

The Yellow Paper

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The Yellow Paper

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Autumn 2022

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Trig Point

an editorial

Laura Haynes

A chasm of uncertain time opens a recess to fill, it seems. Or it opens a recess and this is filled differently. Or the recess that's opened is actually site and studio and what happens there is mindful of a siteless chasm of time. And what happens there is a clarification of proximity. Of what situatedness might offer the liminal writer, artist, colleague, peer. 'The recollection of the place must intensify it,' writes Kate Briggs (p 12).

Now gathered in a group permitted to be larger than ten, we're back around the table and this time it is round,¹ and this time it appears different, it is more like an anchor than ever. An anchor for anchorites to circle, to test from, to hit their knees on and turn out soft shells from. There is a distinct materiality to the work made by Art Writing students over the last year. An apparent pleasure in that which is tangible: made and found objects, movement afoot, building, installing and asking how this might transformatively join force with the digital imperceptible that has connected us all beyond time and borders more than ever over the last few years.

There is a distinct registering, of 'how thoughts have intruded, how certain words lodged or slipped, how not exactly pictures but dispositions were offered and withdrawn, adopted then lifted—or

¹ In 2018 Kate Briggs visited Art Writing and wrote about the rectangular table that together Kate and the students sat around, and throughout the course of the day 'felt rounded'.

Kate Briggs, 'A bit, a piece, a thing, a twin', *The Yellow Paper: Journal for Art Writing*, 1 (The Glasgow School of Art, 2019), p 17

exchanged, and what was traversed was a patterned, shifting and intensively participatory emotional field.’ We are ‘patting, turning, finding a new position,’ Kate concludes.

‘In 2020, locked out of studios, many artists necessarily shifted medium. Sculptors took up crochet, silversmiths became video artists, and everyone became an Art Writer,’ writes Hazel Glass (p 16). In 2022, we see art writing is an ever present, proximate, material practice. It is corporeal in the encounters of Ms Real as she ‘rolls her eyes and stretches out relieved and queasy on the leather bench in front of a large Joan Eardley painting of Catterline.’ Ms Real’s stomach rises with her churning neoliberal indigestion, reports Caitlin Merrett King (p 64). It is touchable in the future that ‘leaks’ and palpable in the ‘small scar [that] is often at the origin of literary writing’—the infractions scored in Ben Redhead’s scratch poem for ‘two voiced turntables’ (p 93). It lives with others in ‘dim tracks,’ or in the phenomenological soul that is ‘squeezed’ out of a pinky, recalls Marie-Chantal Hamrock in a poetic hauntology that breathes on and off page (p 49). It is *danced all night*, incarnated and ‘(re)membered’ by Rebecca Fortnum (p 53). It is plain in rebekah raine probert’s *Astronaut Suit* when she ‘feels in colour and sees in blue’ (p 103). It is verifiable in the loss of home in oneself as Donald Butler considers the tactile disparity between documentation and production. It cuts through the ‘thickness of silence’² when Lucie McLaughlin ‘attends to the interval [between art and words] as an active space’³ (p 88). It is trodden and traversed across five plots in Elizabeth Reeder’s *On Surveying*. And it is patent in Paul Mendez and Susannah Thompson’s conversation on *Rainbow Milk*, the unknowable yet achingly felt loss of anchor experienced by Jesse after his disfellowshipping from his Jehovah’s Witness family.

‘Anchor,’ writes Sara O’Brien, Art Writing graduate, winner of the 2021 Yellow Paper Prize and recipient of The Glasgow School of Art’s Foulis Medal for Outstanding Achievement, is ‘that from which

2 Denise Riley (in Lucie McLaughlin, ‘Parting, Picking’), *Impersonal Passion, Language As Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p 71

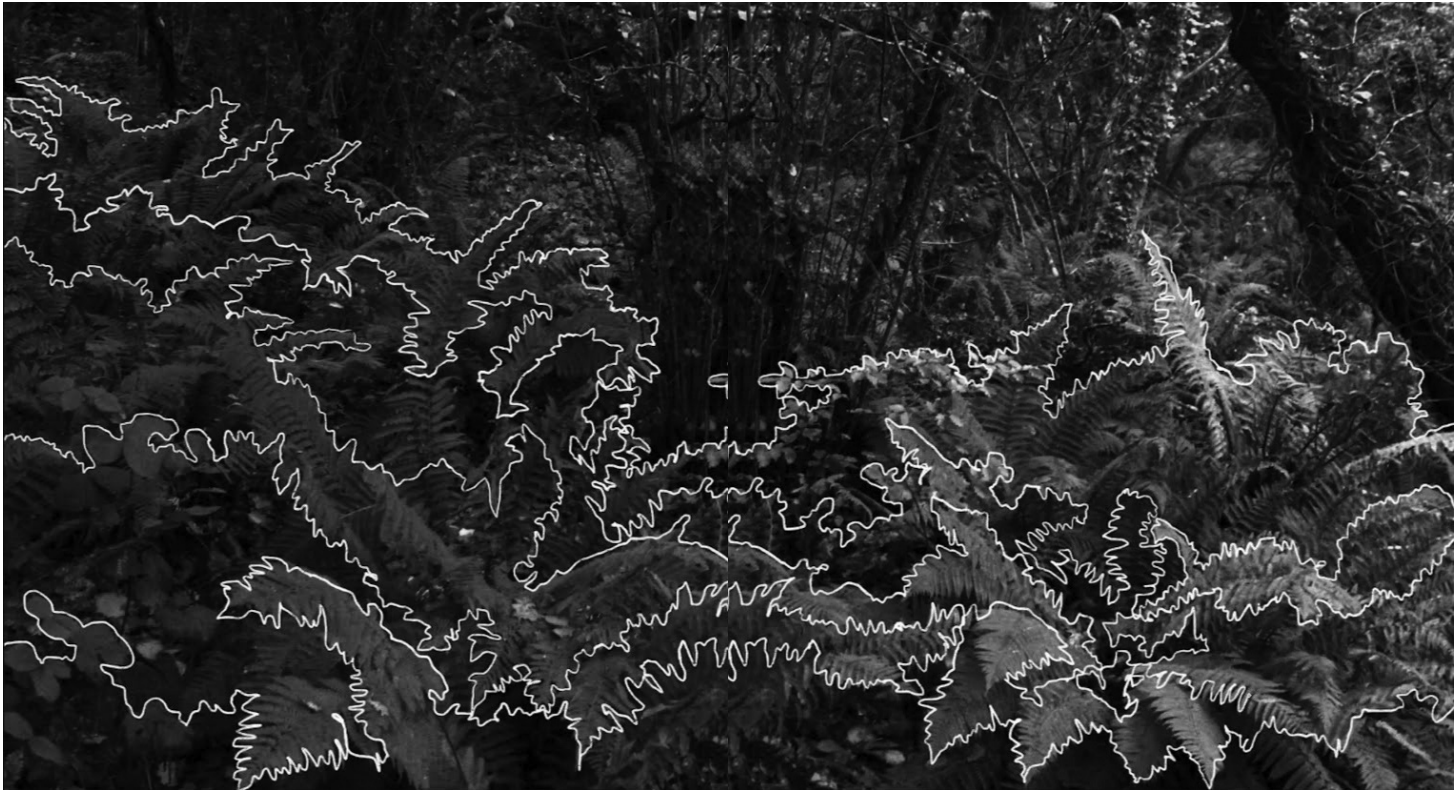
3 Emma Cocker (in Lucie McLaughlin, ‘Parting, Picking’), ‘Writing Without Writing, Conversation-As-Material,’ *The Creative Critic, Writing as/about Practice*, eds. Katja Hilevaara and Emily Orley (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), p 50

we tether ourselves. The point from which we may drift,’ in her provisional index of *Porous Selves* (p 23).

