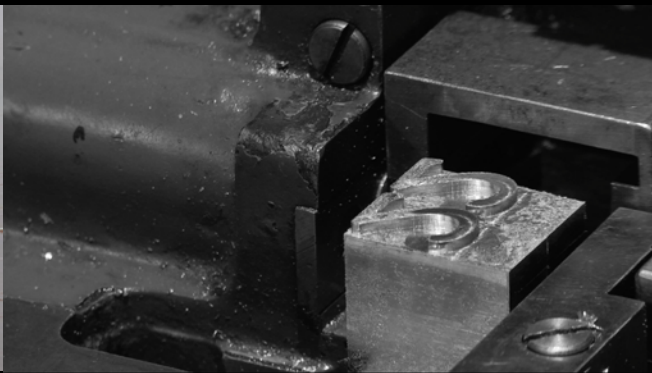
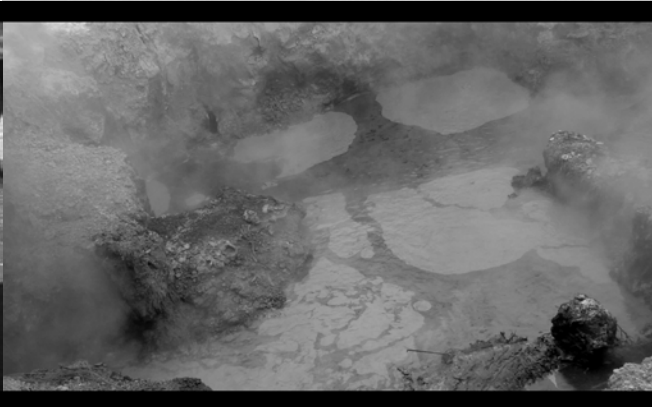
—
Using the lead type the homeopath prepares your remedy according to these methods:

Use cellotape to lift a layer of metal from the surface of a character. Take the sample from the numeral one, it's the narrowest in the set. Literally, one weighs less than zero.

Press with the thumb to stick the tape down, then slowly peel it back to harvest thin layers of metal. Molecules come away in terraces.

Dilute one part of your alloy to 99 parts water and success.

—
Succession is forceful, successive, twelve beats against a yielding surface.



From a uniform distance and with uniform strength.

Twelve beats around a circuit, then measure one part of that solution into another 99 of water and success. Continue diluting well beyond the point where any atoms of lead could possibly remain.

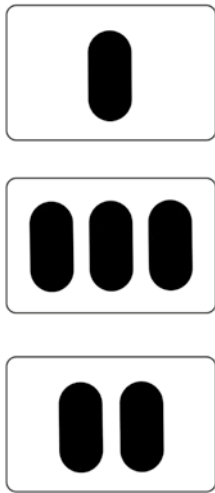
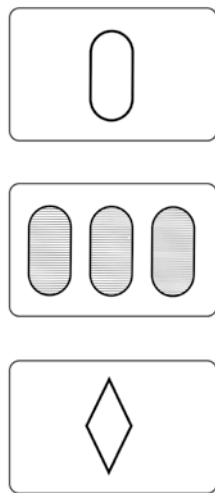
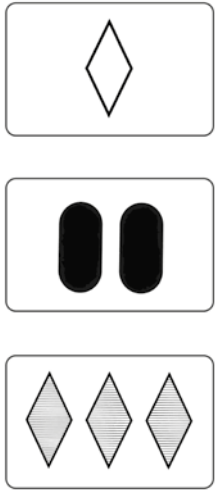
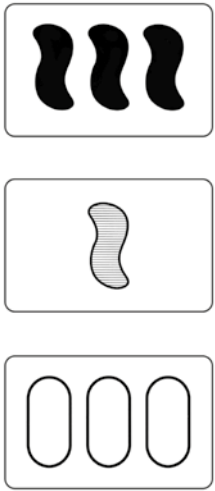
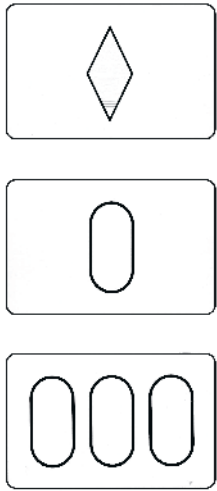
The remedy is potentised through these serial imprints.

The impact produces vibrations that reorganise the water's molecular structure. Lead's weight, its malleability, its dull grey tarnish; the vibrations transfer these abstractions to the water and the water commits them to memory. It's the pattern, the structural information that is transmitted, not the material.

Cast — a broadcast.

Measure four drops from your lead type dilution. These patterns, timescales, these actual facts, squeeze them into your mouth, onto your tongue.





When researching into epilepsy in German Shepherds in 1974, Marsha Falco developed her card game SET, which is quite popular in the U.S. today. Documenting the results of her inquiry into the genes and chromosomes in the animals' cells, Falco collected her data for each dog on file cards. She detected identical patterns: blocks of information that were the same on each card. Falco decided to represent these identical blocks of information by symbols, making it easier to manage her data. Different gene combinations were represented by symbols with different properties.

