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Summer 2021

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Clare Daly

Assembly

You/I walked this rock
pressed, atomic in your wanderings.
When you listened
you heard the company of poets
who carried a feeling
of suffering and love
of each other and difference
of the ethics of figuring out what you were
living, grieving.
John Donne's words
a constant co-incident
a spirit animal, a message, a challenge
slipperiness
its power and clarity.

Your inseparability on earth was difficult to hold.

You felt aches, absence, abyss. Time
was divided from space was divided from land was divided from life.
Alienation, enclosure, emptying, rage.
Centuries of meditation on your illnesses touched each other, still.
Insatiable.
Y/our /I/ troubled y/our /we/ so deeply
and things fell apart
in a coming together that felt like release
and was death.

In dispersion our I was propelled towards us
finding our way from violent dis/possession
to accompaniment
to sensing our expansive interinanimation.

With interinanimation
we are learning a different devotion:
time is space is land is life.
We know that
all that is not here now is not absent
no archive
no past
no forgetting.

In this place a citation summons in motion all that we already know
'When love with one another so
Interinanimates two souls,
... We then, who are this new soul, know
Of what we are composed and made,
For th'atomies of which we grow,
Are souls, whom no change can invade.' John Donne
Words in companionship carry, thrumming
going on and on
giving on and on, skipping
over unity and our desire to grasp
to knowing all our relations
our interdependence.

A poethics does not confer with understanding.

Mis/associations offer leaps for sensing
felt words
open worlds
open ethers
making space for ecstatic dissonance.

The ins and betweens of interinanimation teach us commotion
teach us keeping each other alive
teach us gathering.
Elemental gathering.

We recognise the fiction of separation
that tried to keep us bound. And so
walking in our messy chorus
we practice sounding another ethos:
our animated assembling.

Notes

This text emerges from engagement with the writing of poets Anne Boyer, Fred Moten and John Donne.

Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624) is cited in Moten's *Black and Blur* (2017) and Boyer's *The Undying: A Mediation on Modern Illness* (2019), while Donne's term 'interanimation', is taken up by Moten in his study, beginning with *In the Break* (2003).

The cited poem by John Donne is 'The Ecstasy'.

The concepts underlying 'grasp' and 'giving on' are those of Édouard Glissant in *Poetics of Relation* (1997).

Poethics is a practice of artist and academic Denise Ferreira da Silva. Her thinking in *On Difference Without Separability* (2016) in/forms this text.

Kay Gabriel

from *PERVERTS*

then on the 19th I dreamt of swimming in a polluted
river called the Say which was and was not the Gowanus Canal
connecting both sides of the colonial border
I was & wasn't in the mob, I served a boss
with fat cheeks in a nylon folding chair and I also
dreamt about purges
I was a delegate in the National Assembly in 1789
our meetings took place in a pool, I lined up
brightly colored straws on plastic rhinoceros toys
as the blatant symbols of caucus maneuvers
in the dream I was on acid and a very a strong swimmer
I had to be, the bourgeois pool
covered many rooms, I find
a teenage trans street artist to befriend, we make out selfishly
in the dreams I'm a little gayer than in waking life
often in water, surprisingly topsey
though I never did finish lining up the straws

So what would you do as a parish
priest in the 1780s in protest over the salt tax?
A scruffy Jacques Roux bound to himself
dreams of property as an athletic lover
Patrick you dreamt of the CUNY library
on fire, you dove in heroically to save Stalin's
copy of *Capital* although it seems
pretty certain that he never
even read it, still Ruthie arrives to congratulate
you for doing the right thing
then in the same week you dreamt of
a mass meeting of the left
an old-school gymnasium or auditorium
—I'm editorializing here but I can see
this combination general assembly or Historical
Materialism gathering:
white walls, movement egos
everyone's sitting on the floor in their million debates

David Harvey in his 80s addressing the assembly says
something, 'finally', that gets him cancelled
a chorus of hundreds shouts and exits the dream
but you'd been given a job as his minder
the unenviable task falls to you of explaining the debacle
to the confused and sad Harvey
he doesn't fully understand why or how he fucked up
then you took him back to the house you were renting
together, comforted him and put him to bed
logged onto Grindr and got caught
mid-fuck on the verandah with your app hookup
though not by David himself
I'd pay good money to see the caucus theater,
the burning library, Stalin's unread Marx
once you starred in a slightly too cinematic
dream I had in which a bearded Trudeau, Jr.,
arranged in an end of history manoeuver for Ottawa
to be secretly populated by robots
they moved with precision through different parts of the city
he hoped nobody would notice
and maybe nobody would have without,
Patrick, your role in the dream:
you hack the robots such that they stop moving
and start shouting horrible shouts making such a
tremendous noise they upend the peaceable and frankly
boring capital where nothing moves
except speculation at the speed of hoisting bitumen
out of the ground
now it's a place of total noise and chaos, shouting robot shouts
a noise show in a barn somewhere made public like a social wage
Cam has a Merzbow shirt from a show that 'caused him nerve damage'
I like to wear it and pretend I'm the boyfriend, a punching
bag for tyrannosaurus soundwaves
though really I protect my delicate ears
Patrick I'm a sap for pretty shit
Brecht and Artaud make beauty suspect as it
should be and that's their real point of contact
now my broken doorbell is hissing at the mouth like a robot
in Trudeau, Jr's, house of commons
or a parish priest urging arms over the salt tax
Ottawa has shed its clothes of bureaucratic perfection
In the dream the shouting robots allowed something to unlock

elsewhere since Ottawa here and always a city of squares
was consumed by its forever droning puppets and nobody died

And nobody died: optimism!
Well *I* think that's funny
I'm being dialectical so you don't have to
I lived with a guy who said: it won't be
a good revolution if I survive it,
fighting the people's war in Paterson, NJ
crisis escalated me out of that place
and into the expensive hovel, near the Home
Depot, with the roaches and the infuriating smell
the one long-lasting roommate an aging
beauty and a spy for the landlord
remember how I lived with Stephen and Liam
for a month to avoid her?
Then Stephen towered over my dreams like a nightly
impresario. Here's one he had about me:
'I'm at a restaurant with Kay,' he writes.
'We join a table where Margaret Mead is sitting.
Kay is like is that Margaret Mead. She starts
going on super Margaret Mead-type rants. She
kind of looks like Joan Didion'—wait for it—
she starts talking about the last words of W.H.
Auden and transphobia. 'Nobody's more
celebratory of the erotic than trans people,'
I said, in Stephen's dream, at the Margaret
Mead table, or did Margaret say it? Then I told
Margaret about 'fucking boys' mouths on day
2 of affairs.' 'Day 2 is kind of a Margaret day':
In Stephen's write-up of the dream that's in quotes,
So either I editorialized to Margaret Mead about
dedicating the second, mouth-fucking day
of an affair to her, in quiet contemplation, like
a day in the French Republican calendar dedicated
to cabbage, or she inserted herself into my tawdry
affairs to self-dedicate mouth-fucking to the memory
of Margaret Mead and other Margarets. I thought
she was a Christian Socialist, I mistook her
for Dorothy Day. In the dream Stephen's holding
me and spooning me, he feels deep Platonic
love and then 'Kay's also W.H. Auden and I'm crying

because I love him so much and I can't speak.' W.H. Auden is trans, like poetry is a way of happening. Patrick says I'm reanimating his interest in aesthetics, an 'effete kitten he'd long since drowned'. Auden's last words are a 'kind of stuttering monologue about beauty and gratitude throughout which he gradually loses coherence'. There, Steve, did I get it right?

Keira Greene

Piscina

My father is a decorative painter and when I was eight, he went to work in Spain. It was the 1980s and gaudy *trompe l'oeil* was much in demand on the Costa del Sol. This distance enabled my parents' separation and I transitioned to having two homes, spending long stretches in Andalucía in southern Spain, before returning for term time in England.

Salto del Agua, or 'Waterfall', was the name of our neighbourhood where I played with my friends, copying their language, or else, losing myself in the baroque grounds of my father's wealthy clients. In the evenings we were always out, meaning outside, with a group of his friends, the smell of heat rising off everything, and with the sense of a never-ending party. People were tactile, I was shy, but nonetheless enjoyed being caught off guard by strangers.

At that time my mother, who is a gardener but also a painter, eagerly began her arts education in the UK. Because she was a single mum she did most of her painting at home in our kitchen where she dressed in a dark-blue boiler suit and often worked on multiple large-scale oil paintings at a time. The house was creative and chaotic and I recall eating dinner flanked by these paintings, two of which I remember distinctly. The first was Mary Magdalene washing Jesus' feet with her tears. In this case it was the feet of my mother's then-boyfriend with the hair of some unknown Mary draped over them. The other was a rendition of Titian's *The Death of Actaeon* (c. 1576) in which the Roman goddess Diana bolts across the canvas in pursuit of a stag. In her portrayal there was no Actaeon as stag, so all I knew of the story was a woman running and armed.

Since then I've been giving 'the myth of Artemis' the wrong name. Now I know that the root of both paintings, my mother's and Titian's, stem from the story of Actaeon in the epic *Metamorphoses* by Ovid. In Ovid's myth, the divine figure Diana punishes the mortal Actaeon by transforming him into a stag when he stumbles across her bathing.

I am reading Actaeon, it is 2020. I am gripped by the woman Diana—or Artemis in the Greek tradition—and by questions about why she transfigures a man into a stag, the stag who my mother left

out, and who is mercilessly torn to pieces by his own hounds. Does Ovid intend some moral counsel by Diana's abrupt act of violence, where she upends the power dynamic between woman, man and stag?

To follow Diana is difficult, she is pliable but with limited overall movement. For example, in Titian's painting *The Death of Actaeon*, she is depicted running through the forest, perhaps chasing or else fleeing. But in Ovid's poem Diana does not run, she is embedded in a landscape that morphs around her, in which a proscenium arch of plants and rock seems to grow about and confine her.

Below the words that appear in italics belong to Ovid:

It happens on a mountain sometime after noon. Diana is here, naked with tied-back hair. The days heat has created a mirage. Even Diana's name is susceptible. At times she is also 'an Artemis'¹.

I call her Artemis from the Greek tradition; the roots are in 'artomos' meaning butcher. She is Artemis, since this is a grave tale about hunting.

She is found bathing in a *widening* pool in the company of friends. We know nothing of the depth of the pool. We hear none of the women's conversations.

Elsewhere, there is a bloodbath. Actaeon is a young hunter. He stands with his hunting party. The mountain is *stained with the carnage of hounded beasts*. Already the story signals betrayal.

Actaeon leaves the party to go walking; his name is intact. He comes across Artemis as if by accident.

Artemis's friends are washing her *virginal limbs*.² There is confidence between the bathers.

Sacred trees enclose their pool, the group are outlaws.

It is unclear for how long Actaeon is watching, his look isn't described either. Artemis is framed by an arch of calcified rock and *anger* spreads through the tissues of her entire body.

What does Actaeon glean from Artemis's dripping hand? Artemis is an immortal god and he a young buck of a man.

Artemis or Diana, divine as she may be, blushes. Then she uses a splash of water to transform the man into a stag, rendering him speechless.

¹
In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* she is known as Diana.

²
She protects wild animals and virgins.
She is a guard and not a hunter.



He flees and is set upon by his own hounds who maul him to death.

But let's return to when Artemis and the nymphs gathered in *the clear, clean water*. Artemis, a virtuoso guard is *weary* from work and takes a bath.

Ovid, our narrator, has us brushing through the ferns, placing the reader right there alongside Actaeon. This is apparent when Artemis turns around. She does not so much as rotate, as she is wrung.

Artemis is uncoupled from the Elysian scene and warps towards us. She is *stood with her front turned sideways* looking *over her shoulder*. This uncomfortable move adjusts the composition and we become aware of 'our' privileged 'front'.

The reorientation distorts her and it changes her temperament, she speaks as if from outside herself,

*Now you may tell the story of seeing Diana naked
If story-telling is in your power!*

What follows is a hard cut to Actaeon bounding through the forest of his own volition. One by one, Actaeon's dogs enter, each one named before brutally *burying their noses inside his flesh*.

But what about the bathers and their architecture? They are described within *a secret corner* where *nature has used her talent to imitate art: she has moulded the living rock to form the shape of a rugged arch*.

Where do I know her from, this woman, Diana or Artemis?

The narrative jumps abruptly between scenes, each reaching a dramatic peak before relocating us in Ovid's landscape. I move across each scene and orient back to Artemis, compelled by her detachment. She is conspicuously volatile and her volatility is heightened because she is evasive, or rather, because we are given so little information about her. As a god and a hunter, she might take remorseless pleasure in acts of aestheticized violence like this one. But Ovid has her blushing and eludes to her having human-like and 'feminine' passions. Hereinafter how we interpret Artemis's red cheeks too will effectively transform her.

Given the scene's apparent power dynamic—one figure male and clothed, the other female and naked—it would be sound to read Artemis ensnared by misogynistic order: Actaeon *saunters* into the *unfamiliar* glade and the women react in *horror* with *re-echoing*

screams. Since Artemis cannot defend herself with her weapon, she *used what she could* and splashes him with *vengeful drops* of water.

However, rather than through a prism of shame, I choose to understand Artemis's response in terms of arousal, an incitement to emotion; self-conscious as in, alert to her environment. The intrusion engages her defensive nervous system commonly known as fight-or-flight. Her heart rate increases, and her blood pressure is higher, causing her *crimson glow*.

In this piercing moment, where her autonomy is under threat, she intuits in an instant that there is a possibility for redemption. Metamorphosis happens as a cut in the timeline, the flash of oblivion in which narrative is irreversibly reconfigured.

In an act of aroused refusal, she rejects the responsibility of Actaeon's desire. The catalyst for her wilful act is perhaps informed by her contradictory godly duties; Diana or Artemis was understood to be the god of wild animals, hunting, chastity and childbirth.

What ultimately transpires is that Artemis sends Actaeon back into the landscape, formerly *his* landscape where he had roamed freely, but now he returns without language and so this is a fable that signals responsibility.

I invited Artemis back.

My mother says she has the painting rolled up somewhere, she has moved house half a dozen times since she left our 'family home'. It was called 'Riverside', a 1930's semi-detached house flanked by a main road and a river. When the bathroom walls had begun to crack my father came and painted faux marble veins to 'tie them in'.