This year some semblance of gravity has (re)manifested and Art Writing at The Glasgow School of Art has extended its own soul from a pinky. We are delighted to have hosted the School of Fine Art’s first annual Practitioner in Residence, welcoming Kate Briggs in March 2022 and collectively considering what conversation is to practice. In spring we opened our digital classroom to interdisciplinary’s new and familiar with *Biographical Fictioning*, a masterclass inviting ideas around expanded biographical forms. In semester two, stowed out, we sighed in relief at Soft Shell’s rebirth. We truly *moved to feel* in our Writing Studio, sinking into our scribing bodies, and later two trips to Cove Park took us out of the Studio to remind us of the ambient quiet. We welcomed back graduate Maria Howard to lead a conversation with Khidr Collective on water, porosity and independent publishing as part of GSA’s *Close of Play* series, and our students talked with a host of incredible guests as part of the Friday Event series: Donald Butler with Morgan Quaintance, Ciarán Mac Domhnaill with Bedwyr Williams, Clara Raillard with Erica Eyres, and other brilliant speakers: Maggie Nelson, Catherine Liu, Joy Gregory, and more. We are endlessly grateful for Esther Draycott’s unflinching support of the Programme in her first year of Teaching Assistance and thrilled she’ll join us again next year. And we extend a huge thank you to Silas Lehane for his administrative patience and vitally important sense of humour.

Edition 3 of *The Yellow Paper* gathers work from Art Writing’s Class of ‘22 and contributions from those who have shaped that which becomes solid. And yet, what is captured here is by no means representative, and we extend further appreciation to the immeasurable energy of Lauren Dyer Amazeen, Daniela Cascella, Laurence Figgis, James Hutchinson, Margaret Salmon, and the many others acknowledged at the end of this book. Perhaps all could be guests at the next critical dinner party held by Clara Raillard and Frederick Loren, with Nigella cake supplied by Alex Bottomley, complete with ‘resonant, ferrous tang’ (p 60).

August 2022



Sarah Long, W/w, 2022, moving image (still), 31.25"

Round a Corner

Kate Briggs

Walking a high-hedged curving lane: it dips, turns, and up ahead, over the stile, is the open expanse of a pale, meadowy and, in its own way, complicated, emotional field. Standing open-toed, the weight shifting from ball to heel and from foot to foot and spread out over the hard living room floor is a fabric, patched, primary coloured, very tactile, in parts plastic (that is, synthetic), in parts plastic (that is, mouldable) emotional field. It looks interesting. The park slopes. It falls all the way down the side of a hill. Its steep zones and its people, planting, litter, benches, the birds in the trees, the animals closer to the ground, form a populous, living, organised, formal, unorganised, perpetually changing, emotional field. Its playground is an instance of a nested, loosely bounded, enterable and public emotional field. Its features clang together. Its floor is spongy; edged by concrete, grass and clover. The chains of the swings get tangled. Like any sphere of activity or invested interest it makes for a potentially joyful, potentially difficult, potentially painful and potentially transformative emotional field. Crossing the busy main road to reach the park—whether the striped place for designated crossing or the ad hoc place for impromptu community crossing, cued to the timings of the lights, the rush-pause of traffic, the rush-break between the cars, the flushes and pinches, the smarts and pallors, as well as the energy of the fast big bus, bowling forwards—is to run the gauntlet of a highly charged and risky emotional field. A bare patch. Nothing much grows in the large circular patch of what once was a field and long before that the community

dump, though now it is a garden which is to indicate the layered depths—the history pressing upwards from underneath and raising, even as the contemporary weather falls down into and reshapes, the surface of every order of thickened and thinner, mistier, more finely dispersed, if at times only barely perceptible, but still impactful, emotional field.

There is a valley. It was once a quarry and now it's a deep verdant fold. Once inside—it's somewhat frightening. Why? Because you're alone and committed. Because you've only just realised that no one else knows you're here. Everyone is nervous now. Or, no one is. The recollection of the place must intensify it: the play of forces, its sounds and light-fall and growth and shadows. The muddy smell of the river, running shallow then deep over rocks and small stones. It is just that if you were to meet someone else, anyone else, on the path, you'd have to negotiate your way around them: their body, their dog, and what they want. Their intentions, purpose and direction. Narration: is a space and time opened and supported by language, and it unfolds in the imagination. It opens there, if it opens, and it expands—but not only in view of what comes next. Looking back after having moved through the understanding of a page, any page, registering how thoughts have intruded, how certain words lodged or slipped, how not exactly pictures but dispositions were offered and withdrawn, adopted then lifted—or exchanged, and what was traversed was a patterned, shifting and intensively participatory emotional field.

There are sunflowers. Just off a motorway in childhood, the car is very hot and the windows wind down manually. It is solid colour at a distance: all-yellow, very emotional. A crop irrigated by massive sweeps of timed water spray. It is a working agricultural, wetted and electric, geo-political field. Close-up and the stems of the plants are furry; the hairs are hooked and almost sharp.

The rain water collected on the flat roof viewed above makes a trembly picture of the blue sky and the large loose shapes of three white clouds. Because the rainwater is at least four inches deep its reflective capacity will take a time to evaporate, giving

a day or two of permanence to its subtle provision of a local and shimmering, periodically recurring but somehow always unexpected, emotional field.

I saw more rain falling this morning.

Sometimes it is enough to shake your head, put up or take down or rub at however you cut your hair, to shake a mood. Stand up if you've been seated or elevate onto a small step if you were already standing. Turn a corner, round a corner, flip the bed sheet over when it's a hot night to make it cool. The chance of sleep: to maximise it. Is that better? Patting, turning, finding a new position. Does that not make a difference? It does. A small note of surprise: it does, actually. Thank you. Yeah.

—

Dr Kate Briggs is the School of Fine Art's inaugural Practitioner in Residence, hosted by Art Writing 2022-23.

Proxyerotics: Notes on Touch Hazel Glass



*It's just (aah) a little crush (crush)
Not like I faint every time we touch*

...

In the Euro 2020 post-match interview in the flush of victory, exhausted and euphoric, the footballing men are living adverts for skin and eyes. This wonky spectrum of handsome has paraded onto the screen in my living room where I live. And now another sweaty head considers the query of the unseen interviewer, 'How did you feel after that second-half goal?', when the only real question is, 'What have you done to me?'

Aesthetically speaking, the disappointment of the tournament has been with the sad number of sporting men sporting indistinct ink. So many arms, abstract with tattoos too intricate, too blurry, too nothing that the camera, even shooting at extremely high frame rates, can detect as a shape. Did you not consider something a little more graphic? Did you ask for a sleeve of non-specific?

...

I have made out on a few but I have never fucked on a bench.

A bench is like smoking, and writing. It is just an excuse for thinking.

I can't remember sleeping the night outdoors on a bench and I wonder now if it will happen in my lifetime. With the various scenarios that the Earth will die by—the big rip, heat death, vacuum decay—I wonder if we will all be sleeping on benches in the run-up.

...

The story of a woman whose acute social anxiety catches up with her in the supermarket is too obvious. Supermarkets, like swimming pools, have already been over-rinsed as scenery for psychological shading.

So, when panic struck, in an act of reverse mindfulness, she gasped, grabbed the chicken thighs and the throwaway barbecue, and self-checked-out, contactless, only exhaling on the pavement outside. Floating through the park gates, she was soon seated, head between her legs, heaving in great fists full of air, the shopping resting on the bench by her side.

...

Per capita Glasgow has more tattoo parlours than anywhere else in Europe. One for every thirty-six children in the city. One for every rainless day of the last decade.

But only one is dedicated to Contemporary Art. Jim Cullen runs The Institute of Ink, and prides himself on tattooing photorealist recreations of work from each year's Turner Prize winner since 1996. His favourite artist is Mark Leckey. He hates relational aesthetics. Recently he has been struggling to translate the socially engaged practice of collectives into something that will look good on a forearm.

In 2020, locked out of studios, many artists necessarily shifted medium. Sculptors took up crochet, silversmiths became video artists, and everyone became an Art Writer. For Jim, this dematerialisation of practice has mixed blessings. He misses the scale of symbols—if tattoos were not his calling, he would have enjoyed being a Land Artist—but he enjoys the typographical

possibilities of an art writing aphorism, and he's getting more and more meme requests.

...

The park bench is the open sandwich of street furniture.

...

Glasgow, Rotterdam, New York, London

You moved to a new city in a pandemic and met all your friends top-half first.

What does this have to do with touch?

These photos are the most tactile you've taken since you arrived. Taken before you saw their legs.

You want a new tattoo. To mark the shift from one state of being to another. And to be a prompt on your skin—to recall a secret knowledge that it mainly serves you to forget, but at key moments it will be essential for you to remember.

...

You should probably get a tattoo of a triangle.