Acid grassland, long shadows over grass from adjacent copse. Acid grassland crossed by two sloping lines. The grassland lies on an incline, on the edge of a magnifying lens. Incongruous woman, starkly silhouette, bends over to side from waist. Seven women in black rise up, lift from grassland to tarmacked lane. The lane is wet.

Along the wet lane tracking there is a rising mist. Thin yellow gold sunlight. Incongruous old machinery on either side of driveway – four women in white overalls, two long troughs, flanking drive with large pails, wheeled water cannon, plough. There flows a stream of water which has suds in it, mud and straws of grass.

A large internal courtyard filled with light. Rat running beside a stream of water disappearing. Do disperse or do continue straight. Subject to years of thinking sublimated. Thinking and describing that kind of success, what shape this works.

Last through courtyard gate, counter to the soapy water running off the camber of the drive. Before she was half ready was she kind. Nihilism or depression is an for examining how the. Force of success in the command is unified.

Steam rising from the shower block. Steam, steam, water, running away. It is clear, still, very early in the morning. A large peaceful rat runs around.

Steamed window. Women with wet hair. With red faces. Swimming pool and lockers, partially obscure windows. Male details structure recreation and the rules. Women have passed, from the control of men, pathetic and impressed, to women's institutional authority. Bathos seeks that thing unnatural to women in this place: regimes that yet above compassion, witness comfort passively.

Reasons – in order carefully chosen – to make better connections between forces and female civilians: abuse and rape, women as an epidemic, retaliation, regulation, particular promotion of female members, relaxation. Men say that they do not mind, or actually enjoy the experience of women's. For women in this company assault has been an answering, an unheard interlocutor:

I was in another regiment before this.

Rooms empty to slowly dying sounds of violent struggle and suppression by reconstruction of insubordinate women.

This year women have insubordinately violated property.

Refusing to be moved, defend occupation peacefully, for three days and four nights. Two women apply for transfer to mixed barracks voluntarily.

Feelings of confinement prove to be candles lit from personal grudges. Particularly reviled girls act, once again, on their feelings of hurt pride and injustice. A traditional charade, typically, when the men arrive, celebrates another year together, for 24 hours, under pretence of insurgency.

Women – on a fully legal basis – desire full respite and full pay for injured. Demonstrate for the removal of the Head, with right to contraceptives. Men are still flirtatious. All dorms face the inner courtyard. Men passing, in civilian clothing, windows, dorm rooms. Head is restrained, subject to interrogations, in room, on top of desk, behind desk, on seat. Women are performing manual duties. Women are in the open air and mist, tracking breath in cold air. They are uncommon girls of trust and responsibility, surveying the grounds of the barracks, time, ideas of romance, a thin snaking river, some dull light from the white sky and a motorway. Romantic relationships break and are forbidden,

are formed which must be forcibly broken. A pool of muddy water over which there is a rope. Rope, a small ramp, pool of mud. Women stumbling climb the wooden ramp. The rope is on the wrong side of the pool. Struggling to explain red faced women approach the mud.

Women bring out a latent tendency. Have inclinations in their hearts. Have found inclinations known to them, enlisting. They had or had not knowledge of 'illegal entry'. Reason will invariably plead the influence of environment. Authority has worked in women for over twenty-five years. Head shouting, woman bleeding from assault course. What? Bleeding from assault course. Coercion rarely amongst the women is the offense. Animosity that has built up will escalate occasionally. Doubt – it must be tempered – is very effective. Clean, empty baths. Curtains on a ring. Running water, steam, scalding water, water heavily treated. Women washed or washing with shampoo suds. Cleaning hair from baths. Who generally can see that it's unfair the way command undermines morale. Who accept doubt as strategic advantage. Who in separate beds go to the trouble of making sleeping decoys. Tenderness is, at the same time, touching. The newly shaved revelry of women, woman with a boy flourish, women bent over looking, tenderness, romance: a kiss. Day from last night barely distinguishable in kit. Lovely hair is false of course. Even those bravely set for the occasion: wigs.

WEIRD NEWS

This Building Won't Stop Screaming, And It's Driving People Nuts

Eerie howl is caused by a glass "blade" at the top of the skyscraper.

🕒 12/01/2015 01:00 am ET

I'm all out of love, I'm so lost without
you
I know you were right believing for so
long

I'm all out of love, what am I without you
I can't be too late to say that I was so
wrong



 Ed Mazza
Overnight Editor, The Huffington Post



It's been described as a howl, a hum and a scream. But whatever you call the [weird sound emanating from a British skyscraper](#), it's annoying the heck out of the people who live near it.

Self-Demolition of building A = Surveillance Globe Copter
Self-Demolition of building B = X-Scorpion
Self-Demolition of building C = Duraflex Python

Bank Outlet Mall Shopping Plaza Financial Center Congressional Library City Hall Corporate
Park Bar & Grill Federal Office Supermarket Co-Op Museum Makerspace Gallery Shared
Studio Motel Rest Stop Tenement Trap House Park Bench

These days, they just leave when they want to.