In my mother's translation of the Actaeon myth, the form of a woman moved through thick orange and brown paint with a cobalt blue bow cutting across the dense earthy tones. She was bold, filling the frame and moving at speed. Now I too have uprooted her for my work, in the film *The Hide* (2021) dance artist Katy Coe is seen running in the forest in a tracking shot where the camera persistently holds her in frame. It is night time and car headlights follow her, but this is her car, we have just seen her get out of it. She falls to all fours, crawls and then rises to her feet and continues running.

For my mother and myself at least, her forward propulsion matters, even if this is a gesture held in stasis as-in painting. In the myth itself her variable and slippery subject position is her most intriguing quality and to keep that in flux has been our familial duty.

Artemis responds to Actaeon's intrusion by spilling water at him, an act of revenge in which her godliness passes through the water and mutates him. Or, perhaps it is the liquid and not her gesture that possesses supernatural power, performing an elemental mutation from water to flesh.

To ask whether Artemis has supernatural powers is to wind up in a cul-de-sac, but if we attend closely to her gestures we might find that the drama they incite stirs up within us—the politics of arousal.

A gesture can cause a grievous or emancipatory transformation, for example, the separation of a family, speaking another tongue, becoming animal. Attending to gestures that we re-perform may reveal something of their complexity, hidden in plain sight we may find libidinous shame, wilful vulnerability, the mutability and the muscle memory of previous experience.



Paul Hughes

To suture a wound open

(with thanks to Hamish MacPherson and Clare Daly)

I don't want to be small, small, sad

I want to be big, big, sad

I want to make a pageant of my grief

—serpentwithfeet, 'mourning song' (2018)

1.

I started to embroider my clothes about two and half years ago. It was a cheap and immediate of shifting how I was presenting myself on the street, and an attempt to salvage the more bland contents of my wardrobe. I gradually became more and more interested in reworking t-shirts, as a smooth, ubiquitous and anonymous staple of menswear. I found out later that they're a pretty uncommon material for embroidery; not only because of their low value, or how quickly they wear through, but due to their stretchiness: there's a high risk of the fabric bunching up around the stitches. It presented a very technical challenge. I became obsessed.

These embroidered t-shirts began to make their way to friends as gifts, or in exchange for favours or their own artwork. Hand-embroidery is a pretty slow and labour-intensive medium; I often think of it alongside stick-and-poke tattoos, which have had a resurgence over the past few years. Like my embroideries, these hand-pricked tattoos are an intimate and restrictive medium of drawing steeped in subcultural economies and friendships. But whereas the tattooist works directly on the body, the t-shirts I embroider are a surrogate skin, that I work on and then post to the wearer across distance.

Over the past year, I've almost exclusively been embroidering wounds. I began with St Sebastian: the patron saint of faggots. A cream arrow with green feathering pierces the front of the t-shirt; a blue-white arrowhead emerges out the back at the right shoulder, spilling out big drops of purple-red blood. Where the 'skin' parts, we can glimpse chunky semicircles of vivid red, dull pink and deep blue. The next was smaller and more discrete, but more grand in its theft. Jesus' final wound reappears as an inch-wide wavering slit across my right ribcage—a vivid froth of French knots that oozes

yellow and blue that trickle down to my hips. Martyrdom never looked so good.

Making and publicly wearing these wounds felt outrageous. But as peers expressed their admiration, my nervousness diminished and I became more curious about this idea of ‘surrogate skin’. In contrast to how my formerly semi-abstract designs simply ‘floated’ on the t-shirt, the wounds have a more direct relationship to the body that wears them. But what do these ruptures—adorning my body, and the bodies of my friends—actually do? Whose wounds are these? And what is happening as these garments are slipped on and off?

2.

I want to write from this practice—from a year of wounds, wound-making and woundedness. But it feels risky. I want to be careful, and make my inexperience clear. ‘To suture a wound open’: I’m no philosopher of trauma, or grief, or surgery; and to be honest, I don’t even know that much about fashion or needlework. In order to resist easy generalisation, and to try to account for some of my blind spots, I want to speak directly from my own experiences of woundedness—physical, emotional, sartorial or otherwise.

But I hesitate. And this isn’t just the artist’s generic fear of how their speech might close down the potential meanings of their work. There’s a more specific risk at play here to do with the ethics of speaking from woundedness. To speak of wounds is not to speak of scars: to narrate my body’s history through the now-healed traces of its encounters. Wounds are open, live, and relational. The wounds in my life—the ones that trouble, linger, throb, leak—are all deeply bound up with other people. These are conversations that haven’t yet been broached; things we can’t bear to name or address; that which can’t be touched without causing pain. How can I be accountable in my writing to those who are inextricably implicated in this woundedness?

Any presentation of wounds can easily become their weaponisation. I know my own readiness to play the victim—to demand attention, to beg for mercy, to disavow responsibility, or to covertly position the other as an aggressor. I think of Maggie Nelson writing about her attempts to reconcile her long-term commitment to highly intimate writing, with her partner’s strong sense of privacy.¹ One solution to this problem is to just approach whoever it is and ask their consent: Nelson recounts going through an early draft of her book *The Argonauts* with her partner Harry

Dodge, over which they both have the opportunity to challenge, clarify and make demands. But that strategy requires a degree of proximity and dialogue. The relationship that has most intensely haunted me for the past few years is one in which any attempt to address our still lingering material and emotional detritus leads to months of emails left unanswered and calls not being picked up.

How does one write from a relation of which there is no consensus: just pure vibrant fissure?

3.

I’ve been watching videos on YouTube about how to sew a wound closed. They demonstrate on these silicone kits: little beds of peach-pink wounds in a various shapes—long, wide, wavy, branching. Whereas the needles I use are straight and long—and thin enough to pierce the t-shirt’s tight fabric without tearing holes—surgical needles are curved, almost like fish hooks. I can quickly see why: with each stitch, the surgeon needs to curl the needle back out to the surface. Unlike the t-shirts, you can’t simply reach into the interior of these bodies and grasp it from the other side.

As I sew, the thread is continually passed through the fabric to ensure it is secure and hangs tight. Instead of producing long lines, each stitch is a bulky little atom; which chains together to form a complex image. So when thinking about embroidery, I end up looking less at work in pencil or ink than I do at mosaic.

And I’ve noticed something else that these two media hold in common. While Western painting in the Renaissance was getting obsessed with pictorial illusion and spatial depth, Byzantine mosaics retained their flatness. Rather than these icons being a window into a different and three-dimensional space, the figures they present occupy the same (sacred) space as the viewer: ‘The image is not a world by itself; it is related to the beholder, and... exists only for and through him.’²

Similarly with my embroideries: they propose no fictional depth, but instead sit on the surface of the body of the wearer. But I think that wounds, in both cases, pose an interesting question. If there is no alternative space being presented, then what can we glimpse in the crack of the wound? This inaccessible ‘inside’ being

¹
Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*
(Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2015)

²
Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration: Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 7.

conjured is only ‘here’ to the extent that it registers as ‘not-here’, as ‘there’. What is this other space: the wearer’s body? Their interior psychological life? Or the interior of the t-shirt itself, as a semi-autonomous entity?

4.

What I wrote before about my consideration for others in writing about wounds sounds quite reasonable, but is not really the whole story. My hesitation is also just me being terrified about speaking from my pain.

How should one speak from disarray? We tentatively touch at our wounds—and suddenly pull back at the occasional flashes of sharp pain—in order to develop a sense of their contours. I think of the narratives I have drawn from to make sense of myself: of growing up in the homophobia of Catholic Ireland in the nineties and early noughts; of what bell hooks terms as the ‘psychological terrorism’ enacted on those raised male;³ of the ‘personal incoherence’ that James Baldwin describes as the psychology of whiteness.⁴ Or I think more closely about the idiosyncrasies of my childhood, and how I and my immediate family might be shaped by a generational cascade of mute trauma and grief. These discourses are not just potential elaborations of the contingencies of my life (queerness, maleness, whiteness, my childhood, Dublin, etc.). Each of them is also a way to account for my possible self-estrangement.

But knotted into this not-knowing is an intense self-consciousness—‘when we are ashamed of ourselves, we know what we have done and we know that it is terrible,’ writes the psychotherapist and essayist Adam Phillips.⁵ My shame—that mismatch between who I want to be seen to be, and who fear I really am—both obsesses me and forms the limit of my thinking. As Phillips puts it: ‘shame may be the thing we are least able to adequately respond to... We can suffer our shame... but we can’t read it.’⁶

³ bell hooks, *The Will To Change* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), p. 47.

⁴ James Baldwin, ‘The White Man’s Guilt’ in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays* ed. by Toni Morrison (New York: Penguin, 1998) pp. 722–727.

⁵ Adam Phillips, *Attention Seeking* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), p. 43.

⁶ Ibid. p. 46.

My hesitancy in speaking from woundedness is not because I don’t think it is valuable or urgent work. It is. But it is also tricky and vulnerable. And the different contexts in which we might do that—this publication, for example, as opposed to a conversation with close friends or a therapist—holds different risks for both the speaker and others.

But maybe this points towards the function of metaphor—both within, but especially outside of these more intimate spaces—as we experiment with how we understand ourselves, and present ourselves to others. Trying to ‘figure out’ exactly what these wounds-as-metaphor stand in for overlooks the significance of their imprecision, vagueness, untethered-ness. To slip on one of these embroidered wounds might be to test the declaration of being wounded—of being heartbroken, hurt, in disarray, completely fucking miserable or unsure or at a loss—without yet demanding of ourselves to be able to account for the nature of that pain. Phillips refers to this process—finding movement within the tight bind of shame, to make visible to others the parts of ourselves we find unbearable—as ‘style’.

5.

One of my nicer jumpers was recently savaged by moths, so I have been learning how to darn. And as I was weaving clumsy meshes across these holes, I wondered what it meant for my needlework to be so meticulous in the sewing of wounds, yet so casual in their repair.

There has been a recent surge of interest in notions of ‘care’ in contemporary art—often citing the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles⁷—that draws attention to politics and practices that are feminised, made invisible and un(der)paid. A lot of needlework can get quickly framed within this discourse, but I’m wary of my embroidered ruptures getting too neatly swept up within a crude narrative of repair.

I think of another legacy of artists: of Franko B’s open-veined catwalk ‘I Miss You’;⁸ of Rocio Boliver’s performance ‘Between menopause and old age. From the other side’,⁹ in which she

⁷ Mierle Laderman Ukeles, ‘Manifesto for Maintenance Art’, 1969. Available here: <https://feldmangallery.com/exhibition/manifesto-for-maintenance-art-1969>

⁸ Franko B, *I Miss You* (London: Tate Modern, 2003).

methodically pierces herself in a temporary and all-body ‘face-lift’; of Jesse Darling’s exhibition ‘The Ballad of Saint Jerome’¹⁰ with its thicket of precariously extended crutches, a wide-eyed lion holding itself away from Saint Jerome’s ‘help’, and the gaping hole knocked directly in the gallery wall.

What I am drawing from this constellation of different works is how they offered me and other viewers rare and prolonged encounters with woundedness. And something about how startling those experiences were suggests to me a wider social and cultural imperative that many of us in the twenty-first century West might be living under: a continual propulsion toward and demand for smoothness, wholeness and bodily integrity. I read these artists—variously working from HIV-positive, trans, ageing and disability perspectives, aesthetics and politics—as resisting this ideological imperative, by seeking ways to exist in states of porosity and incoherence without being consigned to the realms of abjection, medicalisation or victimhood.

My intention here is not to pit ‘woundedness’ against ‘repair’. Nor am I trying to devise some beta-male take on ‘chicks dig scars’; or even suggest that we should solely read wounds through the celebratory frame of bodily self-determination. Instead, I’m interested in how we can have a relation with wounds that does not immediately seek their disappearance—either through their exclusion, or by escaping them, or through suturing them closed.

Rather than ‘empathy’ (the presumption of ‘shared feeling’) or ‘sympathy’ (a pitying ‘feeling for’), the term I reach toward here is ‘compassion’. ‘Com’ (‘with’) + ‘passion’ (‘pain’): to be present with another’s suffering. What does it take to encounter open wounds and to bear their presence: to recognize and resist our frantic urge to erase them, even when cloaked in rhetorics of healing, repair or care?

6.

About six years ago, my dad was diagnosed with motor neurone disease (MND), and given a life expectancy of nine months. The disease is pretty horrible. It usually first sets into the hands, feet, mouth or throat, and attacks your capacity to move

9
Rocio Boliver, ‘La congelada de uva / Between menopause and old age. From the other side’ (London: Steakhouse Live, 2014).

10
Jesse Darling, *The Ballad of Saint Jerome* (London: Tate Britain, 2018).

yourself—your ability to grip, stand, speak, swallow — before progressing throughout the body.

It doesn’t affect the brain or kill you directly. Those who suffer MND must make a series of decisions about what they are willing and can afford to undergo in order to stay alive. My dad has been bed-bound for about four years. He has undertaken a tracheostomy—a surgical procedure into the base of his neck, through which an artificial lung pumps air into his body — and a gastrostomy—so that food can be injected directly into his stomach. Since he lost his capacity to physically speak and write, he communicates entirely through a computer screen via eye-tracking software; looking at each letter in turn on a screen to slowly type.

Before he undertook these surgeries, he decided to move to the other side of world. We have a pretty terrible relationship—and the situation in which he lives makes it complex to visit for a number of reasons—but I was able to make the trip a couple of times. To turn up, even when there was no real basis for honesty or trust. I didn’t go there to speak venom, nor to simply turn the other cheek. I wanted to be as present and open as I could bear. To bring lightness and jokes to his prolonged death-bed, but also love (bell hook’s definition: ‘care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication’)¹¹ with all the challenges and discomfort that necessitates. And it was pretty uncomfortable. It took me a while to figure out what I wanted to say, and could say. But I did speak—I think with honesty, openness, with compassion, and also all of my limits and blind spots — and listened to what he had to say in reply.

Since then, I have been sending him audio messages on WhatsApp about once a week when I go walking in the park (when I run out of things to say, he can listen to birds and other people passing by). There’s still not a lot of trust, and I’m still pretty guarded, but since the more turbulent conversations in person, there’s a clearer sense of how we can have a back-and-forth. He likes the messages, and usually replies with a brief note of thanks.