My Critical Murder Party
A dinner party, a fiction, a synopsis, and a
research proposal
Clara Raillard



William Castle, House on Haunted Hill
(Allied Artists, 1959)

I have been watching movies and writing about all that happens when I am alone with my television. My eyelids are heavy, my vision is blurry, I have lost sense of what is and isn't real. It is time to resocialise myself. It is time I throw a critical murder dinner party!

...

I'm Frederick Loren and I've rented the house on haunted hill tonight so that my wife can throw a party. A haunted house party. She's so amusing... There'll be food, and drink, and ghosts. And perhaps even a few murders. You're all invited. If any of you will spend the next twelve hours in this house, I'll give you each a 10,000 word commission in my wife's book. Or your next of kin, in case you don't survive. Ah!—but here come our other guests...

Jacques Rancière, Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes are arriving in the first car. Jacques and Susan have been arguing the whole journey about the power of the photographic image. They are debating ideas of fact, testimony, and interpretation. The question seems to be whether photographs possess an intrinsic quality that sets them apart from other representations, or whether that is not the point or an apt question to ask. From up here, it looks like they can't agree on the fact that they are in agreement, wouldn't you say?

‘What is written about a person or an event, is frankly an interpretation, much like paintings and drawings! Photographed images aren’t really statements about the world so much as pieces of it, they’re miniatures of reality that *anyone* can make or capture!’

‘But representation isn’t the act of producing a visual form! It’s the act of giving an equivalent, which speech does just as much as photography! An image isn’t the double of a thing! It’s a complex game of relations, between visible and invisible, the visible and speech, what is and isn’t said...’

‘Although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality, not just interpret it—’

‘The photographer opposed an image of appearance to an image of reality. Then people got suspicious of the image of reality. They think that what it shows is too real, too unbearably real, to exist as an image—’

‘Photographs are an interpretation of the world just as much as paintings and drawings are!’

‘Then they declare the image unfit to critique reality, because it exists under the same visual system as that reality. Which in turn reveals its shiny appearance and the sordid truth of its backside! Which both make up one and the same spectacle!’

When the time comes, do you think they will be able to tell dreadful artifice from unseemly reality?

Roland is just as respected as them in his field, but he isn’t as rigorous as he used to be. Susan and Jacques don’t include him in the conversation, dismissing his arguments as sentimental drivel. Jacques believes he doesn’t have it anymore. ‘I think he’s actually expecting to see ghosts tonight,’ he whispers to Susan.

Here comes the next car, with Wyndham Brandon, Charles Granillo, and their ex-professor, Rupert Cadell. They admire him greatly and feel a sense of kinship with him, an understanding. They absolutely loved his recently published essay, ‘On Murder, Considered as One of the Fine Arts’. Rupert is concerned by their immaturity and unselfconscious conviction. He finds their praise of his work to be worryingly literal.

Wyndham and Granno heard that Andy Warhol was coming tonight. He is on his way somewhere behind them, riding with Vincent Price, to whom he’s just offered a part in his next movie. We shall see if that was a serious proposition, or just party chatter. Oh, don’t fret, gentle reader. I am a man of my word, and I promise you my little bet is most serious. You have as good a chance as any of them to be featured in my wife’s book. Or to remain in this house, for all eternity...

Andy’s a great entertainer, although he has been known to rub people the wrong way. Nevertheless, you can’t deny, it wouldn’t be a party without him. He’s met Wyndham and Granno at a few *soirées* before and every time they shadow him all night. He humours them but finds both to be irritating try-hards. Dorks, really. They mistake his mockeries for witty piques between friends.

The last car is driving in now, with John Waters, William Castle, and Rosalind Krauss, who got stuck in the middle. John is a man of renown these days, but at the moment he is looking somewhat starstruck. How endearing! Will’s premieres were a formative part of John’s childhood. After a couple drinks, he will often tell of this gimmick where a skeleton flew from behind the screen, over the audience, into the projection booth. He says he’s been trying to emulate that level of showmanship in every one of his movies.

Rosie’s not one for such tricks. She claims she doesn’t believe in ghosts, nor does she want to be featured in Clara’s book. She says she is however interested in writing an essay about a widespread phenomenon of delusion in contemporary artists, who seem to believe in the reality of their own creations. She sees my invitation as a sort of research residence, so to speak. I do hope it’s worth it!

We’re only expecting you now, gentle reader. Fashionably late as always. Just make sure you join us before midnight. That’s when we lock the doors.

Porous Selves
A Provisional Index
Sara O'Brien

Winner of The Yellow Paper Prize and
Recipient of the GSA Foulis Medal
for Outstanding Achievement, 2021

About

—To write *about* something or someone can insinuate a certain kind of authority or authoritativeness. It implies mastery. It proffers hierarchies. To write, instead, *around*, *alongside*, or *as*. Write *from* or *to*. To write *through* and *with*.

Anchor

—That from which we tether ourselves. The point from which we may drift.

Attunement

—To calibrate our instruments, if language is an instrument of thought. If story is an instrument that can be played by a self. Tapping into different frequencies, strumming many rhythms. To dial up, tone down, fine tune.

Channel

—Writing as a channel or a passageway. Writing as a conduit through which ideas, language, stories, subjects, and selves can make their way. A thinking of that which is transmitted. To think of and as transmission, where writing can be a means of channelling to get through and to get through to.

Contain

—To contain need not mean to constrain, even if working within the parameters of constraints. Even if working within the sharply defined borders we delineate for ourselves or those that have been delineated for us. The different means of containment, of holding and being held in language and its myriad forms. The containers we construct for ourselves.

Content

—A term that has the potential to breed discontent in the dead ends and dissatisfactions that can result from being overly or too overtly preoccupied with what one's work is *actually about*.

—In a conversation with David Naimon, the poet and translator Rosmarie Waldrop speaks about a time when she felt the need to 'get out of herself and her obsessions.' She 'decided to make objective poems' using text collaged from other sources, only to find all the poems were still about her mother. She realised two things:

—'...your obsessions get into your work no matter what you do, so you don't have to worry about content and can concentrate on form.'

—'The other was that form is totally generative... the form generates the context.' It can create the content for you.

Distance

—Quinn Latimer offers this: 'With its vicissitudes and vagaries, it can be temporal or geographical or emotional, instructive or paradoxical—even dialectical. It can be a physical fact and an intellectual misnomer. What does it name anyway? Distance.'

—One might thus ask, is it merely, or is it all, a matter of scale?

Dwell

—To spend time with oneself, with ones writing. To find the place you want to sit, your nook, your burrow. To forge many modes of dwelling, as ways to reside or to inhabit, to occupy and to house: words, lives, selves.

Echo

—That which calls back when you call out. That which happens when things get repeated. A means to discern the size and the boundaries of one's enclosure, one's surrounds, which may guide the reach and extent of one's disclosure.

—Recall how this—and so much else—is rooted in myth.

Form

—A term that connotes—that sounds out—something soft and supple. It is to do with shape—the shapes of the containers or the categories, the boxes or the genres that we choose to work within, without or outwith. It is pliable. It offers ways to form, deform and perform, to re-form and reform the lives and languages with which it comes into contact.

—Bring this word close to another and swap the 'r' for an 'a', reformed to foam, which, when solid constitutes a quintessentially porous substance, is another substrate for thinking through. Of the kind of foam that laps a shore, Eileen Myles says

—'Writing (it is my belief) is a sort of performance and text and ideas and bubbles are always frothing & coming right until the last minute. Foam is a kind of radio show.'

Hold

—That which is held in the text and that which we hold on to.

—That which is kept on hold—that waits, in suspension, that lingers in abeyance.

—That which is kept in the hold—secrets, stowaways, the fugitive and our fugitivity.

Language

- The matter at hand, our lingual pool.
- The material we treat and tend to as we tend towards staking positions of our own.
- The lexicons we prod and produce.

Lens

- The devices we use to look through, to zoom in or out, enlarge and bring close. A means to focus and refocus, through which the material of a life or one's language can be refracted.

Object

- The object of focus, in sight, at hand. Both the mould and that which gets moulded in turn. Malleable and tender, it may be tended by both corresponding and discordant subjects, tethered by, or cut loose from its promise of concreteness.
- Resist the slide into objectification. Be both wary and aware of the detachments and distances furrowed through objectivity.
- Tilt the syllabic emphasis of object, as Jeanette Winterson does, to think through what we are told we ought to be and how we ought to write, so that we may object to that which is taken as given or is too readily given to, that is imposed upon, us.