Last month, he let me know that he is losing his capacity to read and write. He will soon no longer be able to read or send messages, or to communicate with those around him. Given the likelihood of Covid-19’s continued disruption of travel in the near

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bell hooks, *all about love* (New York: New Visions, 2001), p. 5.

and mid-future, I don't anticipate being able to visit him again before he dies. But even if I could physically get there, there is no possibility for another such conversation that could shift our relationship.

I don't feel regret. I think I said what I could. It's more a sense of: 'Oh... ok. That's what that was, that's where we got to, that's everything that it will have been.' I will continue to send him WhatsApp voice notes; speaking more or less whatever comes to my mind; seeing if the ticks turn blue, signalling that someone has pressed play for him to listen; until they stop turning blue, and someone tells me that he has died.

When I write of being wounded, I am not imagining some final (or original) counterposition of wholeness. Rather than ever achieving such a moment of total stability, our understanding of ourselves and others will always to some degree be unclear and unresolved. This is indelibly part of what it means to be in relation. As Judith Butler puts it: 'ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human.'¹² We can only work with what we currently have—our tools and understanding, but also our inarticulacy and obliviousness—in our attempt to go beyond ourselves.

7.

I follow a lot of accounts on Instagram dedicated to Eastern Orthodox icon painting. They are replete with wounds. And like my embroideries, these wounds are often spurting blood: glamorously, excessively, casually. Wounds are not the most clear-cut shape; they can easily end up just looking like a slug, a blob. To really register as an orifice—to evoke this sense of interior-exterior—it's best to have them ooze or spray fluid.

But after littering a few juicy wounds around the torso, I got a bit bored. Beyond merely the proposition of being wounded, I began to wonder: what can we do with these wounds? What do the tears in these t-shirt-bodies make possible? What can they hold? Things began to emerge from, sit within, or hook onto these crevices.

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Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p.215.

A nail, a dagger, chains, medallions. And flowers: alstroemeria, chrysanthemums, roses, long grass, Himalayan balsam, stonecrop.

A wound is a portal in the body through which we can penetrate one another—like Jesus inviting St Thomas to finger him—and in which foreign life can enter us and thrive. But as much as the wound is a place at which the world enters us, it's also where we can pour ourselves out into the world. We issue forth blood, spit, semen, tears, piss and pus as rich and generative material to be smeared, soaked up, licked and ingested; with which we can nourish one another, and form various kinds of kinship.¹³ Huw Lemmey's rewrite of Hildegard of Bingen sees her drink from the wound of her companion in a simultaneous act of healing, and communion with herself, all others and the divine: 'It was just me and the wound, and behind the wound, the girl, and inside the wound, the world.'¹⁴

Wounds are a place that we spill into the world, and the world spills into us. All of which is to say: for better or worse, our wounds have indelibly shaped the ways we have built our lives. Before we sew them closed, we might pay attention to what has taken root there, and what they have let thrive.

8.

I tried to write about the long list of people for whom I intend to embroider t-shirts. About being guided and nourished by a network of (mostly unsalaried) artists, activists, thinkers, spiritual leaders, and organisers. About what Ursula Le Guin wrote of the relationship between our mutual recognition of our capacity to suffer, and the possibility of us acting in solidarity.¹⁵ And about the economy of images of wounds, and what Hannah Black writes of the long tradition of white people transmuting images of Black people's suffering "into profit and fun".¹⁶

My embroidery practice is steeped in these ideas. But I suspect my impulse to end this text with these wider politics and networks is

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Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp.84–96.

14

Hildegard of Bingen and Huw Lemmey, *Unknown Language*, (London: Ignota, 2020), p.180.

15

Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, (London: Gollancz, 2002), p.52.

16

Hannah Black, 'Hannah Black's Letter to the Whitney Biennial's Curators' (2017), *e-flux conversations*. <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/hannah-blacks-letter-to-the-whitney-biennials-curators-dana-schutz-painting-must-go/6287>

mostly driven by my embarrassment about (what I perceive to be) the self-absorbed nature of my writing. The spotlight I have placed on myself here is mortifying; was I just trying to get you to look the other way? I sew these embroideries. I write these words. I continually look back over these stitches and sentences, and consider how these materials are differently imbued with a sense of tautness, vulnerability and un/certainty. What do I imagine they offer you, the viewer or reader?

I dither. I begin to recognize that I have gotten stuck at the question of 'how to close?' I had set out to write from wounds, wound-making, and woundedness. Of course I would get stuck here. Our wounds are, by definition, things about which we have not yet formed 'closure'. Does my obsession with these embroidered wounds point to some kind of inability or resistance on my part to forming closure; a reach towards some kind of living-without-closure? I think of my heartbrokenness, my grudges, my obstinacy. The love I insist on, and refuse to let go of.

I'll finish by leaving it open.

Laura Jane Lee

fish wishes from a 2-chambered heart

- 1 to make no choices
- 2 to heed the matchmaker's order
- 3 to be brokered something you can swallow
(see: a coin, or affection)
- 4 to be tender, and fresh
- 5 to carry my own flesh to the sea
- 6 to swim these careless bones
- 7 to hold a mouthful of plastic questions
- 8 to consider cardiac anatomy foolish
- 9 to be simple-hearted
(instructions: give, take, give, take)
- 10 to roam seven seas with five fins
(last seen: pacific)
(missing: dorsal fin)
- 11 to be unbound from the island
- 12 to cut through this hill
(see: Mount Davis)
- 13 to be coated with optimism
- 14 to escape marination
(ceviche: bitter, sour, spice)
- 15 to roll up the gate every morning
- 16 to not know that time is a thief
(stolen: light, shadow)
- 17 to have the long years throw themselves
- 18 to know that this is still my life
- 19 to finally allow myself to sleep
(on: his bed)
(see: beside him)
- 20 to lose count of the days
- 21 to be restless under my skin
- 22 to keep me my scales
- 23 to talk about the weather
(that: which i have i weathered)
- 24 to sit by the window
- 25 to let him hold me
(under: storm and sun)
- 26 to wish as a fish can
(see: in a net)

Sticky Metaphors: The Matter of Meaning

Exposition

In living with an awareness of the entanglement of matter and meaning, words have consequences. If you directly translate a metaphor from another language into the one we are speaking, chances are it will carry the shape of the idea but not the historical context. Metaphors reveal connections that have become embedded within a culture to the point of passing unremarked.

One day in the past I wrote urgently: *I will be as attentive as possible to my use of metaphor in my writing. I will be mindful of the implicit ideologies embedded into certain metaphors and try to invent alternatives. I came to this writing with a fear of metaphor, grounded in feminist critique of the patriarchal and imperialist power of language as representation. However, while language is indeed an ineffective tool in conveying the complexity of the material world, it is also a tool that I have. Rather than disavowing metaphor, I will seek to engage with it creatively, engaging with its etymological root of 'carrying across'.*

Metaphors have several components: the 'tenor' is the concept and the 'vehicle' is the image that carries it across. Leaning too hard into the vehicle of metaphors risks cutting away the tenor, the *weight*, of what they're describing. My favourite writing often asks the words to hold tightly to the dual roles and responsibilities of tenor and vehicle, to pack a tense density into metaphors that troubles the insistently not-yet-dead Western notion of the separability of matter and meaning. Leaning into metaphor so the weight of the tenor holds your body in place in the vehicle makes some of the co-constitution tangible; what's present, what's excluded, and what's cutting the present-and-excluded together and apart. It collapses some of that distance. Both/And. Carry over.

Cutting together and apart (entanglement)

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Karen Barad describes how matter and meaning are entangled. Each apparatus—boundary-making practice—makes 'agential cuts'. Barad is initially writing about observing electrons in the lab; how they can behave differently depending on which apparatus is being used to observe them.

But she extends her point that there is no ‘outside’ from which to observe ‘objectively’ into a call to responsibility based on the collapsing together of ethics, ontology, and epistemology: matter is performative and discourse is material. Each cut of a boundary-making practice into matter-discourse excludes certain possibilities in order to make others intelligible. An electron appears as a wave or a particle or both, depending how it is observed.

To give something a name or a category is a boundary making practice. A name brings different possibilities of meaning nearer and farther. A category formation limits or enables, effecting those captured within it and those excluded beyond its boundary.

There is no separability between the boundary-making practice that cuts, the intelligibility it produces, and the matter that uses this intelligibility to make meaning. What the boundary-making practice excludes—cuts out, cuts away—always remains present, even if it is not knowable to the intelligibility it co-constitutes, cuts together. Barad calls this ‘exteriority- within’.

Some humans use managerial language to hide or elide the violence of boundary-making cuts that deny the intricacies of interdependency and its responsibilities. In this system of globalised racial capitalism, names like ‘detention centre’ or ‘managed extraction’ mean toxicity and death for many to pay for profit and property for some.

Transformation-in-relation (working models)

In the week-long residential workshop ‘*Mobilis in Mobili: On Space, Time, Motion, and Forces*’, organised by philosopher and physicist Gabriel Catren for non-physicists and physicists alike,¹ participants use language to make transitions and translations. We move between thinking in spacetimes that feel different to the experience of being on Earth, and the tactile and conversational space of the room where we are learning while sitting on sofas, listening to music in the breaks while birds look in the window.

Wild use of metaphors abounds over meals as people who speak humanities try and integrate maths and physics into everyday

¹
The workshop was held at Performing Arts Forum, France in September 2018. Performing Arts Forum is a building run on principles of self-organisation by members where individuals or groups may stay for relatively low cost.

The reproduction and sustaining of this space by all those who inhabit it is a central aspect of spending time there. Sometimes people organise specific workshops there, such as this one, which are open to all who respond to the announcement.

speech. During the day ‘geometry’ was a schema of axioms; now it means ‘a mode of arrangement or relations’. I have struggled with visualising the matrices used to plot the four dimensions of objects in motion. Over dinner I start to use ‘matrix’ to mean ‘complex field of relations’. The poetry of ‘worldline’ attracts like a gravitational pull. I *think* it means the totality of all of the positions a particle holds in space and time while it holds to one identity; here it speaks to the stories of matter and the paths I track for orientation through spacetime I have learned how to feel in limited ways. The word ‘intuition’ gains density and strength; a valuable, and fallible, guiding tool that connects to non-linguistic ways of knowing that stretch space and time. A question that’s used frequently to open conversation is, ‘What is your intuition on that?’

In this multi-disciplinary space people listen carefully to each other and ask thoughtful questions trying to understand one another’s ways of doing things. These conversations happen while bodies cook or stack the dishwasher repeatedly; side by side joint attention on an external object can make it easier to share verbally. Eye contact checks crucial points of meaning but bodies provide most of what is necessary.

Someone explains to me that mathematicians do not have to speak great English. There is less pressure on words because they can use mathematical formulae. It can hold working models for to all who know it regardless of what other languages they think in. This form of abstraction holds its poetics differently than words—the expressive texture isn’t as loose, the axioms are firmer, the parameters of the abstract space are more transparent—but it’s no less weird or wild.

In this learning space, the workshop leader uses working models instead of metaphors. We’re thinking beyond the visualisable dimensions and properties of space and time on Earth so we stay grounded with thought experiments where dimensions and properties of space and time off-Earth can be broken down into proofs. *There is a train leaving the train station. Inside the train there is a clock and there is an infinite array of clocks all along the train tracks. The train and the station and the clocks are all in a vacuum...*

Interlude (unnaming)

We met in the overburdened garden. One of us was already not comfortable identifying as he and had yet to find an articulation for this feeling, but soon would move quickly through they into she.

Another of us was freshly out of a long-term relationship feeling the pressure of liminal fertility. One was me, she then, not now. Summer and sage stroked our skin and the resting containers of sun tea. We read, sat beside one another, with texts laid out on the horizontal planes around and between us.

Reading beside,² not through or into, just with. Looking for ways to talk, without names,³ about what ways of knowing might be possible through the end of the world.⁴ We were trying to apply our words differently to the world, to not rely on the pieces of code that we'd built in our schools, our friendships, our amniotic sacs, our visits to government offices, our experiences of being employed when that was still a thing, in all the times we'd done something we didn't want because someone else did, and in all the times we'd made someone do something they didn't want but we did. We were searching for a metaphor-less methodology for collective thinking. Reading transversally, without a singular guiding line, without shortcut words to make maps of shortcut worlds, we fumbled.

Transformation-in-relation (fermentation)

Fermentation is a metabolic process where one compound is broken down through anaerobic respiration into other compounds. For example, a carbohydrate can be fermented into alcohol and carbon dioxide. Fermentation has been used figuratively for a long time

2

One of the pieces of paper was a photocopy of page eight of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003). There, she proposes 'beside' as a prepositional relation that carries more plural (and spatial) possibilities than 'beneath' or 'beyond', which invoke linear time through a focus on either origin or telos. In her argument, 'beside' is non-dualistic, for multiple things can be beside each other and need not be equal, equivalent, or oppositional. So 'beside' offers a mode with which to avoid the dualisms of a variety of linear logics, not only temporal ones.

3

Other pieces of paper held a print out of Ursula K Le Guin's 'She Unnames Them', a short story originally published in the *New Yorker* in 1985. The story describes the aftermath of a societal process of unnamings living beings from

categorising nouns: 'I could not chatter away as I used to do, taking it all for granted. My words must be as slow, as new, as single, as tentative as the steps I took going down the path away from the house, between the dark-branched, tall dancers motionless against the winter shining.'

4

Yet other pieces of paper held a printed-out scan of Denise Ferreira da Silva's 'Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World' (2014). That paper works through two questions: 'Would the poet's intention emancipate the Category of Blackness from the scientific and historical ways of knowing that produced it in the first place, which is also the Black Feminist Critic worksite? Would Blackness emancipated from science and history wonder about another praxis and wander in the World, with the ethical mandate of opening up other ways of knowing and doing?'

to speak about activity and agitation—passion—usually now in relation to the production of ideas and cultural objects. The word 'ferment' itself comes directly from the Latin: *fermentum* for the noun, *fermentare* for the verb. This latter may itself be a contraction from the Latin verb *fervere* (to boil or foam). The Proto-Indo-European root of *fervere* is *bhreu-*, which I speak in words for food, fire, water, and feelings: *bread*, *bratwurst*, *braise*, *burn* (the Scottish word for stream), *brew*, *barmy*, *brood*, *embroil*.

Columbian artists' collective Laagencia have a practice of creating open programmes called Escuelas de Garaje. The event I write about here, 'Escuela de Garaje—vol. Fermentation', took place in August 2020 in and around an art space in Rotterdam called Rib.⁵

We were sitting, standing, moving in the long art space in the neighbourhood where many artists were sitting in subsidised real estate. Some in the neighbourhood were building mutual aid, open-source infrastructures, and friendships with neighbours who weren't artists; some were grumbling. For the first time, the window to the long art space invited entry.

Laagencia had painted basic information across the large shop window about what was happening inside, when, and said that anyone could join. They kept the door open and played music out into the street: salsa, cumbia, reggaeton. People who wouldn't usually come in stopped by to listen and chat.

Fermentation was encouraged in weekly practices of reading, open kitchen/bread-making, and visiting places together. Laagencia's gatherings were accumulating a larger, looser collective to mind out for the fostered bacterial cultures. Microbial life was being centred and given human attention. Already-ongoing neighbourhood activities of food production and anti-gentrification organising were also being centred.⁶

5

Laagencia describe themselves as: 'an office of art projects that promotes investigation and processes in art + education, stimulates debate on artistic and instituting practices, experimenting with different strategies and methodologies of work to propose formats of mediation, public programs in collaboration, self-publishing exercises, and alternative ways of doing with others... The project is made up of five artists, without any kind of hierarchy, all of them are directors, producers and participants.' <https://laagencia.net/laagencia/> [K's translation.]

6

It is beyond the scope of this text to adequately address the long-term gentrification of Rotterdam. Present in the events I describe are multiple complex local histories of the ways in which some artists have been willingly instrumentalised by the municipality in gentrification processes while others have been active in anti-gentrification movements, the particularities of European white supremacy in the Dutch context, and a regional experiment in running a municipality as a neoliberal form of service provider.

I joined for ‘ferment readings’. People talked, listened, settled, stirred, ate, drank, read, together. Someone brewed coffee. Someone sliced bread. Someone talked about how they made the drink in the bottle they held. Someone put a piece of electronic equipment into a mason jar of polluted river water to learn if microbes might grow in the relation of these substances. Someone cooked sourdough pancakes made with leftover starter on a hotplate. Someone washed cutlery. The long art space was filled with life. The table gave bottles and jars of differently coloured liquids and pickled foods; hand-written labels. The reading happened incrementally but non-linearly, by consent, each chunk digested slowly with conversation about lived experiences and effervescent connecting of ideas and matter.

In the practice of Laagencia, fermentation is happening literally and figuratively. They activate multiple processes of transformation-in-relation that remind the humans engaging in these processes of the fragility of the epistemological structures we have been given at school that prop up the state we are standing in, feed its extractive economy, and, in this Dutch neighbourhood six meters below sea level, produce the very ground we are standing on.

Fermentation insists there are many ways of knowing and being that are not to do with profit and property. Bacterial boundary-making practices create possibilities that humans depend on for life. Around these processes of transformation and onto-epistemological humbleness, fermentation as metaphor supports the gathering of heterogenous groups through its affective power. In their self-published pamphlet *Garage School Fermentation*, Laagencia write: ‘Through fermenting we learn that matter and metaphors can still be changed.’

Cutting together and apart (listening)

Listen to your body, to your dreams, to your intuition. Listen to the voices of your ancestors, to what the Earth is telling you.

These are things some people say and other people understand but some people find troublesome. The trouble accumulates around the questions of whether listening is meant literally or figuratively, and where might the edges of literal or figurative be. In Western traditional thought, listening describes what happens when some humans perceive and understand sound. Often it is connected to the ears and the brain, sometimes to the body. But the separation of the senses into touch, taste, hearing, sight, smell (and the subsequent expanding list of nerve-neurology perception pathways with names

like proprioception, pain reception, temperature sensing) is only one way of making this cut.

As a thought experiment, imagine someone raised in a Western knowledge system who experiences the senses as separate and their body as autonomous and independent. Perhaps for this person, listening is a sensory modality where it is easier for them to experience themselves as porous in relation to other life, to feel that their body is an integrated system that cannot be disconnected from other systems. Perhaps this experience and the collapse of separation, autonomy, and independence it invokes is why sound is often gendered and racialised into noise or why sound is used so often as an instrument of torture.⁷

Like sound, skin-to-skin touch of human hands is also sensed as an oscillating wave of vibration through the nervous system. Current ways of thinking say that what is being vibrated differs (air, flesh) and the nerves and brain region processing the vibration are different. But that is only one way of cutting this experience into intelligibility. A different cut, towards the category of the waveform rather than the parts of the human it is waving through, could say that what is happening in hearing and touch perception is more similar than different. With this cut, we’d need to find more words for what we experience when we listen to mechanical, electromagnetic, or gravitational waves as they move through us.

But sticking with the cut of listening being about sound, we still grow complicating connective paths among what the cut has just separated. Following Pauline Oliveros, if listening is hearing—i.e. the sensing and perception of vibrating sound waves within a frequency range that stimulates the auditory apparatus of animals, *plus* the integration of what is being heard into a form of meaning—then listening is an accumulation of experience and memory.

But sound waves don’t only vibrate within the frequency range of the human auditory apparatus. Some humans learn to interpret technical instruments or the behaviour of non-human life and matter who do sense that frequency range. Listening here involves

⁷ Noise is an imprecise category, with contextual meanings in different forms of practice or disciplines of knowledge. It has frequently been mobilised in multiple different ways as one side (bad) of a highly mobile (following the moving needs of a power structure) good/bad binary.

Persons, beings, forms, or sounds can be coded as noisy following multiple logics of white supremacist imperialist patriarchal oppression. For just a few examples across a range of disciplines and oppressions see: Weheliye 2005, Kheshti 2015, Stoeber 2016, Thompson 2017, Steingo and Sykes 2019, Robinson 2020.

reading through the accumulation of memory and experience of a trained listener, like a seismologist or a cardiographer. But experience and memory (even only of sound) don't only live in the brain; they live in the body and its environment, and through cultural and spiritual practices. What kind of listening listens to them?

Robin Wall Kimmerer, botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, makes this cut: '... we say that we know a thing when we know it not only with our physical senses, with our intellect, but also when we engage our intuitive ways of knowing, of emotional knowledge and spiritual knowledge. And that's really what I mean by listening.'

If I wanted to propose a non-extractive and non-dominating listening then it would need to attend to and integrate what has happened and been repressed from experience and memory, and become aware of effects that are not compressed into a waveform but experienced or remembered in another way. Listening as a description of this more-than-sonic experience might become a temporary metaphor for the kinds of attention and awareness that English doesn't have so many good names for, like how Fred Moten and Stefano Harney define hapticality in *The Undercommons*: 'the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you.'

This is listening as poly-sensory, poly-temporal experience. The frame of this listening is understood differently than in Western scientific understandings of human hearing—listening involves listening to 'sounds' that are not normatively 'sounded', and entities that do not produce sound in a normative way are entities one can listen to. It is possible to listen into times other than the present. This listening is a collective activity, in relation with others, although those others do not have to be humans; different forms of life and matter are interdependent and co-constitute the listening possibilities. Understanding is not the only intention and may well not be achievable. Listening to plural ontologies, epistemologies and cosmologies asks for learning from their plurality of stories, memories and experiences; things known and unknown; beliefs.

Coda

We slip into metaphors comfortably like worn-in shoes, borrowing their easy clarity. Metaphors can carry affective energy for gathering political collectivity to change practices of thinking and doing. They can connect actions and materials to ideas and feelings.

Depending on how they are used, they can also conceal power. Leaning too hard into the vehicle risks losing the tenor. My metaphors are mixed and made in relation to yours so, how do we take care of them and mind where we are as we use them without fumbling too much?

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Aisha Mirza

m4ry k4te & a5h13y

I don't remember much from the dream except those reeds that stick out the sides of wetness. Cattails they're called because i just googled them coz i don't know much about anything, but i know it was a war zone. The hills and ponds were pretty but the bodies lifeless and red in that english way. The cattails balancing fat and gold on skinny green stems. Just right they were and all and minding their own business, you know how it is. The scene was idyllic and haunting, a moon, and i was far away but predictably indicated. There was a recital, like a poem or a eulogy but when i woke i could remember only the words 'your body is yours and not your children's' which was my sign to get my tits pierced.

It's not something i hadn't thought about before. i'd always fancied a nipple piercing for the secret metal and the fuck you, felt very drawn to it in fact. but upon research found out that if it goes in weird you can be left with scar tissue that inhibits your ability to breathe which pre poem-eulogy felt like too much of a risk. I don't have kids, and 10 years later, though the body modification spiral lives on, i'm not sure i'd ever want to do it biologically anyway coz idk that just feels a bit sus. I had sex with someone i was mistreating the same night i got it and i saw how they sucked more enthusiastically than usual. The next morning my nut had swelled up so big they had swallowed the metal but i was calm on my way back to the shop because it felt like retribution.

i didnt understand much and i guess i still don't but of course i was already familiar with my body as a site of punishment. with my body that would pleasure me and punish me in unequal measure so that i could feel free and not free and free and that i'd be encouraged towards it and into my body but my god sometimes it feels good to leave. Now i know how i feed u regardless of the triumph of my boobs and that is freedom but it took a sec. It took the white boy on his knees giving head to the air between us and it took a wounded puppy crawling to me from the edge of the bed nothing but hunger in their eyes. im the only one.

I couldnt breathe in binders and i mean i know no-one can but i was anxious all the time in a way that felt worse than avoiding my reflection and i can't make my mind up long enough to do anything more permanent than that and in that way im a failure too.

When i told my therapist i prefer being naked to wearing clothes they were shocked but i explained that i dont like being naked either and everyone calmed down but i do like to climb rocks naked as a crab at the trans beach my shell cracked open like a fairground that does feel very good for me.

I suppose it's weird because i had a chat with myself to approach the idea of not feeling so awkward and frumpy about th3 g1r15. to have myself adhere to some kind self imposed binary around wanting them or not you know it's not that difficult is it but i struggle to feel just one thing about anything at all which is why i will always stand by the fact i hate sports and cooking and people who say they're on their way but refrain from giving a clear time estimate because life is too short to approach everything with nuance. Anyway the conclusion of that particular selfchat was that i should try being a slut which presented a challenge because i dont want anyone to touch me before they've written me poetry or cleaned my kitchen but like how about embodying the essence of sluttiness you know with my ch3st.

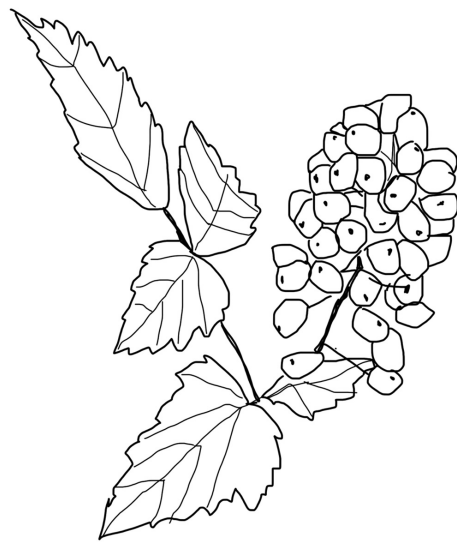
When i reveal my b050m to an audience and they cheer i think it's funny because i left my physical body hours ago when the lights went down and the techno (why are you playing techno) started. Sure, i feel embodied but it's not a thing of flesh and bits for me it feels more like playing. like teasing and hide and seek and dress up though i've never been a style queen but you want to watch anyway. It's about the power of the ju9s and It doesn't hurt me any more when drag queens take their big juicy silicone baz00ka5 off and place them on the counter but it might again one day and maybe that's my secret now.

D Mortimer

RUGMUNCHER

Unlawful Eating & Irreversible Change.

This essay as forage looks at themes of dumbness and wonder, wellness and invalidity in the context of 2020. The forage consists of toxins and delights in equal measure. Hungry creatures feature. A copy of *The Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare (1609) finds us en route.



1. Eat food. Not Too Much. Mostly Plants.

The fear of invalidity is, at heart, the fear of contagion. My fear of catching Covid is the fear of being changed unalterably. It is the fear of being mauled or eaten by a bear. It is the fear of death. It is the fear of disability. My horror at the news or at the testimonies of survivors is partially a selfish terror that this might happen to me or the ones I love. Vaccines act by infecting the dosed with a small amount of virus. Testimony and news reels stimulate the scenario-generator in the brain by populating the imagination with the virus. Phantom aches and pains result. On listening to a survivor's testimony we might gasp and say, 'how awful, how sad.' The fear is that we, too, will be unalterably changed. Catch something bad. When my girlfriend got Covid, she said to me, 'will people hate me?' She thought she might be judged or that her friends—the ones she had seen—would be pissed off.

So too with AIDS discourse in the eighties. In the tabloid imagination, 'Gay Cancer' was sordid, dirty and associated with promiscuous homosexuals and sex workers. And a spectrum of 'good' and 'bad' AIDS quickly developed. Junkies, sluts and bottoms got bad AIDS. Whereas, if you contracted the HIV virus from a cheating partner in a heterosexual relationship or a blood transfusion, you had the good kind. The homophobia, racism and whorephobia around AIDS led to interventions such as 'ALL PEOPLE WITH AIDS ARE INNOCENT'. In 1989 the AIDS activist group Gran Fury, strung a banner with this message across Grand Street, Manhattan.

Susan Sontag wrote that there are two worlds, the world of the sick and the world of the well, and that we all cross—have crossed or will cross—this ethereal border. Some return. Others do not. There can be a 'wrong side of the tracks' logic to health that corresponds with moral and ethical judgements. Like you must have done something wrong to end up in council housing. That it is somehow the fault of the sick or broken that they are sick or broken. To my girlfriend I replied how during this pandemic we had been guilty of casting the moral judgements she was worried her friends might—not because they had weight, but because we were afraid. I have strayed from Hackney marshes, the setting of my pandemic summer. I am not there now. Perhaps I never was. It didn't feel real. Summer never feels real from the perspective of winter. The heat of our winter beds is artificial, either centrally heated or generated from without in bursts of fever. The domain of the unwell is densely

thicketed, with out-of-date maps, shady figures in the undergrowth and white humanoids in PPE. Viruses work in binaries. Zeroes and ones. Positives and negatives. You have Covid or you don't. But that doesn't mean there isn't a hinterland.