Poise

- To be poised and ready.
- The balance we find in the positions we lean into, the composure of ourselves in and as our compositions.
- The postures we perform and appropriate and thus risk losing ourselves within, described by Clara on day one.

Possession

- To harbour other voices, to speak in ways that might not yet be understood.
- To think other than a proprietary notion of the self—other than a self that must contain itself, comport itself, that exercises the exclusivity of ownership, sealed up by impermeable borders of sovereignty despite the permeability of skin.
- As Bayo Akomolafe says while ruminating on possession, 'we are composite creatures' such that, 'To be a proper self is to be beside oneself.'

Slip

- The undergarment that smoothes the friction between the body and its outer layers.
- Slips of the tongue and that which slips or slides on or off the page, in and out of margins, before and after annotations. The slipperiness of language and the slippages between selves. That which slips by and slips out.

Trace

- To trace an outline, by way of contours and edges, as one does with a pencil on paper that is translucent and opaque. The beginnings of forging definition.
- The residue and the remnants, that which lingers or remains—of the experience, of the object, perhaps a memory, a feeling, a sliver of your self that no longer feels like yourself, which might be a self to write with or from, to or through.

Track

- A different kind of line. The kind that leads on a map to somewhere, which leaves a trail that can then be followed.
- To track as a means of pursuing or following, a keeping track of something or someone else, or simply of the litanies produced by the self.

Vessel

—Writing as a vessel for our stories and our selves. These vessels, these containers we construct, come in many forms: a box, a bag, a tale, a life...

You

—The you to whom we write, even when we write only for ourselves and to our selves.

—‘You’ as the counterpart to ‘I.’ The ‘you’ that dwells in ‘I’, as another, as the other, and as one of the many facets that constitute the porous selves that we are. Selves that are cobbled together and constructed. Selves that wend their way through the world, sifting through the words at their disposal, gathering the content and discontents of their lives so that they can be shaken, filtered and refined through writing and language, those variable meshes of the self.

A conversation on
Rainbow Milk
Paul Mendez and
Susannah Thompson

Biographical Fictioning Proceedings,
April 2022



Paul Mendez is a British writer. His debut novel *Rainbow Milk* (Dialogue, 2020), an *Observer* Best Debuts choice, was shortlisted for the Polari First Novel Prize, the Gordon Burn Prize, the Jhalak Prize, the Lambda Literary Award in Gay Fiction and a British Book Award (Fiction Debut). He has written for *Vogue*, *The Face*, the *London Review of Books*, Poetry Foundation, the WritersMosaic and the BBC. He is currently adapting *Rainbow Milk* for television, while reading the MA in Black British Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Susannah Thompson is a Glasgow-based art historian and critic from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. She is Head of Doctoral Studies and Professor of Contemporary Art and Criticism at The Glasgow School of Art. She spoke to Paul as part of the MLitt Art Writing event ‘Biographical Fictioning’ in April 2022.

...

ST: I’m very happy to introduce Paul Mendez who joins us today to talk about his debut novel *Rainbow Milk* and other projects. *Rainbow Milk* centres on the character of Jesse, a young, Black, working-class man living in the Black Country in the West Midlands who also happens to be a Jehovah’s Witness. Very broadly, the novel follows Jesse’s forced departure from his family, community and religion and his subsequent sexual, racial and intellectual reawakening. Before we start to discuss

the novel in more depth, I'm going to invite Paul to read from the book.

PM: Thank you. I'm going to read from the first section of the novel. The first fifty pages are in the first-person voice of Norman, a landscape gardener in Jamaica who emigrates to Britain in the 1950s. The bit I'm going to read is just before he moves to England with his wife and children. *[Paul reads an excerpt from the opening section of 'Swan Village', Norman's narrative, which is written in Jamaican dialect and starts in July 1959].*

PM: We then skip forward to Jesse's narrative. Jesse, as was described at the outset, is a young Black man living in the West Midlands who is being raised in the Jehovah's Witness community. He lives with his mother, his white adoptive father and his half-sisters. At the point that we enter his story, he's nineteen years old and he's been disfellowshipped from the Jehovah's Witness community, which is the equivalent of excommunication in other Christian denominations. Jesse is basically an exile in the family home. *[Paul reads from 'Great Bridge', Chapter 4, where we find Jesse alone in his bedroom on Christmas Day, ostracised and ignored by his family who are downstairs in the house. In his room, Jesse reads James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room. The section ends with Jesse apologising to Graham, his stepfather, who responds by telling Jesse he must leave the family home].*

ST: Thank you so much for your brilliant reading, Paul. Before we get to questions in more depth, I want to remind people who haven't read *Rainbow Milk*, or who don't know your work, that this is your debut novel. It has been a huge hit since it was published in 2020. It was an *Observer* Top Ten Debut in 2020, has been shortlisted for the Gordon Burn Prize, the Jhalak Prize and the Polari Prize. It was in the fiction debut category of the British Book Awards and was longlisted for the Desmond Elliott Prize in 2021. It has been extremely positively reviewed and is an enormous success—congratulations! In light of all of this, I wanted to ask you about your beginnings as a writer and how you started to develop a writing practice. How did it begin?

PM: Well, *Rainbow Milk* came out in 2020 but it was really twenty years in the making. I started writing in the summer of 2002, when I was twenty, by which time I had become estranged from my parents and from my Jehovah's Witness background. For anybody who doesn't know, Jehovah's Witnesses teach that we're living in 'the last days' and that only if we are one of them do we have the hope of surviving Armageddon and then inheriting the earth and turning it into a paradise. So, I knew I didn't believe that anymore but I didn't know what else to believe and I hadn't yet developed a new centre of gravity. I was also still in the closet and trying to conceal any notions of femininity. As part of this, I was doing an engineering degree. But then I read an article in a magazine, and I wish I could remember the title of the magazine, but it was an article in praise of beautiful men. And it wasn't even from a gay perspective—it was pitched at both men and women just to show that men could be beautiful. I just found that to be a really radical concept at the time, I guess, because when you're raised in a strict religious environment, gender binaries are also extremely strict. Jehovah's Witnesses are anti-LGBT and so I could never imagine acting out these deep desires, these same-sex desires that I had, or even considering another person of the same sex attractive. So, the magazine article really opened my mind. Then a flatmate gave me a copy of James Baldwin's 1968 novel *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, which is one of his less well-known novels but it was my first encounter with his work. It was the first novel that I'd ever read by a Black person or a queer person, never mind both, so it was really enlightening for me. And then my flatmates and I watched a film called *Amores Perros*, in which, at the beginning, a cataclysmic and unexpected event takes place, changing the lives of all involved in an instant. That film, that story, really chimed with me, because that's how my disfellowshipping felt. It felt like I was coasting along, and I was absolutely fine, with the hope of surviving Armageddon and living forever, according to the Jehovah's Witness belief, and then, all of a sudden, cut off completely. And then it's the rest of your life, so what do you do now? What do you believe? That [the disfellowshipping] was really my catalyst to start writing.

I really needed to write to think in a deep and structured way about what had happened to me and why, and where I was going. The writing was about ordering my thoughts, memories, expressing my anger and frustration. I sent what I had written to some publishers and didn't get much feedback, if anything at all, so I abandoned it. But over the next fifteen years or so, working various jobs, I just wrote whenever I could, with no real structure in mind. I often wrote as a way to deal with immediate issues as I was growing up and changing, and starting to realise certain things about myself and about the way people see me in the world. As I was coming to terms with all of that, writing was my first means of being able to explain all of these things to myself. But it wasn't until I got a book deal that my publisher challenged me to find the fiction in that material. By that point, I'd been narrating audiobooks and acting in amateur theatre so I had ideas as to how to create characters using certain methods. I was able to develop their voices. With Norman, for example, I could do enough research and thinking about that character to be able to speak in his voice and dictate a monologue. And that's what ended up being transcribed into the first section of the novel. I very rarely read the Norman section out loud. I've done a lot of readings of *Rainbow Milk* but this is only the third time I've read in Norman's voice.

ST: It's a real treat for us to hear it. I am interested in what you were saying about your experience of narrating audiobooks and how it influenced the voice and the register of some of the characters in the novel. I'd like to come back to it, especially in the context of this workshop which centres on biographical fictioning. Could you tell us some more about some of the decisions you made? I know that you were responding to your editor's [Sharmaine Lovegrove] suggestion to turn the novel from a memoir into fiction, but apart from this change, there are other, quite particular, decisions that you made. For instance, the character of Graham is a clear split from your real life. There are autobiographical elements that you've quite deliberately changed. I'm also interested in the structure of the novel in terms of the split between Norman's story and Jesse's story. Can you tell us about how you came to the decisions around what

was going to be changed, what you decided was not going to be identifiable as you? What was your decision-making process in this regard?