The Winter's Tale | Shakespeare | 1609

TLDR: jealous king Leontes falsely accuses his wife Hermione of infidelity with his best friend Polixenes, and she dies. Leontes asks his servant Antigonus to exile his new-born daughter Perdita who he believes is the result of the affair. Antigonus is eaten by a bear on his mission. When Perdita returns after sixteen years, her mother Hermione, in the guise of a marble statue, 'comes to life' and everyone is reconciled.

This is a play concerned with hinterland. The play begins in the court of Bohemia but we encounter the bear on the country's margins. The bear's entrance, which is an exit, happens on a border. He bisects the drama; signalling the end of part one. Shakespeare decides to invent an imagined coastline between Bohemia and Sicilia, where the bear happens upon his royal victim. 'Not until the bear appears is the illusion of reality firmly broken' says Burr (p.424). The eating of Antigonus happens off stage, outside of the social and symbolic order of the play. The bear himself, unannounced, un-signposted and uncalled for symbolises a wildness that is uncontainable in the institution of the play.

The strongest thematic strain in *The Winter's Tale* is the fear of contagion. Both sexual and racial. Convinced of his wife's adultery with his childhood friend Polixenes, King Leontes is seized by feverish jealousy. 'Out! Mankind witch!... I'll have thee burnt,' he rails against his wife's servant Paulina for protecting her. On first reading I assumed the use of 'mankind' here meant human. I believed Leontes was comparing Paulina to a chimera, a human with supernatural powers. But no, the word 'mankind' in Shakespeare's time literally meant mannish, butch or as my Penguin volume defines it, 'Virago-like'. In threatening to have Paulina burnt at the stake, like many pagans, healers, hermits and 'rugmunchers' of the period, Leontes is exhibiting his fear of sexual contagion; a theme that underpins the play in my view. Paulina's queerness, like a pox, must be contained. And purification by fire was seen as the cure.

There is a racialised aspect to the world of the sick and the fear of contagion. In *The Winter's Tale* a dark, outside force unbridled and virulent threatens the purity and health of the royal bloodline. King Leontes believes his wife Hermione is pregnant with his friend Polixenes' baby. Ironically, it is Leontes himself who corrupts the royal bloodline. His fantasy of adultery breaks apart the nuclear family. He imprisons Hermione, who later turns to stone partly because of his accusation. And she remains a statue for sixteen years before miraculously returning to life in the final scene.

While Hermione is a statue she remains in an induced coma of sorts. She cannot reproduce whilst she is a statue. The royal bloodline is stoppered and everything, including potential virus and infection, cannot live and breed whilst she is frozen. The dramatic petrification of the mother and the banishment of one royal child and the death the other all shatter the illusion of an immortal and homogenous body politic. Viral infections also shatter the myth of the homogenous whole. Symptoms isolate. They break up the body. At the GP surgery, I pinpoint and peripherise. I complain of a sore throat pointing to my neck, or to an ache in my joint lifting up my trouser leg.

Although he contributes significantly to the plot, the bear is missing from the original list of characters in the text of *The Winter's Tale*. 'Time' is named as a character, but the bear is not. Loping about, betraying his trauma in his gait, the bear is the contagious Other. He is covered in dark fur, impure and unclean, dangerous and stupid. He eats unlawfully and with abandon. No airs. But grace, yes. He comes from the wrong side of the tracks and strays off stage to munch beyond the symbolic order. He spoils gentrification. The laws he abides are not organised by human society.

The statue of Hermione is the bear's counterpoint. She is white and pure. Her transformation is into herself. She does not disrupt the sanctity of the family by changing badly. And she changes back. In the Ovidian tradition mortals who are changed, do not change back. It is like a God and not a mortal that Hermione traverses forms without consequence. Hermione is coded as feminine and graceful when she thaws. The bear, however, is outside the strata of morality and language. He eats anything that moves. There is a parity to his eating practice, he eats when he is hungry, converting men into energy. He is neither fussy nor prejudicial.

In the world of the sick, the ill person needs guides and foragers, people with tinctures and blessings, kind words and a good bedside manner. The ill person needs the soothing properties of a witch.

The NHS was designed so that all may receive equal care. And no one turned away through lack of funds. No one judged because they drank too much or took bad drugs, or because they chain-smoked their way to the cancer ward. In practice, of course, the NHS is an institution structured by race and class hierarchies. But the premise is healthcare for all. The practice of mutual aid, growing in this country due to the pandemic, has the potential to be increasingly based on moral judgement and material wealth. Individual donors decide whose access to healthcare is valid and which fundraisers are favoured, meaning more widely shared. The strategic crumbling of the NHS by the Tories will force further moral judgements like this.

‘You saved me,’ says Michael Rosen, on Radio 4, of the NHS after his recovery from Covid-19, ‘and you didn’t know me, you cleaned me up. You did all the things that mothers do’.

Visitors are no longer allowed. A spell in hospital is now a voyage you must take alone. The doctor or nurse will be your guide to the underworld. They are the forager you must take on route. The advice is, when taking hallucinogens, to always have someone there to hold your hand. Someone you trust and you know. And be outside. That’s important. And in nature. If you can. The ill person must be held and led by those who have held and led those who have gone before.

On the hospital trip the doctor is a stranger. That is singular. In great pain, in altered consciousness, strangers become friends and friends become strangers. There are maps. But they don’t always work the way you expect them to. There are stories. Testimonies and tales. Cling to them. Really there is only trust. Trust in your body. Faith in medicine. In the doctor. Trust in the speechlessness of miracles, I guess.

Hospitals are full of drugs that will make you see things. They are places we change. Where things are put inside us. *This is good for you. This will make you better.* The hospital is also a wood. Where bears are hunted and negotiated with. And we are not out of the woods yet.

‘It is required you do awake your faith’ — Paulina,
The Winter’s Tale, V.3



2. Hackney Marshes

Christie has been enjoying the marshes. In black.

2020's weirdness has brought many people to the boggy stretch of marshland that cups the River Lea. Someone, a *Guardian* journalist most likely, renamed this part of London the 'Hackney Beaches'. Though I haven't really heard anyone use that term in real life, save my mum. 'The Marshes' is more common, as in 'Meet Me in the Marshes' an event organised by Liquid in July where I read some of my poems. It was the first event outside of my house that I had attended in months. The giddiness was infectious. So anomalous was this social freedom that I woke up the next morning inside a panic attack. 'Was that safe?' *jitters* Red circle emoji.

For the event I decided to read a dense essay on the Statue of Liberty. I had spent most of the afternoon editing it and going over it with my patient gf. But on seeing the gay soup, a mound of people joshing affectionately and leaking techno I questioned my decision. As we became a larger pool, laughing-gas merchants gravitated, spying the waiting trade—and waiting *trade*. Here is where the marshes do feel like beaches. Instead of cold cerveza, mostly black NOx hustlers make canisters say pssssssssssssssssssssssssst to the delight of bleach-blonde white gays. The weighted realities of race and class dog the cottage-core fantasy. I scratch the Statue of Liberty and opted for a few poems.

Christie was in black that day. An internet friend, made super Real supplanted in acrid soil. She lent me a vogue, indefinitely. We chatted in a way that was fun but wasn't easy. Whether because of the months of hermitage or a trace of sexual tension, I couldn't tell.

Hot days dip the marshes in a chloric yellow. As you wind from Lea Bridge Road over Friends Bridge, the calypso grows louder. The beats carry fast over the quickening current. Families have been playing all summer in this water. Outdoor pools are closed or prohibitively priced. The pumped-out calypso is accompanied by the percussive slap of hands on wet backs and yelps. I see one kid fling himself in joyous peril off Friends Bridge. With anxiety I await the bob of his head as an expectant dad might—listening for the mewl of his newborn. Mamas wring speedos from sopping to damp up and down the bank.

The scene is frenzied but photogenic. The water, which is cool and clear belies its true toxicity. The Lea is the filthiest river in the country and sometimes contains raw sewage. Figures released last year by the UK's Environment Agency indicated that every river

in the country contains greater levels of chemicals than are healthy for humans. The council are loathe to reveal how often sewage run-off is let into the Lea, but my friend has an app which tells her when it reaches cross-bones levels of danger. Local lore advises not to swim after fresh rain. Dusty swims. He takes his dates here too. I have swum here only once, high. 'When you think it's time for you to get out, it was time for you to get out five minutes ago.' A Josie Mitchell proverb.

From Friend's Bridge there is short grass straight ahead and bulrushes and pylons to the right. These pylons feed the GPS, which loads up all the dropped pins, leading huffing guests to all the outdoor 30ths necessitated by the pandemic. You will see the aluminium signifiers swaying in the breeze. Giant silver Zeroes wrap themselves round bulbous Threes.

Christie has dropped a pin. She is by the pylons. There is a mattress stuck far up in the spikes that puts me in mind of that Andy Warhol print. After a car crash, a body is skyrocketed into a telephone wire. The seat they flew from: spring-loaded. What was the cause of this grimmest, and strangest of happenings? What energy and force propelled this person? I think about Frankenstein too, and electromagnetic life forces. Warhol's hair. Galvanism and late eighteenth century experiments. The job of the mattress is made absurd by its home in the pylon spikes.

Christie has thrown herself into the marshes.

She has been taking them on academically. Reading up on the history and meeting with foragers, or a forager rather. John is his name. They went on a mushroom tour. She made a so-so pasta with her findings. He showed her this spot above the river, behind a wall, where the concrete juts out, just so. It is here we meet on a hot afternoon. John's spot is large enough for a picnic blanket. In a freer country it might have found use as a launching pad for browning bodies to dive off from. The blanket Christie has splayed is white-checked, I spill beer on it, apologise. A dog gets lost near our spot, sniffs his way down to the water, jumps in and struggles to get back out. His owners fuss. The bathers try and shepherd him to a low enough bank—'it will act like a ladder!'—'Bruno, Bruno, come on Bruno!' We feign anxiety, confessing our feline allegiance in hushed tones.

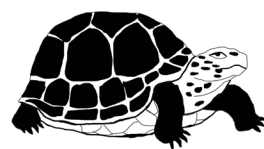
Later a turtle floats by. He is both in and out of context, like Shakespeare's bear.

Exit: Pursued by an amphibian.

The surprise turtle interrupts our chat on polyamory.

‘If we were poly,’ Christie says, ‘we would have been too absorbed in our own drama to even notice the turtle’. The reptile, taken by the current, dizzy and flapping, is resigned to its fate.

I tell her about the Unicorn Garden, and she tells me about the bears. The Unicorn Garden is a new cruising spot erected for Covid times, outdoor sex being more ‘secure’. I’m still not sure if sex was actually illegal for a little bit in lockdown? Was sex with people outside of your household illegal? I think it was. In Germany they issued safer sex guidelines which included masking up and doing it doggy. True to form next time we meet Christie has researched the Unicorn Garden and has found out where it is. ‘It’s in Walthamstow Marshes over by the train tracks,’ she says. ‘Should we go?’ I don’t suspect a Guardian journalist made up the name Unicorn Garden. It is touchingly millennial. And might be as mythical as it suggests. I like to think it does exist and queers with lilac hair are wandering nakedly in a glade somewhere, levitating out of knolls and not touching. Instead of fucking they are just bumping gently into each other’s force fields with blissed out faces, the way Mario does when he reaches the outer limit of code in Galaxy 3. We talk about going. It will stay talk, not least cos I like my unicorns mythical. And sex, more often than you think, is better mythical too.



3. The Marsh Bear

December 1981, London.

The voice of a white male reporter crackling over the radio for LBC.

'The discovery made by four young boys brought big game hunting to the unlikely setting of Hackney Marshes. The lads were walking their mongrel dog Lassie yesterday lunch time when they came across large footprints in the snow. The dog sniffed them and refused to go on. The boys called in the police but despite a brief search they were unable to find any trace of the animal so the boys went back onto the marshes after nightfall with their torches and it was then that they spotted what they were certain was a bear behind some bushes. Tommy Murray who is twelve got the closest.

Tommy: well, it growled and it just stood there on its hind legs! They started running and I was still standing there for another, well 'bout another seven or ten seconds and I started running after 'em.

Reporter: Did it come after you?

Tommy: No

Boy: It stayed there didn't it?

Tommy: It just stayed there, we was running, got the police and then they come with all the equipment and that.

Reporter: How frightened were you?

Tommy: Errr, terrified.

His twelve year old friend Darren Willoughby was sure it was a bear.

Darren: As soon as I saw it I turned and ran.

Reporter: Are you sure it was a bear?

Darren: Yeah

Reporter: Have you seen one before?

Darren: Yeah, I've been to the um zoo that's what they asked us at the station.

Reporter: And you've seen a brown bear before?

Darren: No, not a brown bear but I've seen a bear.

Reporter: And what sort of a bear was this one can you describe it?

Darren: Well not really all I saw was its arm and it was just like brown.

Ten year old Elliott Sanderson also got a glimpse of the bear.

Elliott: As I shone the torches at it the bear come through the bushes, it stood up on its hind legs like that and put its claws out like that. He stood there shining the torch at it and us two and this 'nother boy started to run.

Armed police immediately rushed to the scene. Crack marksmen from the Scotland Yard's blue berries squad, armed with powerful rifles, were ordered to shoot to kill. London Zoo experts warned that if it was a brown bear it would be too dangerous to try and capture even with tranquiliser pellets. They sent officials to try to identify the footprints. A helicopter with a powerful searchlight was put on standby but fog prevented it from taking off.

Inspector Dave Jordan of Hackney Police: Well we treat anything like this seriously its obviously for the publics own good that we treat it seriously.

Reporter: What have you actually made of the tracks so far?

Jordan: A large animal tracks but what sort of animal we don't know.

Reporter: What sort of thing have the zoo experts suggested?

Jordan: They haven't suggested anything yet they're still studying them.

Police believe the incident may be connected to the discovery of two bear corpses in nearby Bridge Road canal three weeks ago. The bodies were headless and they'd been skinned but so far that mystery hasn't been solved.

4. The Human Bear

When Christie told me about the kids in the eighties and the bear on the marshes I thought about the bear in *The Winter's Tale* running in and out of the action at the same time. I thought about this essay too which was foaming in my head. I knew I wanted to call it RUGMUNCHER and for it to be about unmentionables and speechlessness. I knew I wanted it to be about bears and eating fur.

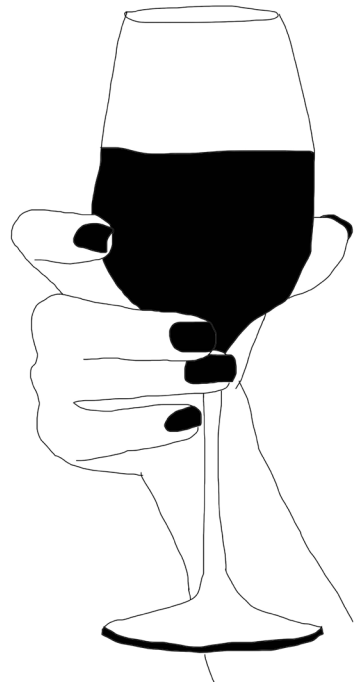
When the kids first see the bear they report feeling terrified. Although each kid must have set out in search of his own idea of the bear, the reality of the bear was just too hard to believe. When Christie told me the story I had started and stopped T a few times already. And hadn't quite decided what my new fur meant. I had set out on my own expedition of what masculinity was to me, and found the reality unbelievable. Not quite turning and running. But yeah a little bit that. I am yet to grow into my fur. I wasn't sure about what it meant then or now. But sometimes when I am foraging for the right word I find myself stroking my moustache.

Expressions of terror and wonder are hard to tell apart and even harder to make legible. What comes first, before the terror—before the wonder, is always disbelief. Which is another word for speechlessness.

The moments of terror and wonder in *The Winter's Tale*—the exit/entrance of the bear and Hermione's resurrection from statue to life are mirrors of each other. Both instances involve the animation of upright effigies. Queen Hermione's resurrection is an example of Ovidian metamorphosis. The bear too is a changed and charged Leontes. The 'good' King and husband is transformed by jealousy into a rabid tyrant. These metamorphoses then, cannot be rent from questions of Protestant morality. For there are good and bad types of metamorphosis it seems, related to reversible and irreversible change.

Hermione would have been played by a youthful boy or gender-queer person. The statue becomes a woman in the context of the play and the man/transfemme becomes a woman in the context of the players. Sublimation reigns in *The Winters Tale*. Both events of metamorphosis toy with euphemism (a man in animal-drag eats another man) as well as notions of hiding in plain sight. Similarly a double metamorphosis or prosopopoeia, is performed in the character of the bear, who hides his human maleness in a bear costume to consume a human man in the production.

Louise Clubb notes that the ability of the bear to stand upright is what makes the bear in pastoral theatre seem 'both more and less terrible than other wild beasts, because it is humanoid, capable of upright posture.' The bear belies belief. A human effigy. It is tragic and comic, cuddly and ferocious, a wild beast waddling like a man that has been clubbed on the head. Intoxicated.



5. The Toxin

A rainy afternoon in Aldwych. Summer 2020. Enter Orion and Marlo. Two friends. They are sheltering from the downpour inside an empty wing of Somerset House. Orion paces under an arch, remembering an encounter with a bear. Marlo squats on a radiator, listening.

Orion saw a bear in Nebraska

or was it Alaska ?

'Stay still. Then run away or else it might catch ya!'

Big bad paws and un-filed claws.

'The bear, no joke! Had a salmon in its jaws'

Marlo: 'Were you scared?'

Orion: 'No, because we had the forager, I mean ranger, with us and he knew what to do. Also there was a river separating us. And the bear wasn't like bears I'd seen in pictures. I remember thinking he looked hungry, thin and a bit mangy. The man said he was behaving weirdly too—going to charge and then stopping—like there was something wrong with him you know, in the head. The ranger said he thought he'd been tampered with somehow.'

Slurred speech can mean booze or drugs. Usually spring-back-able-from but sometimes—something inside has been Ovidian-ly lost. Slurred speech can mean something somewhere has been corrupted, chemically or neurologically. Lobotomised like chalk from a cliff. It is uneasy-making, the slurred speech, because the person can look fine—no blood gushing, no twisted limbs—but the slurring implies something has gone wrong.

Butter hulk
in the midday sun

reshaped by a buzzard to a block.

On holiday in Alaska, Orion could only dimly perceive there was something wrong with the bear just by looking at it. It took the ranger's practiced knowledge to confirm this as true. And he did so by reading the battered braille of slurred behaviours in the bear. The way it was charging and halting, charging and halting was not normal for a bear. But normal enough for the ranger to diagnose the problem from the clues of mal formation, mal treatment or 'bad' culture performed by the bear. These constellations of trauma betrayed themselves in the way the bear dramatically behaved over time.

Something poorly looked after is vulnerable to slurs. All the bears in Shakespeare's London bore the scars, within and without, of their experiences with humans. In the case of verbal language what makes a cuss-word legible as a slur is its derogatory meaning. In 'bad' or taboo speech the assault is contained in the word. It is the word that mauls.



6. The botched fresco

A slur is a bad or faulty representation. A botched fresco is a type of slur. When news hit of Cecilia Gimenez's botched restoration of Elias Garcia Martinez's *Ecce Homo*, thousands descended on the sleepy town in Borja, Spain where the painting adorns a church. The fresco, colloquially known as Monkey Christ is sometimes known as *Ecce Mono (Behold the Monkey)*. Gimenez, who is in her eighties, restored the damaged fresco in good faith and with the priest's support, only to be later ridiculed for the cartoonish representation of Christ's head. In 2016 Gimenez herself told *El Pais* that 'sometimes, after seeing it for so long, I think to myself, son of mine you are not as ugly as I thought you were in the beginning.' In November 2020 an amateur restoration of a statue in Palencia drew comparisons to *Ecce Mono*. Maria Borja, Vice President of Spain's Association of Restorers and Conservators is quoted in *The Guardian* as saying 'Non-professional interventions mean that artworks suffer and the damage can be irreversible'.

Father, this prayer

Is for everyone that feels they're not good enough

This prayer's for everybody that feel they're too messed up.

For everyone that feels they've said

'I'm sorry'

too many times.

You can never go too far when you can't come home again.

That's why I need...

faith.

Kanye West, *Ultralight Beam*

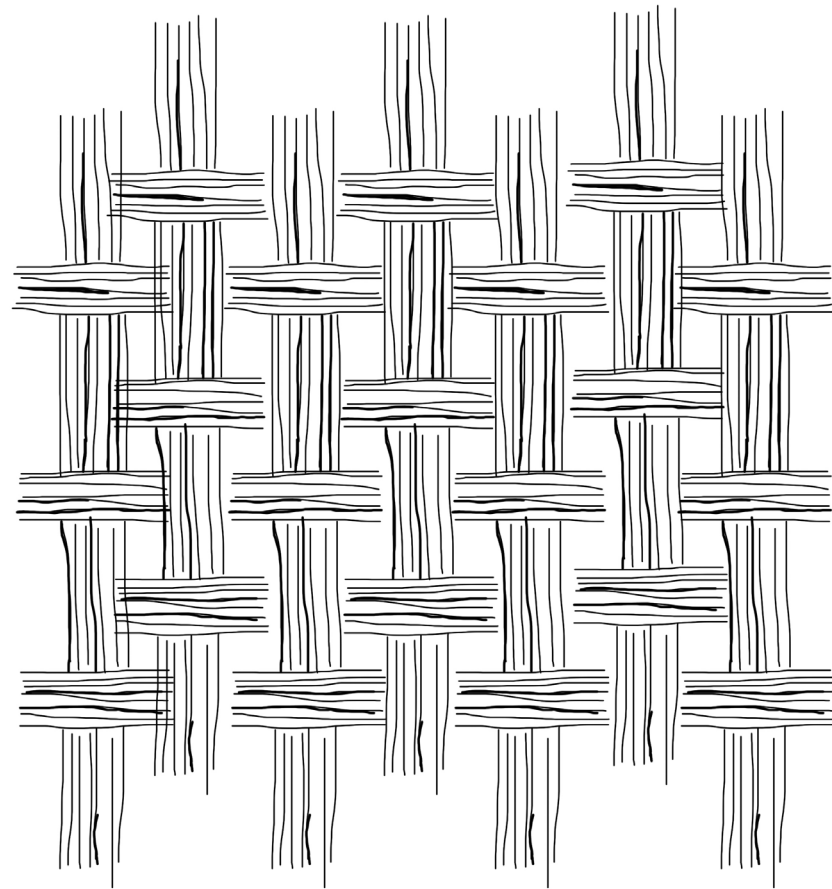
Human intervention with a fresco or statue is a type of individuated formal metamorphosis within the form. It is the attempt at a return to the before. A botched fresco sparks a response in the viewer close to a fear of mal-formedness, invalidity and deformity. The word *mal* in particular is useful here, as a word in French meaning bad,

wrongful or ill. In English, mal- is used as a prefix in the words malformed, malcontent, malnourished and maltreated and is often used to refer to abuse and neglect.

When Joan Jett was asked if and what she would edit about her past she replied: 'I don't think I'd change anything; the bad forms you more than the good.'

A bear cub or essay plan is a slur, a draft. When I don't know what I am making yet. I am still licking it into shape. I suppose it matters whether your actions are in good or bad faith and whether you intend to harm or restore. The Gimenez fresco proves that what might be first perceived as a harmful act, if done in good faith, can over time achieve ascension. The Centro de Interpretacion art centre, which opened in 2016, is dedicated to Gimenez's viral restoration.

The bear is nature's slur. Before being licked into shape by his sculptor-mama the bear is a wet ball of fur. The mother uses her techne to shape the little fluffball into something that looks like a bear. Cecilia Gimenez refers to the botch as her son. She forgives him for being ugly, she loves him regardless—without condition, without judgement. As his mother she performs a reverse fresco lick. She licks the fresco out of shape with the stroke of her sandpaper tongue.



7. The Rugmuncher

I have only been called a RUGMUNCHER once (to my face and to my knowledge) it was one of the first slurs I was ever called. Isn't it a delicious phrase? So tactile and rude. It was funny and strange—when I heard it and later gathered what it meant, the word seemed to tread the boards between comic and tragic, even then. It is archaic and clandestine. Or crude. Yeah, crude. As a phrase it does something similar to those other antiquated gay slurs: shirt-lifter and fudge-packer. But I prefer RUGMUNCHER. The textures involved are better than cotton or faeces though those are perfectly fine textures too, annoying together. Liam Orr called me a RUGMUNCHER after dark. I was sitting drunk on a pavement with my girlfriend; belched out from a nearby party. We were in each other's arms. And this group of boys from school walked past. 'Rugmunchers,' Liam muttered under his breath. I remember being a little perplexed, not really hurt or upset just kind of confused. I hadn't heard it said before and it seemed weird that Liam, who was usually very quiet (people fancied him, I thought he was eerie) would know what it meant and be moved enough to say it out loud. He was a touch Tom Riddle. Liam Orr. This silent white boy. The type to torch insects in his room with a magnifying glass.

Because of the pandemic I haven't been licking my lips or wiping my chops with my hands. Even though now they say the risk from surfaces is negligible. So, after drinking brown drinks, my new hair catches the droplets of tea. 'Saving it for later,' Gramps would say.

I wanted to write about fur initially because my moustache was growing due to me taking T and then I wanted to talk about speechlessness because my voice was doing different things because of taking T. Swirling feelings of mostly bad irreversibility accompanied these changes y'know because *nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so*.

Before they prescribe you T, the psychiatrist lists possible outcomes and you have to say how, theoretically, you feel about them. It's not a test but it feels like one. You have three options: positive, negative or neutral.

Fur: upper lip Fur: belly Speech: altered Fur: chin Fur: arse

Can I trace my transition in my partner's face? She looks at mine more than I do my own. Can I map my changes in the seasons of her expressions? She is convinced her belly button is growing hair, and that like the wet clay of Hermione's lips, I am starting to rub off on her. The hairs on my belly I notice first. There were seven to ten lone black ones, now there's a whole ant trail. Dumb I am to the hairs on the backs of my thighs. They cannot tell me that they are there. I was oblivious of them until recently, when the angle I was in while bottoming afforded me full view of their base camp. There was this new coating of hair where before there was none. It wasn't the gradual noticing of the belly button procession, my back thigh hair was just suddenly there. At this moment in my transition I encounter parts of myself in increments, or in tales told by other people.

Most of the language that human's use is internal. Like 60% of the time or something we only use words to chat to ourselves. We speak to ourselves, silently, all the time. Noam Chomsky believes this is why 60,000 years ago a group of hominids in East Africa developed the gene mutation that allowed human language as we know it now to develop. The mechanics of language have not mutated again since then.

It is hard to conceive of intellectual thought without internal language. Chomsky proposes that this mutation allowed for a way of silently talking to ourselves. And that talking to others evolved secondary to this. According to Chomsky internal speech allowed for more complex decision-making processes to occur and enabled humans to process more abstract ideas like love and grief. Speech, thought about in this way, is actually speechlessness.

*One line between speechlessness and fur is, when I go down on you
I am made dumb.*

This is the most compelling connection for me.

And the most sexy. Oral sex is, ironically, not oral at all.

It is speech-less-making.

It is hard to talk—sensibly—with your mouth full.

%.£\$

What's hotter than the perversion of eating fur and never getting full?

'Yes,' Liam said softly to himself, holding the word in his mouth, rolling it on his tongue, saving it for later, before releasing it into the air, 'Rugmunchers.'

On MoMA's website they say the fur-lined tea set invites delight and disgust and that fur repels the tongue and that a teaspoon was made to drink with. Fur does not repel the tongue. It might quash speech. In the way that fish bones are used to filter wine. But it's not repulsive. RUGMUNCHER, I like the opulence of it, and the connection to traditionally feminine forms of labour—weaving, meal making. I like the decadence of the Wildean tea set in Oppenheim's cup & saucer, the hum of gossip and shine of chintz. The feminine space of the vessel. A chapel. But also the levelled up domestic drudgery of doing the washing up. A luncheon in fur is something a 1940s Cate Blanchett-looking lesbian might extend an invitation to. I like how the curls of the fur on the tea cup look like licks. And the connotations of service and pleasure. Wet pelts. Hidden welts.