PM: It was random. It was written in the first person for a long time and I had submitted several drafts to my publisher, the latest of which was three months before the original publication date. Obviously, the publication date had to be pushed back but even then, once it was submitted, I emailed my editor three days later and said 'throw it in the bin, I can't do it. That's not what I want to put out. I need the opportunity to switch to the third-person voice'. When you're working with material that's so close to your own it doesn't matter how much you try to change little details and combine characters. When you're writing in first-person, you're still in your own head. It's very difficult to get out of that, especially when you're dealing with trauma. You're just reopening old wounds all the time and trying to make them sound better, trying to make them more poetic. I felt like I was being strangled by this material and that I didn't want to work with it in that way anymore.

It was a very tight, almost congealed text that I had submitted, so I retracted it. Switching to third-person detached Jesse from me and I was able to tell his story. I am a Gemini—Jesse and I are the same but at some point our lives diverge. The character of Robert, Jesse's father, and his story and background basically links Jesse's and Norman's stories. He teaches Jesse something new about art, the world of art and the world of 1980s gay life. And Graham, the adoptive father of Jesse, just came out of nowhere, but I really liked him as a character. I felt like using him as Jesse's adoptive father was a really good way of demonstrating how white patriarchy and notions of white supremacy are so active in all of our lives. Unlike Jesse, I was raised by a black father, but I feel like I was also raised by white supremacy because of the way it infiltrates everything. I felt like creating this character Graham as a white man raising Jesse would demonstrate that much more clearly, and hopefully it did.

I was talking about Norman earlier. When I first got my book deal in November 2017, it was just a month before the Windrush scandal broke in *The Guardian*. My grandparents are Jamaican but this was the first time I'd ever heard of the Windrush generation. I'd never thought of them as part of it, one of the most important and consequential migration waves of the 20th century. And my paternal grandfather, very much like Norman, was fit and healthy when he arrived in England in the 1950s, but soon began to suffer migraine headaches and sight loss. Jamaican men don't go to doctors until it's almost the end, but he went to a doctor when he was almost blind and the English doctor told him 'it's because you're so tall, you're so much closer to the sun than the rest of us and the light is very different here than in Jamaica so try to stay out of it.' I don't know whether that's true but everyone in my family said that is what happened, and that's all I know about him. And because my grandmother couldn't care for him while raising their two children and working he was sent back to Jamaica to be cared for by family and died sometime later. My dad hadn't seen him since he was two years old and obviously, at that age, you have no memory. So, when the Windrush scandal broke I started to think about that generation, what their lives would have been like, and what Norman's life specifically would have been like. And that was how I was able to create that narrative, in terms of creating the character and embodying him and recording him. I used fiction to give him a voice and to reclaim my family and heritage. And I've been asked before why I didn't intersect their stories, but I think it's much more poignant to have them completely separate. They didn't know each other, their lives are completely different, and I didn't have the privilege of knowing my family history until I was in my 30s. But there is a huge generational disconnect, and a huge paternal disconnect in terms of the lines being broken constantly and I was really mindful of that in structuring the novel.

ST: There is a point at which the stories converge, but we can't discuss this without spoiler alerts!

To go back to thinking about narrative voice and your choice to write in the third-person for *Rainbow Milk*, I was interested to read 'The Earth We Inherit' in the 2021 Daunt Books anthology *In the Garden: Essays on Nature and Growing*, which is written in first-person but covers some of the same thematic territory as Norman's story in *Rainbow Milk*. The essay was published after *Rainbow Milk*—do you think that having written the novel and seeing it out in the world then allowed you to tell the story directly, in your own voice?

PM: Yes, I think so. I was commissioned to write that essay about two months after the novel came out. It was a really strange one because I was suddenly getting loads of commissions and I didn't know anything about gardening, really. The other contributors were people like Nigel Slater, Jamaica Kincaid—all of these amazing food and gardening writers. And then me. But I did feel like it was something that I could do, because I had already done the research and I'd already thought a lot about my grandparents' generation and how their gardens were a way of demonstrating their Englishness, a way of 'keeping up with the Joneses'. To anybody walking past their house and looking at the garden, they'd just think it was an English family living there. And this was a world in which, if we're talking about the 60s, was still a 'no blacks, no Irish, no dogs' era. It was an era and a region in which Enoch Powell was active—his constituency was down the road from my grandparents. And up the road in the other direction was a Tory MP who ran for the 1964 General Election with the slogan '*If you want an n***** for a neighbour, vote Labour*'. That's the kind of environment my parents experienced as children. And so, for me, it was a privilege to be able to write and give them a voice, and because I'd already done the research into the flora and fauna of that period for *Rainbow Milk* it just came easily.

ST: How did you do that research?

PM: I spent a lot of time at the British Library. The day that I recorded the first Norman monologue I spent a whole day at the British Library. It's such an incredible resource. I found this

book of illustrated flowers of Jamaica in the 1950s which was just perfect, so I learned a lot from that.

ST: I'd like to return to an earlier point we discussed. I recently read Juan Gabriel Vásquez's 2015 novel *The Shape of the Ruins* which has been described as autofiction. In it, Vásquez writes 'the true reason why writers write about the places of their childhood and adolescence and even early youth: you don't write about what you know and understand, but because you understand that all of your knowledge and comprehension are false, like a mirage and an allusion [...] All that I thought was so clear, you then think, now turns out to be full of duplicities and hidden intentions, like a friend who betrays us.'¹ In relation to this, do you feel that you had a compulsion to write *Rainbow Milk* as a way to try and make sense of things? In the final chapter of the book Jesse plans to turn up unannounced at his parents' house 'to reprogramme his memories'. As we've discussed, your life mirrors Jesse's in some ways. You were subjected to such strict boundaries and surveillance as a Jehovah's Witness, including self-surveillance, but after being disfellowshipped you were, very abruptly, suddenly free of all those restrictions. Do you feel that writing the book was a way of trying to address this sense of disorientation—a way to fix it in time or anchor it somehow, rather than an attempt to resolve it?

PM: Yes. The Witnesses are anti-LGBT, anti-abortion, anti-feminist, anti-birthdays, anti-Christmas... you know. They indoctrinate their followers into believing that all other religions are false and evil. And they foster a mentality where you're taught that you're only safe as a member of their flock, and you're actually not to associate with anyone outside the organisation beyond what's necessary in the workplace or at school. You're discouraged from pursuing further or higher education, and persuaded that all your intellectual needs and questions can be met in the pages of the Bible, and Jehovah's Witness publications. You're taught that God created the heavens and the earth in seven days, and that we're descended

¹ Juan Gabriel Vasquez, translated by Anne McLean, *The Shape of the Ruins*, (London: Bill Swainson Book, MacLehose Press, 2018), p 439

from literal Adam and Eve. Witnesses believe that the three main races of white, brown, and black are descended from Shem, Ham and Japhet, that humans have only been on the planet for a few thousand years and lots of things like that. And I believed it, I believed all of that. I wasn't born into the organisation but my mum got baptised when I was four so I accompanied her when she was being given her Bible studies for at least two years before that and then I was going to the meetings for three evenings a week from the age of four to seventeen. I was totally indoctrinated...

ST: And in addition to the meetings you'd also be knocking on doors trying to recruit people. All of these activities take up a lot of time and leave you with very little space and time of your own to think things through.

PM: Exactly. You put your head in this cauldron and you don't take it out. During school holidays I'd devote sixty hours a month to preaching door to door, and I loved it, and it was a great community. I defended those beliefs for years, even after I left, because that's who you are, that's kind of what defines you. Engaging in sex work was the first thing that really kind of cut through all of that for me. I could really shake myself out of my moral complacency. At that point I still believed that anyone who wasn't a Jehovah's Witness was evil and that you [gestures to the audience] were all going to die because you don't worship Jehovah, you don't pray to Jehovah through Jesus Christ. And I got to the point that I just couldn't live with that because the people who should have been there to support me and give me unconditional love weren't doing that, while many of the people I'd come into contact with outside of the organisation were lovely and wanted me to do better and to have a good life.