When we were fucking I wanted to be talking to her and when we were talking I wanted to be fucking her. The slur is ugly in every sphere except music where it means the smooth movement between notes.

Fuck me slurly.



8. Conclusion: The Crisis of Legitimate Consumption.

In *The Winter's Tale* the threat of contagion arises in the suspicion of a perversion in the royal bloodline. The fear that produces Leontes' rage at the start of the play, as I see it, is not one of non-reproduction but mal reproduction. That is, reproduction of the wrong sort: the replication of a gay gene to be exact.

When Paulina the Mankind Witch bids Hermione the statue to unthaw Leontes, bystander, says:

If this be magic, let it be an art as
Lawful as eating.

Lawful in this sense means normal and healthy, puritanically speaking. Lawful in this context means benign. In lending this patriarchal, judicial air to proceedings Leontes hopes to inoculate his wife against her proximity to lesbian sorcery.

What is it that compels Leontes to pronounce so desperately the lawfulness of this unnatural event? Reminds me of Prince William saying, 'we are very much not a racist family.' His fear of impure magic and heresy underscores his caveat. The antonym of benign is malignant: meaning 'ill', meaning 'wrong'. Malignant connotes the push of a virulent infection.

I believe Leontes' real anxiety is his eldest son Mamillius' infectious effeminacy which bobs whack-a-mole in his baseless accusation of his wife's infidelity. The shame and repulsion he has for his son is sublimated into rage at his wife and his best friend Polixenes, the 'twinned lamb' with whom he shared his own profound and arguably queer love for as a boy.

Eating, like magic and queer behaviour, can be regulated but never totally prohibited. This is why, although it may come off as barbaric (unlawful) for the bear to eat Antigonus it is not against nature for it to happen. 'The necessity of eating is a law of nature that all laws of reason have to respect.'

Eating is a practice—like magic.

Think of all the spells that involve eating and imbibing. The many *eyes of newts* and midnight mushrooms. The taking of victuals, the quaffing of oils. Magic is eating and eating is magic in that eating is always a becoming—a metamorphosis.

Statues do not need to eat. In the sixteen years that Hermione is a statue, she hibernates, awaiting spring and the return of her lost daughter. But wait, if she does not require feeding, what is Paulina doing in her thrice daily visits to chapel where the statue of Hermione is in hermitage? Paulina's visits correspond with the number of meals in a day. If they are not sharing meals together, could it be they are sustaining each other in other ways?

I do not agree that 'eating is a law of nature, an artless art as lawful as survival'. Not everyone in this play is lawfully permitted to eat in order to survive. There are those in the play, notably those who lack language, baby Perdita and the bear, who must fight for their survival and risk starvation. Paulina too, must maintain a heterosexual face of legitimate consumption in order to survive. She must consent to Leontes' order at the end of the play. She must marry his servant Camillo in order to eat. She must keep one eye swizzled upwards, one pointed below in order to feed herself. She has the apposable vision of an apostle; St Paul to be exact.

IF THIS BE MAGIC LET
IT BE AN ART
AS LAWFUL AS
EATING
RUG

Why did Shakespeare choose the word 'eating' rather than 'breathing' in this quote? Surely breathing would have made more sense. Both are 'God-given' in that we don't have to learn how to do them and both abide by nature. Eating is vital to thinking and to internal speech. But so too is breathing? And we can survive longer without eating than we can without breathing?

But eating is distinct from breathing, it includes taste and it includes pleasure. Eating is what animates us, what lends quality to life. The word eating in this context of legality brings us right back to the bear and his aristocratic appetiser. My friend Don would call this jungle justice. The wild bear supping on Antigonus. In his lecture *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2002) Jacques Derrida analyses human supremacy. He examines 'the unique sense of exception that characterises both the monarch and the animal: neither is subject to the law.' The sovereign is above it, he says, calling it into existence. The beast, is below it. What laws govern the space between borders in *The Winter's Tale* where we blink and almost miss Shakespeare's brown bear? As well as being part of the magic jump to wellness eating is vital to dismantling power. Eating can immunise and heal. It is the force that propels all those invisible tunnels that re-compose the public space. The RUGMUNCHER eats unlawfully. They talk with their mouth full under the table. They delight in the undergrowth, taking pleasure in metabolic play. It is messy and it is bad and it is good. A perfect slur.



Illustrations by Elena Gučas.

Lisa Robertson

Garments/Etruscans

(for Liz Magor)

A garment customarily has an inside and an outside; it can be inverted. It has dearness. It can be handed down. Garments are fragile, formal and mysterious, and therefore valuable.

A habit is a suit of clothes. Karl Marx began *Capital* with a description of the development of value in relation to the stages of construction of a kind of coat called a habit.

If something did not previously exist in *this* form, how would we recognize it as form? Part of a garment's value derives from the recognizable iteration of a supple, reversible shape. It is an inhabitable kind of precarious speaking.

As etymologists we'll venture this: form is amateur or Etruscan. The Etruscan language had no precedents or antecedents. It was not Indo-European. It sometimes borrowed and loaned concepts and their words, but did not develop from or toward any neighbouring or even distant language. There is a theory circulating on the internet that Etruscan was a secret, ceremonial language constructed on inversions. The Etruscan word *form* is the Greek *morphe* spelled backwards. The Etruscans borrowed *morphe*, inverted it, then, as *form*, handed down the word to Latin.

Marks and traces of construction are often hidden on the insides of garments. Snags and darts and seams and threads latently cluster: untidy, like sentiment. Every seamstress will want to finger the inner expressions of seams. As she inverts the garment with a little thrill, seeking its formal secrets, its hidden linings, its instructions for care, every fetishist will recognize the fonts of the Jacquard-woven labels.

One meaning of form is 'the resting place of a hare'. Surely a hare doesn't stop for long. Form only pauses. Well, the earth is not different than ornament. Using the medium of our bodies, we dress in its fibrous elements and mix them around. The web, the fleece, the skin, the stem, the gauze, the seed fluff, the petal and leaf tinctures fixed by mineral and chemical mordents; we're wearing the spun-out elements of the teeming surface we've endangered. Clothed, we're shuttle-like. Even a city is woven with our transactions. A loom is the fundamental unit of architecture and economics.

Aristotle says that when we think of the physical world, we must structure our thought in terms of elements and causes. We imagine that these terms are similar to the fixed warp and the mobile weft. A pause takes place between an element and a cause. There is a physics of garments. When we say that form is amateur, we're suggesting that form is unlimited and undetermined. The extreme variousness of the history of garments suggests this is so. It is possible that our habits and thoughts—in proliferating combination with the earthly elements, and accompanied by our spatial sense of interiority and exteriority—will produce a garment that belongs to no institution.

Here folded, there skirted, occasionally veiled, between garland and garnish, unutterable mysteries variegated a vocabulary of form. We must be dressed to be able to think. Spirit is what flutters the cloth.

With attentive passiveness, hooked and buttoned together, tucked-in, fluffed, smoothed, with strictest tailoring, impeccably darned, ritually torn, privately unfolded with widest vibrating frock-skirts, from the skimpy shade of a flaring collar, in hidden, slippery floral negligée, beneath unimpeachably brushed felt-hat-brim, brushed counterclockwise against inclement weather, flung errantly, upward-gathered protectively, tightly, caressingly, accompanied by the scent of wet wool, with brittle flaking trail of ancient taffeta, and sprung and blurry knife-pleats, dangling sullied cuffs, puckered redundancies, bursting elbow-darts and clumsily altered waist-seam, proportionate ancientness, profligate thinness, hastily repinned hem, and newest possible recombination of superlative lost gestures, with tactile eagerness and tacit illustrious hope we wonder about form. Maybe it shivers. Or outwardly it glitters and gleams. So say the etymologists.

From fold to seam (where the fold is the opposite of the seam), from the whole cloth to the cut, from weave to knot, the history of the structure of garments has moulded all the human gaits and ways of moving across cities and rooms. Our slightest gesture is inflected by the forms of the clothing we wear. Personally, we prefer the older, worn-in garments to the tyranny of the new. We prefer to be caught unawares by the flicker of our ancestors' gestures inhabiting our own. In this way, the garment frees us from tiresome autonomy.

Our bed with its sheets and blankets is also dressed, and the daintiest dish of the luncheon board or the merest sandwich wears its diminutive invitation. Trimming is an ancient sport. To dress

and trim has been our entertainment. How do we know how to do it? Someone learned from someone—a desire, a sheltering, then a gesture transcended a life, reached toward another's, and then it happened again. The invitation flits, impalpable, from hand to hand, from will to will, pausing now and then among the materials to temporarily alter the forms of appearing. Its ghost is a texture. We say of a textile that it has a hand. When the garment falls to the floor, how does the hand later know how to fold it? How do you fold a garment you love, a garment you have made love in, a garment mended by a stranger, a garment inherited from difficult accomplices, and what sort of garment do you leave on the floor?

On the frieze adorning the front of the Athenian Acropolis, two female figures—one divine, one human—together fold a large cloth. What is that textile suspended from their four hands? A sail, a robe, a blanket, a curtain, a dance floor, a city. A house or a city is just a library of cloth. We need protective closets for our outfits, for the ones we've inherited, and also for the ones we retrieve from the city's refuse heaps and the stores and warehouses of the *refusées*, led purely by our instinct for cloth, which radiates from our recollecting hands.

Let's think about the hermetical adornments of the housewife of any gender, the laundress of any gender, the hoarder, the private collector of unfamous things that will never overtly appear. Because not every garment is always for appearance. The folded garments, resting in their little caches, will rise from and fall into secrecy and in this way notate seasons and time. She, the citizen of this library, will arrange these tremulous fragments. She will fold them, smooth them, wrap them and store them. Her gestures are protective and sometimes inquisitive. Sometimes she will retrieve her assemblages just for the pleasure of the rustling of the special papers, to admire or meditate a little on their plentiful solitude. She'll take the inventory of humbleness. This ceremony could take place at the change of seasons, or when somebody dies, or in the morning after certain unsettling dreams, or sometimes while a little drunk. Her fingers will tingle. This tingling will transmit a syntax. Secrecy is social. Hers is a material anthropology of secrets.

Ratty, tawdry, cheap, elusive, worn: what we clandestinely love we assemble according to a formal grammar that operates on reversals and the strong pleasure of the implicit. We use the garment sometimes to hide desire, and then we veil the garment itself with the purloined wrappings of a lapsed economy. We keep it for later, for Nothing, these moth-filigreed blankets of melancholic

provenance, these coin-like tags and buttons sacrificially clipped from jettisoned cardigans, these stained luncheon gloves that have lost their mates, these embarrassing blouses with lurid applique corsages, these moot words applied to cloth. Objects and wrappings found in anonymous thrift-store pockets now become elements in a language game.

The referentiality of these private caches is indirect. They don't function like signs; they are images. Any image is thick with latent time, with others' times, as is the structure of anyone's consciousness. An image makes a proposition about the complexity of human relationship—historically, sensually and psychically.

As a battery stores energy, converting then releasing it in measured increments, the image stores time.

A composed stack or pile of discrete units in enclosed contact produces an energetic charge. The relationship of memory to the polyvalence of surfaces, their textures, the productive and affective traces of bodies, is enjambed or paused in the image. Any image is a network of correspondences that energetically converts its receiver.

The relationship of form to image is this: not every form is an image, yet each image selects from, enacts and reconfigures a history of form. Form is labile, always becoming other, slipping away, as in the Ovidian accounts of changing. The image frames this tremor, gathers and arranges its traces in order to transmit immaterial experience to the future, to the lover, to whatever must be transformed. The transmission will not be smooth or constant. Long fallow times in the image-life may arise. We think that any image, any outfit, is an autobiography of form.

Arena, ceremony, form, family, market, military, person, satellite: these are words of Etruscan origin.

We just love etymology, in a decorative way.

Riots, or: not seeing the forest for the trees

*'Any event that attains the status of 'event' (that is to say, of 'history') functions as metaphor from the start.'*¹

Riot

The word 'riot' implies a dark and negative eruption of violence that is over as soon as the violence stops. It is conducted by villains, named as 'rioters', and historicised as rootless, an event that occurs with no bigger intention than destruction.

On 4 August 2011, Mark Duggan, a Black British man, was shot and killed by a police officer in Tottenham, north London. The protest outside the police station over a lack of explanation for his murder triggered riots far beyond the locale, these several days equally known as the 2011 Tottenham riots, 2011 London riots and 2011 England riots. The heavy-handedness and dismissive attitude of the police towards Duggan's friends and family caused anger, and then violence—a violence that twisted its way through a classist, multicultural nation in the middle of an economic recession.

On the day the riots reached east London I was sitting on a rooftop with friends. Funny how we could sit in the sunshine while London burned; funny how passively one witnesses the unfolding of history. A couple of days later, at one of my regular copy-editing shifts at a liberal national newspaper, I heard someone say 'race riots'. Race may not have divided rioters from the victims, but it was clear what was on (some) people's minds. In any case, the Crown Prosecution Service made sure to show that it was acting tough against violence—but, not against the racist violence of the police. Lawyers were up all night charging every single person caught looting from the smashed up shops, one by one. No act was too small to be punished—one student was jailed for six months for stealing a bottle of water.

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Gyanendra Pandey (2001) *Remembering Partition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.94.

I scrolled the photo agency feed on my computer, to see if a multi-source perusal of the optics could help me understand the bigger picture—to see the forest, not the trees. In the end, details stuck in my mind. In a few photographs, white lawyers were taking naps on their desks in between prosecutions—tired heroes taking hard-earned breaks from enforcing justice. In others, white residents of tree-lined neighbourhoods held brooms and mops aloft. They brandished their cleaning material proudly, as #riotcleanup trended on UK Twitter. Some of the people who turned up to help wanted to be ‘useful’, their ‘moral conscience’ finally awoken. Boris Johnson, then London mayor, held up a green broom for the cameras. The disorder, the emotional chaos, the senselessness, had now succumbed to a natural order, at least in neighbourhoods that had nice trees.