Writing was the other thing that helped me to move past it because I was able to acknowledge that just because I wasn't a Jehovah's Witness anymore *didn't* mean that I was suddenly free of those restrictions or boundaries. I realised that they were still tripping me up all the time because everything that I learned or did or thought had to measure up against that doctrine.

And when you've built up this complex of knowledge, to de-indoctrinate yourself is very, very, very difficult. I sort of think of it, indoctrination, as like receiving an electric shock—it's instant, it's there. But the healing afterwards, or de-indoctrination is a long, long, long, long process and something you won't ever get over. So, writing for me has been therapeutic but it's also where I can be angry. It's where I can organise my thoughts and give myself something to replace the centre of gravity that I lost.

ST: Thank you for sharing that, Paul. In terms of losing your centre of gravity, this is particularly the case with a religion like the Jehovah's Witnesses. Because they are a relatively small, niche religion, it's very difficult to meet other people who've been through anything near the same experience. If you're a lapsed Catholic, for example, there are lots of other people you could meet that have had similar experiences but for a former Jehovah's Witness it can be an incredibly isolating experience.

You've just been talking about Jesse's journey, and your own, from Jehovah's Witness to sex worker, so clearly the central themes of the novel concern race, gender and sexuality. But what's been discussed less in the reviews that I've read is your focus on class or the sense of being from the Black Country, from outside the metropolitan centre. So, as well as all of these other key themes, there is a regional or parochial voice at play. At the end of the book Jesse seems to finally be flourishing, to feel comfortable in the more middle-class milieu he now inhabits. What I found interesting were the moments where this new confidence is disrupted. In one passage Jesse and his partner go to visit wealthy friends in the countryside and Jesse has a moment of self-consciousness when he tries to speak about the art displayed in the house and he becomes acutely aware of his relative lack of cultural capital in those surroundings. You also write a lot about Jesse's changing accent and use of dialect. I wondered how you navigated this as a writer and as a commentator on Black British literature?

PM: Well, I am from a working-class background, but I think there's a certain expectation attached to becoming a writer and

becoming a published author that sort of transcends class in many people's minds. So, if you're a published author, you can't necessarily be working class anymore. I find that very difficult to navigate in my life because now I am known as a writer in certain circles, and as a reviewer and critic. So, in those circles I do have cultural capital, but when I'm in spaces where nobody knows who I am, when I'm just sort of going about my day doing my shopping, etc., I'm just another black guy in a world that fears black male presence.

I did a talk at a university in London a couple months ago and I met the tutor/host outside and when he tried to bring me into the building with his pass the security guards told us that we had to go around the other side. So, I ran to the other side, and we tried to get in and another security guard stopped us and said 'who is this person? Where's his pass?' But five minutes before the same tutor had walked through the same entrance with another author who I'd been talking a few minutes earlier and they walked straight in. No pass, no questions. The other author was a white woman, another debut author. So, it seems very clear to me that because of my black masculinity, or what they *think* is black masculinity, I am being treated differently. That's always a really difficult thing to manage, that as a black person, I would literally have to be Beyoncé before people like that could take me seriously for who I am, and that's not gonna happen. But the other thing I'll say is that I suffered with impostor syndrome really badly, and that's partly down to my identity as a black working-class, gay man and not having many kinds of literary forebears but also because my novel came out in the spring of 2020, during lockdown, so it got a lot of attention very quickly. And then George Floyd was murdered and I was suddenly being targeted all the time by people asking questions, asking to be to be educated on certain issues which I was still working out for myself, like my place in the world—I'm still working on all of these things. *Rainbow Milk* was my way of starting a conversation, not my way of saying, 'oh, I have all of this knowledge and experience. And I've put it into a book. There you go'. *Rainbow Milk* is me saying, 'I need to start something and this is my proof of entry'. I've been extremely lucky to have some great gigs come

my way since I was published because I proved what I could do in the novel, but fulfilling them has usually been really difficult, because I'm still learning—I'm still at Uni doing my MA at Goldsmiths [in Black British Literature], but I'm also a reviewer at the LRB [*London Review of Books*]; it's just really weird.

This country still has a big problem with accent bias. I realised from my late teens/early twenties that I would have to change my accent in order to be taken seriously, being from the very un-literary Black Country. I've also seen reader reviews lamenting my choice to render Norman's monologue in Jamaican patois, as if Literature can only be sold wrapped in standard English. My use of dialects in the novel is my way of reclaiming agency for myself and other voices not usually seen at the cultural centre, but whose lives and experiences are no less interesting or poetic.

ST: I'd like to ask a question about audience. You've spoken about your first encounter with the work of James Baldwin, which is reenacted by Jesse in *Rainbow Milk*, and how transformative that discovery was for you as a young man, and through your work as a novelist, student and critic, you've demonstrated a deep commitment to Black literature. Did you have an intention to try to reach beyond the typical literary fiction readership with *Rainbow Milk*?

PM: I didn't think of an audience when I was writing the book but I did think of certain individuals that I hoped would appreciate my writing. I didn't think of marketing myself towards any specific group, but since the book has been published the feedback has been that people from all walks of life have read the book. A lot of ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, a lot of people who've never read a book like this before, and then people who were reading more during lockdown and heard of *Rainbow Milk*, picked it up and had no expectation that they'd be confronted with a story or characters like that. Writers just starting out should hope to be surprised by the audience they attract but I think with future work there are certainly people in the world I'd would like to communicate with or slot alongside. There are people with whom I'd like to be in sibling-hood and open up certain conversations.

I don't just want to talk about identity, but it is really important when you're still kind of experiencing racism or gender dysphoria. And we still live in a world in which LGBTQ+ issues are still coming into question such as the recent news and decision in Parliament to uphold certain forms of conversion therapy for trans people, etc. Also, growing up as a Jehovah's Witness and always having the idea of another world in your head, I want to sort of discover what the new version of that would be for me. You know, are we talking about black queer utopias? Are we talking about Afro Futurism and things like that? Things that I've admired from afar, but never really discovered. I'm really looking forward to this next kind of tranche of reading for me: Audre Lorde, Octavia E. Butler, Samuel R. Delany, various theoretical authors. I've never given myself the opportunity to examine the peripherals of my experience, or to theorise, or communicate with other people who are doing that so I think my future work will be more specific on some of those things.

ST: I'm interested in your pursuit of an alternative 'other world' which might replace the paradise you'd been promised as a Jehovah's Witness, as detailed in the essay 'The Earth I Inherit', which we discussed earlier. The obstacles and the challenges of being brought up a Jehovah's Witness are really clearly and very devastatingly articulated in *Rainbow Milk*. Do you think those experiences have had any positive impact on your life and career as a writer? Is there anything that you've been able to take from a negative experience and use in a constructive way?

PM: The only thing I would say is, I was taught rhetorical skills from a very young age. I was giving public bible readings from the age of nine and that gave me a special kind of confidence in terms of being able to speak to a large audience and be convinced of my own argument, and sell that rapport. I mean you're nine years old, and you're looking at 120 people who are looking back at you. You give your little introduction, then you read your fifteen verses, and then you present a conclusion that's appropriate to the needs of the congregation. Beyond that, it just gave me something to rail against.

I just wish I'd been indoctrinated with the truth, not with all of the things I outlined earlier. And the irony is, the witnesses call themselves 'the truth'. Are you in 'the truth'? Is she in 'the truth'? And it's not. Not for me. And who's to know what a child's truth is, until the child is old enough to grow up and figure that out for themselves? To grow in pursuit of your own philosophies, to paraphrase Stuart Hall. So, I guess if great art comes out of the friction of being indoctrinated in one way and having to deconstruct that and rebuild myself in a new image, then yes, that's a privilege that I have.

ST: My last question is about art. We have a lot of artists and writers in the audience and many of us are connected to The Glasgow School of Art as part of the studio-based Art Writing programme who arranged this event. Your use of visual description in *Rainbow Milk* is really striking, from descriptions of Norman's garden to the sex scenes, working in restaurants, interiors and so on. I was particularly interested in the character of Robert Alonso who only appears in the novel indirectly through Jesse's encounter with one of his paintings. Jesse discovers that Alonso was a black, gay painter who had been active in the 1980s and was associated with the Blk Art Group in the West Midlands. Was the character based on a particular artist or work? Can you tell us more about your interest in art?

PM: I grew up in the Black Country and Wolverhampton School of Art is where the Blk Art Group was founded in 1979. I didn't find out about them until about five years ago even though I'd known Keith Piper, one of the members, for quite a long time. He was teaching Fine Art at Middlesex and a schoolfriend was doing an MA there, so I met him through her. I had left the Midlands assuming there was no culture there so it was fascinating to me to discover that there had been a group of artists working there in the late 70s and early 80s who would go on to become key figures in the Black Arts Movement. To discover that the epicentre of black cultural artistic heritage in the UK was down the road from me. Through the character of Robert Alonso, I wanted to think about what it might have been like to be a queer person during that time, because

black radicalism and queer radicalism don't always meet in a particularly easy way. There are a lot of conversations that aren't really being had between the two, and it can feel like there are two separate camps rather than one enmeshed group. I didn't base Robert on anyone in particular but I took a little bit of some of the Blk Art Group artists and also thought a lot about Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Ajamu, both black gay male artists working in the medium of a black male body. The painting I imagined—that was ascribed to Robert Alonso—was called *Nude with Othello* and it's a self-portrait of a black, gay, nude man holding a rose. It's a genus of rose called Othello, which was developed in Wolverhampton, so there a nice kind of circularity there. I don't know why I wanted Robert to be a painter—that's just where my research went. It was as though I was doing the research and then found a character to embody it. I wasn't able to do much in the pages of the novel, but *Rainbow Milk* is being adapted for television, by me, and I will get the opportunity to flesh out his character a lot more—to actually see him in the process of making this piece of work.

I once read a quote 'the better you look, the more you see.' It was on the cover of FHM Collections, a men's fashion biannual, and was meant to be ironic, but I took its literal sense to heart with my lingering visual descriptions. Because of Jesse's class, race, religious background and work choices, most of the audience will be unfamiliar with some, if not all, of his experiences. So, it felt necessary to allow Jesse to show us life from his point of view; hidden in the minutiae should be the real story of who he is, where he came from and where he is going.

PAUL MENDEZ'S IDEAL SYLLABUS

Marlon James – *A Brief History of Seven Killings*: like *The Godfather* but set in 1970s Jamaica. A revolutionary, post-punk, dub-reggae riot.

Alan Hollinghurst – *The Line of Beauty*: the first gay novel to win the Booker Prize did so during my first few months living in London as an out gay man, and I sought refuge in it.

Bernardine Evaristo – *The Emperor's Babe* (or *Girl, Woman, Other*). Both are perfectly-pitched experiments in form that are funny, moving, and clever.

Hazel V. Carby – *Imperial Intimacies* | *A Tale of Two Islands*: riveting and instructive examination of both sides of the biracial author's family, tracing all the way back to the Jamaican plantocracy of the eighteenth century.

Jeremy Atherton Lin – *Gay Bar*: one of the best books of any kind published in the last five years; scholarly and conversational, like someone with an encyclopedic knowledge of queer history holding court over a pint.

Ed. Amelia Abraham – *We Can Do Better Than This*: writers and cultural icons from across the queer spectrum speak out on where our radicalism should go next—even more relevant post-Roe v. Wade.

James Baldwin – *Notes of a Native Son*: the book that taught me that everything I complacently accepted as truth had to be refiltered through my own Black, queer, agnostic subjectivity.

Stuart Hall with Bill Schwartz – *Familiar Stranger*: the most accessible and revealing of Stuart Hall's texts, his politics and theories are seamlessly weaved through his autobiography. I can't imagine a more generous, humane and brilliant person.

Sometimes Her Tracks Are Dim
Marie-Chantal Hamrock

One night, as Jupiter sank sadly behind the teal houses, a woman tried to swim up-river. Knowledge of the entire town was reflected in the eddying water, as sparkling concentric circles grew and disappeared into the landscape. Later on, the doorbell rang, giving the furniture goosebumps. The roof stood mute and hung low, while the stairs swayed left to right.

And then

I had a dream that my mother
Squeezed her soul out of her little finger,
And let it fill a thin glass vessel—
And then we slept by the lip of her grave
Which was still just a mound of dirt.



In my dream there was a moth. And behind the threshold
I could see my mother's face. The moth fluttered nervously
around her, landing every so often beside her profile, her dusty
companion. She began to read words I had written from behind
a freshly ironed white sheet while I lit lamps in desperation,
willing the moths to come into the house. I could feel the flutter
of their wings, but they remained invisible and elusive. I begged
them to come, reciting dusty incantations in my mind. Light
burst out from every orifice in the house, projecting a warm
glow in every direction.

But the moths stayed away and—
the house seemed to float alone in the cosmos.



Rebecca Fortnum, Bessie Vonnoh's Sarah Bernhardt, 2022, carbon pencil on paper, 160 x 100 cms

(Re)membering Rebecca Fortnum

Biographical Fictioning Proceedings,
April 2022

*I could have danced all night, I could have danced all night, and still
have begged for more,
I could have spread my wings and done a thousand things, I'd never
done before*

So sang my grandmother when I was little. Later I realised the song came from *My Fair Lady*¹ where the gorgeous Audrey Hepburn, slightly unconvincing as a 'common' flower girl, looked divine as a 'lady' in her Cecil Beaton dresses. My grandmother had left school at fourteen to become a maid in a wealthy London household and knew the power of elocution. Years later, as a mother of three, she spoke beautifully when attending the parents' evenings and founder's days of the schools her children attended. George Bernard Shaw's class hoax, a thought experiment based on Henry Sweet's phonetics as a passport to social mobility, surprisingly still makes sense. But for me, his reinterpretation obscures the fascination at the heart of the Pygmalion story; that is the transformation from stone to flesh, from inert to sensible matter, via desire.

By the mid 1990s my grandmother couldn't move very well, she had arthritis, a uterine prolapse and various other ailments which included the rejection by her body of the metal pin that had been put in her hip to secure it when it had broken as she fell down the cellar stairs. Over twenty years later the pin,

¹ George Cukor (Director), *My Fair Lady* (Jack L. Warner, 1964)

looking like a large door bolt, was eliminated by her flesh as an alien object. Having broken the skin, it was eventually wrenched free from her body by its ungrateful recipient, at home one afternoon. During this period, I inhabited an upstairs room of her house which I used as a studio and so I was around to help with her ablutions and other duties of the body. Whilst thus occupied I often thought of how she had tended me as a child and how this 'care' was now being returned. Looking at her body made me think of mine, both past and future. And my memory of her seems to reside in my body like the song, particularly now, as it begins its journey towards immobility.

...

You died before I had time—
Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
Ghastly statue with one gray toe
Big as a Frisco seal²

Sylvia Plath writes of her father, imagining him as a colossus, his body swelled to enormous proportions and made of unforgiving material. Stone-cold, dead, his physical occupation of the world comparable to the place he held in her psyche. But colossi weren't always big, they were statues made to commemorate the no longer living, a way to ensure those important to us abide with us a little longer; the flesh transformed to stone.

Wandering around sometimes bustling, sometimes abandoned, sculpture corridors and courts in the museums of Western Europe is an encounter with the dead. In the statues and busts we confront the preserved portraits of those, both real and imagined, who have lived before us. We see not only the representations of others but can imagine their physicality, the way they stood before their image to review it, the image that now we are also in front of. We can envisage the way they touched the surface of the sculpture, perhaps to trace their likeness or perhaps to reassure themselves of their material

² Sylvia Plath, 'Daddy', *Ariel* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), p 48

difference from their effigy. And before us too, embedded in the surface, the presence of the artist and their technicians, the marks of their tools, their hands, moving, dexterously or clumsily, in pursuit of their vision. Scanning the work with the eye (we are forbidden to touch in the museum), this haptic looking allows the surface to open up, to transform; terracotta or marble turned to skin, muscle, bone.

...

When actress and sculptor Sarah Bernhardt portrayed her dead husband in marble, carving his strong, refined features, she appears to have chosen to reimagine him from seven years earlier, when they first met and she had fallen in love; before his acting, before the morphine, before the bitterness and madness, as the twenty-six year old, beautiful womaniser he once was. After the overdose, as she nursed his dying body, did she inspect that ruined face for signs of his former self? And how long does it take to carve a marble block into a life size portrait complete with roses? Was she crying, chisel in hand, all the time? Perhaps a happier experience was the earlier portrait (in 1878) of Louise Abbéma, 'new woman', fellow artist, companion and, because it was Sarah, probably lover too. Maybe the work was made as reciprocity for the (albeit ghastly) painting Abbéma had made of her three years before, an important work in her career, establishing the young painter as an artist of note. Now it stands just outside the café in the Musée d'Orsay, allowing those waiting in anticipation of a pleasurable lunch to admire her stylish chignon and the self-possession of her downwards glance.