Loot

The word ‘loot’ comes from the term ‘lút’ in Hindi. The word entered widespread English usage after the 1857 Indian Rebellion, one of the biggest anti-colonial uprisings in British imperial history. Its definition denotes plunder and mayhem, and is still one of the most reviled tactics when it comes to the morality protesting movements—despite the fact that in its original context, loot was used as part of the British strategy of recruiting allies—loot was a prize of plunder easily accepted by racialised subjects. Looting, a word taken from a colonised people, was ‘used to denigrate and racialise riotous subalterns resisting English empire. It would from the very beginning refer to a non-white and lawless relationship to property’.²

As Vicky Osterweil notes, ‘that looting is one of the most racially loaded, morally abhorred, and depoliticized concepts in modern society should come as no surprise. From its very first usages, the word has served to re-enforce the white supremacist juncture of property and race.’³ According to historian Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, the term’s use against colonial subjects in the Raj signified ‘an intrinsic inclination in “natives”, their fundamentally avaricious, unruly character, and which therefore required the brutal civilizing violence of European colonial

² Vicky Osterweil (2020) *In Defense of Looting*. New York: PublicAffairs. p. 3.

³ Ibid.

masters.’⁴ Never mind the global north’s colonial plunder, nor the loot still held in western museums that masquerade as ‘collections’. Two centuries of the use of the term ‘loot’—an Indian word—to indicate the chaos and unlawful property-taking of the mob, has meant an evacuation of the term’s politics and history.

This emptying of meaning is important when we think about the 1857 Indian Rebellion, instigated by the mutiny of sepoy working for the British Indian army. The oft-told reason given for the rebellion was that the (multi-faith) soldiers refused to bite off the ends of their rifles before firing because the cartridges were purportedly greased with beef and pork fat. This refusal led to punishment, solidarity with those punished, more brutality and more violent action. It is clear that the rifle fat was more a last straw than a sole trigger, as the mutiny became a widespread movement that lasted years, encompassing Indians of all trades, faiths and ethnicities, some of whom looted the regions they captured from the British. When those regions were retaken by British forces, the spoils changed hands.

Looting is a collective practice: it cannot be done alone. The image of those rising up against the British went viral, in nineteenth century terms, and after it was quashed, the ‘looters’—Indians—were not the only ones who faced reprisals. The bloody reconquest of India and the judicial instigation of collective punishment after the rebellion meant that the empire’s own looting of cities like Delhi and Lucknow was not just a territorial victory: it was a moral one. The ensuing reinforcement of religious and racial difference metamorphosised how Indian people were now to be thought of and treated, signifying a ‘hardening of racial, religious and cultural boundaries, with extreme otherness re-inscribed on the bodies of the “fanatical” insurgents’.⁵

Rebellion

In John Akomfrah’s documentary film *Riot* (1999), the 1981 Toxteth riots are portrayed, through archival footage and voices of witnesses and participants in the Liverpool neighbourhood, as the combustion

⁴ Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar (2020) ‘Looting: the Revolt of the Oppressed’, *hyperallergic*. Available here: <https://hyperallergic.com/569283/origin-of-word-looting/>

⁵ Priyamvada Gopal (2019) *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*. London: Verso p. 68.

of racial inequality, police discrimination, black unemployment and poverty. The SUS laws—police stop and search policies—did much to create a culture of resentment and fear prior to the riots, and still do today. In the film we hear the story of Lester Cooper, a resident with no criminal record, who had lodged an official complaint against the police over their continuous harassment of his four sons. He then became a target of police harassment himself. In 1981, the badly managed arrest of his eldest—like the badly managed arrests that preceded the riots in St Paul’s, Bristol and Brixton, London a year earlier, as well as Tottenham three decades later—led to ‘the pot boiling over’. Hundreds of people, including young white men, came into the city with sticks, wearing balaclavas. Liverpool almost burned to the ground, save for a pause in the violence to allow elderly people from a hospital to be taken to safety.

Calling a riot a ‘rebellion’ or an ‘uprising’ or a ‘protest’ can maybe change our perception of the agents’ intentions and moral justifications, but the law makes no such room for wordplay. For the UK, which repealed the Riot Act in 1973, the parameters of what constitute a riot—according to the still current 1986 Public Order Act—are at the same time clear and obscure: ‘Where 12 or more persons who are present together use or threaten unlawful violence for a common purpose and the conduct of them (taken together) is such as would cause a person of reasonable firmness present at the scene to fear for his personal safety, each of the persons using unlawful violence for the common purpose is guilty of riot.’

Who is this person of reasonable firmness? In effect, it doesn’t matter. Section 1.4 obfuscates the manifestation of such a quality, stating: ‘No person of reasonable firmness need actually be, or be likely to be, present at the scene.’ If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? For the sake of a riot, yes, because it *could* have been heard—by someone reasonably firm enough to judge its sound.

Trees

A bizarre outcome of the Toxteth riots, which caused £11 million of property damage and hundreds of injuries, is shown towards the end of Akomfrah’s film. After spending three weeks in Liverpool, then environment secretary Michael Heseltine came up with a solution to the city’s ills: a £250,000 tree-planting drive, contracted to a landscaping company based outside the city. The cherry trees lining the main avenue of Toxteth are a source of wry humour for the film’s

narrators. As well as these trees, a garden festival centre, at the cost of £50 million, was built three miles from Toxteth. In 2020, after decades of disrepair, this site was slated for a new venture—the building of 1,500 new homes. It is unclear whether these homes will be affordable.

When British soldiers hanged Amar Shahid Bandhu Singh from a banyan tree, during the Indian Rebellion, ‘a legend was born’.⁶ According to local folklore, the execution took seven attempts and when Singh finally died, the tree began to bleed. The tree was one of many banyan trees the British used as gallows—many hundreds, perhaps thousands of Indian people died hanging from these trees, mostly in Uttar Pradesh—the province where the Indian Rebellion began. As Mike Shanahan writes, while no historical evidence suggests the British chose these trees *because* of their religious significance to the multi-hued faiths of India, ‘they would surely have known how important these trees were to local people.’⁷ A particularly brutal spectacle in Kanpur entailed the hanging of 144 people on one giant banyan, their bodies then thrown into the Ganges. Trees, like language, harbour temporalities that we cannot fathom in a single human lifetime.

When it comes to pinpointing the reasons for contemporary riots in Indian cities, ‘communalism’ is given as the easily digestible cause—a term that is shorthand, in the South Asian context, for Hindu-Muslim violence, rather than community. The term, like ‘loot’, was coined by British colonial authorities to describe the innate incapability of disparate ethnic and religious subjects to behave reasonably. According to historian Ganendra Pandey, the term communalism is ‘reserved for the analysis of social and political conflicts in the “backwards” parts of the colonial and postcolonial world.’⁸ Communal riots or communal violence are terms that still litter newspapers, books and television programmes about contemporary conflict in South Asia. It’s an idea that takes the division of people as a given—rather than something manufactured for the purpose of colonial rule.

The Delhi Riots in February 2020 were triggered by the clearing of a women-led sit-in protest against the Citizenship

6
Mike Shanahan (2018). ‘The Trees of Life That Became Colonial India’s Agents of Death’, *The Wire*, Available here: thewire.in/history/the-trees-of-life-that-became-colonial-indias-agents-of-death

7
Ibid.
8
Pandey (2001) p. 7.

Amendment Act in Jaffrabad, north-east Delhi. A month after the violence subsided, which left 53 dead and many Muslims missing, the city's high court ordered the planting of 500 trees in this part of a city, a predominantly working-class, Muslim community that saw the police stand by while people holding nationalist flags and weapons entered their neighbourhoods. The order read that 'in a post-riot scenario where thousands of citizens have suffered damages in body and mind, the presence of [sic] large number of trees and greenery will surely facilitate in healing of a bruised and battered society.'⁹

The writer Arundhati Roy, in the aftermath of the Delhi riots, describes this 'communalism' in another way—moving away from the religious divide, she describes the event as 'a manifestation of the ongoing battle between fascists and anti-fascists.'¹⁰ Accusations of police and state complicity in the riots, of which Muslim citizens were the predominant victims, have been left unanswered. On top of this, reprisals against Indian citizens protesting injustice continue to be brutal and violent.

At least some of them have trees.

9

Anand Mohan (2020) 'Plant trees in riot-hit areas, will help heal society: Delhi HC to MCD', *The Indian Express*. Available here: <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/plant-trees-in-riot-hit-areas-will-help-heal-society-delhi-hc-to-mcd-6301648/>

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Arundhati Roy (2020) 'Arundhati Roy on Delhi violence', *Scroll.in*, Available here: <https://scroll.in/article/954805/arundhati-roy-on-delhi-violence-this-is-our-version-of-the-coronavirus-we-are-sick>

Chloe Turner

Last Night a DJ Saved My Life

'There aint a problem that i cant fix cos I can do it in the mix'
—Indeep, 'Last Night a DJ Saved my Life' (1982)

With housemates in the Midlands, every Saturday was spent at the same club—'our' club. In the morning we made our way home, squinting sweat from our eyes and with fag ash on our Sunday best. We used to call it going to *Church*. Our church was a factory repurposed into a club, that sat upon a slight incline at the edge of the city centre.

I read something recently that asked: If all power plants are now clubs, where do we get our power from? Perhaps the author and I don't have the same ideas about power.

The *Paradise Garage* opened its queer club doors in 1977. The Saturday sets of legendary DJ Larry Levan at the *Garage* in New York, became known as 'Saturday Mass,' to his cult following. Levan used to repeatedly play the same track over and over to the point of agitation, until the crowd loved it as much as he. If you were Black and Gay in Chicago in the late 70s your church might have been Frankie Knuckle's *Warehouse*, a three story building on the industrial West side. Both *Paradise Garage* and *The Warehouse* were what their names suggested prior to becoming clubs. In a recent lecture-meets-DJ performance, madison moore spoke of how the *Paradise Garage* building has since been, unsurprisingly, demolished and re-turned to being a parking garage, this time for Verizon Communications vans.

Club culture is awash with the effects of gentrification under varying guises.

Im thinking here about the club scene shift from Black, queer and working class to being driven by white corporate men, the continual inner-city re-developments that turn garages into clubs into garages again, the cultural repackaging of dereliction and abandonment as a 'queer' aesthetic that implies it was a choice not a consequence.

Against the odd, in that mix of technology, ritual and duress we create entire worlds.

Fred Moten recently spoke of dancing as the body tearing itself apart in the interest of the beat, in the interest of rhythm—

a tearing a part of the body that corresponds to the way in which capitalism also tears apart the body. Everything is leaky and porous under capitalism. I could quote Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri's work on contagion and viral connectivity here but I prefer that of Saidiya Hartman: 'the plot of her undoing begins with a hedge fund, a red line, a portfolio, with a monopoly on public resources, with the flows of global capital.'

The brutality of capitalism stacks up against people who occupy multiple margins. Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe and Kara Keeling among others working in Black Studies have enunciated how Black life in the afterlife of slavery is anticipatory, waiting. Yet, Alexander Weheliya reiterates how we cannot lose sight of the many ways political violence and systemic dimensions of racialised, gendered and sexualised subjugation has given rise to 'ongoing practices of freedom within the traditions of the oppressed.' Whether this be at an abolitionist rally or the 'freedom dreaming' of Tourmaline walking to the kitchen wearing only lipstick, such remix's are gifts of radical generosity. Alex Juhasz gestures to the remixed worlds of queer love between lesbians and gay men on the dance floor of the *The Saint*, New York City 'we invent the exuberant possibility for departures from the confines of the limpid stories we inherited, the set structures that seemed immutable...'

In the club, the worlds created are liquid—movement, sound, kinship, art, fashion, gesture—we are undone by a different porosity. The fugitivity of queer and trans (specifically of colour) life, joy and desire shape our rhythms. We dance and cruise with the apparitions of those lives stolen by the violence lapping at the edges of the worlds we design. In a piece by Che Gossett in the aftermath of the Pulse shooting in Orlando, they cite Judith Butler: 'We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire...'

Writing at the intersection of black music and science fiction Kodwo Eshun considers 'remixology is not heresy but reincarnation, a resurrection technique in which sounds are rematerialized as spirits.'

Dispossession is a queer feeling, a disabled feeling, a racialised feeling, the feeling of displacement by gentrification. Dispossessed by the world, possessed on the dancefloor.

As we birth ourselves and each other, tears form stretch marks under my t'shirt.

The DJ mixes tracks together, agitating each one, perhaps to the point of agitation of the audience like Larry Levan was

known to do. As Levan is mixing into being what becomes known as house music on dance floors, disability activists are pushing against community dispossession in public space. Held as part of the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian, there is a chunk of concrete sidewalk which disability activists in Denver took a sledgehammer too, a practice known as 'curb cutting', as part of a protest in 1978. Possession of dispossession. Within a liberal museum framing, curb cutting embodies a gentrified sleekness that spins radical political action into productive and efficient access.

Speaking to this, Amie Hamarie reads the the curb cut as crip technoscience a 'frictioned, leverage-generating device, the curb cut represents noncompliant labor within an existing system, discourse, or built arrangement.'

With public space being closed by the pandemic, sledgehammers are being taken to the curbs of virtual space.

Globally we have watched vulnerable lives being rendered disposable by conservative governments. As Queer and/or trans nightlife has always been about survival and belonging its unsurprising that queer/trans, BIPOC and disability led communities are at the forefront of virtual nightclubs amid a global health crisis. Such spaces centre accessibility in its multifaceted forms, safety, care, communication and transparency pushing towards what disability scholar Kevin Gotkin refers to as 'an enlarged notion of meaningful access' within nightlife which, 'must include thinking about disability as a cultural and aesthetic force.' I read remixing as an agitative practice, that doesn't seek to be suppress but to suspend the disciplinarily rules and individuality that Gotkin gestures to.

Akin to the the stirring of your drink as you look over the club, its the circular spin of the stir that ripples through the liquid, so that everything is suddenly is in motion and suspended in the glass.

Virtual queer nightclubs by considering access as an intersectional praxis, take into account how not only disability and chronic illness/pain, but also the impact of race, class, gender, sexuality, immigration status. As remixed spaces they multiple agitative intersections: lets lay down in the club. Move to the beat of a BSL signed club set. Leave when we want not when the taxi arrives. Head to the club with your grandma. In a less normatively surveilled space, away from CCTV, police, and security staff lets melt into the fabulous affection of the rhythm.

When all is aloft in the suspension of the mix, and DJ can fix all, may everything cramp and break but us.

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