The imagination is a poor beast, it offers everything and delivers less. Looking at the homogenous photographic surface, with a pencil or brush in hand, the touchscreen having given all that it can, one must pinch to zoom in the mind's eye. Yes, chroma partially brings it to life, but never much more than that. Only a provisional translation, a half-life. How does the surface give away its materiality to the viewer? Is it really confined to the way the light glances off a plane? Terracotta absorbing the light, whereas the marble's sheen luminously reflects from its

polished surface. But how is the material's weight or density conveyed to the lens or eye? Can a viewer detect what level of pressure would be needed to engrave its surface with a sharp implement? How do we know it is so bloody heavy it could break our toes if it toppled over? Can fervent imagining really, in some unaccountable way, convey a touch to the brush that will conjure the ancient stone as skin, covered with soft, downy but invisible hairs.

Rodin didn't think Bernhardt was a very good sculptor. It is reported he found her too sentimental. Camille Claudel, however, he judged to be an exceptional talent and she appears to have paid the price for his admiration. The portrait he made of her in 1884, after they had just met (she was nineteen, he was forty-four), shows how captivated he was by her image. Eleven years later, the same image morphed into that famous reflection on reflection, *Thought*, a work that traps her head in a block of marble, symbolically anticipating her later incarceration in the Montdevergues Asylum. In the earlier portrait of Claudel, she is indeed pensive for one so young. Having strenuously and repeatedly denied the use of life casting some years earlier, we cannot allow ourselves to imagine that Rodin took her imprint, pressing her flesh against the wet plaster before it set. Yet that pointed skull cap she wears would lend itself to such an activity, keeping her hair away from becoming enmeshed in the liquid lime and gypsum. Additionally, in the many existing versions of this work, plaster, terracotta, glass paste and bronze, the join lines of casting are present, evidence of the moves between these material states, encouraging us to believe that somehow her body played an active part in the making of the work. (Afterall, he had recruited her to complete the hands and feet of his full figure works). The following year she was to make a portrait of her own, *Jeune femme aux yeux clos*, a powerful strong-jawed woman whose reverie seems to betray a pent-up energy, but whose identity remains unknown.

Paint here acts as another term in the list of material translations, flesh and bone to hard and soft mineral to pixels and retina screen to ink on paper to oil and pigment. A distancing which

allows an intimacy; the soft bristles, loaded with paint of an intense hue, glancing over the silky gessoed board, smoothed by the sandpaper's rhythmical abrasions. The brush then is guided not just by image, but also haptic memory and projection. An act of faith, a moment of belief, not just in the artist or their work, but in the importance of somatic re-membering.

(Re)mastering

She put the pencil down and looked past the easel, to the person standing, unclothed, behind it. The Master had taught her much but he couldn't teach her everything. For example, he wouldn't ever know what it felt like to draw a body so closely resembling one's own—or to touch one for that matter. That body, which had been crouching awkwardly, straightened up, sighed and yawned and the old man sitting next to her paused too and gazed in the same direction, gently putting his drawing down beside him. She glanced at it. It was good, obviously. His skill, his mastery, was the reason she was there, travelling to Paris, rather than Rome, once she had outgrown the Academy in Helsinki. Yet nevertheless a secret part of herself couldn't help thinking that, despite his brilliance, he didn't quite recognise or capture what he beheld. He thought he was drawing 'his' muse for her powerful limbs, for her physical gestures, for her heart-shaped face. Without a doubt the model was a contradiction; uniquely self-contained, yet so extraordinarily expressive. But what he hadn't realised, the old fool (she was sorry to think disrespectfully but although he was a master, where women were concerned, he really was a fool) that the subject of their intent depiction was, how should she say it, *'la pensée qui prend la possession de soi-meme'*. The woman's own skills were magnificent, her touch original, her vision was true, in short, she was a genius. This was something Hilda had known before she had gone to bed with her. Despite that pleasure also being afforded the Master, he was still blind to her greatness.

And now, with a gentle incline of his head, tipping his long white beard to one side, she was being asked to perform too. Although sometimes it was a pleasure, today it was chilly, and it felt like

a drag. She started to undress, unlacing, unhooking, removing the layers and stepped towards the woman she loved, brushing the cool flesh lightly as they embraced. It was, she reminded herself, usually worth it for the results, after all he was the most celebrated artist of their age. And after the drawing and the fucking (which often didn't last very long) they three would go laughingly for a good dinner at the nearby bistro, warming themselves up with a tumbler or two of a fruity Merlot, relaxed in their intimacy.

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Nigella

Alex Bottomley

'Power dwells apart in its tranquility'¹

I should have thought of it before, it's too late now. It's nearly ten and I didn't remember to get a Guinness; the shops will be closed until tomorrow. In 1774 the Royal Society funded an experiment to determine the mean density of the Earth. The hope was to measure a deflection of the plumb line, caused by the gravitational attraction of a nearby mountain. If I set off now there's a danger I won't make it. What, amongst the mystery alcohol in the kitchen, might work for Nigella's Guinness cake? Rum, probably, but I choose a craft larger, safer to stick with beer. Schiehallion, in Perthshire, thanks to its isolation and cone-like shape, was considered the ideal location. French astronomers, Pierre Bouguer and Charles Marie de La Condamine, following in Alexander von Humboldt's footsteps, attempted the experiment at Chimborazo in the Viceroyalty of Peru in 1738, but downplayed their results due to the difficult conditions. I can't remember making a cake like this before, you put the beer in a large saucepan and, over the heat, add the butter, whisking until it's melted. I miss the meditative process of creaming butter and sugar with a wooden spoon. A Committee of Attraction was formed, members including Joseph Banks, Benjamin Franklin, Charles Mason, and Nevil Maskelyne, with the latter, once the suitable mountain had been found and

¹ Percy Shelly, *Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni* (London: T. Hookham, 1817)

granted temporary leave as Astronomer Royal, left for Perthshire. Waves of nostalgia are breaking over me, listening to The Blue Nile, while I add the cocoa and sugar to the beer—indulging myself in the synth. The expedition was well endowed, money and equipment carried over from Cook's 1769 transit of Venus expedition. The party built two observatories on the northern and southern flanks of Schiehallion, where the zenith line was established to compare it to the hanging plumb line. 'Beat the sour cream with the eggs and vanilla and then pour into the brown, buttery, beery pan and finally whisk in the flour and bicarb'. I can't match Nigella's rhythm—who can? After seventeen weeks, calculations showed a deflection such that the earth was roughly twice as dense as the quartzite mountain. In the ensuing celebrations, the northern observatory was burned to the ground. Once everything's folded in, I pour this mixture into the tin and bake for 45(ish) minutes. The mathematician and surveyor Charles Hutton was charged with figuring an estimate for the volume of Schiehallion, from which to calculate the earth's density. Using vertical prisms, he hit upon the idea of interpolating a series of lines at set intervals between his measured values, marking points of equal height. Contour lines have since come into common use for depicting cartographic relief. I read in the comments that 'the cake is as rich and as deep as Irish folklore. The taste is legendary. Thank you, Ms. Lawson.' Same, same, but different. Hutton's measurements led him to conclude that the Earth was about $4.5g/cm$, resulting in his belief that the core of the Earth must be metal. Nigella again: 'This cake is magnificent in its damp blackness. I can't say that you can absolutely taste the stout in it, but there is certainly a resonant, ferrous tang which I happen to love. The best way of describing it is to say that it's like gingerbread without the spices.' Using this estimate for the mean density of the earth, Hutton went on to calculate the densities of the Sun, the Moon, and the planets (out to Saturn) based on their known astronomical properties, mostly to within about 20% of the modern values. I take the cake out, and let it cool for the morning.

Nigella Lawson, *Chocolate Guinness Cake*, accessed 11 July 2022

[<https://www.nigella.com/recipes/chocolate-guinness-cake>].

Information on Schiehallion from a mixture of information boards in the carpark.

Ms Real Gets Indigestion

Caitlin Merrett King



There they are again, the revolving doors whirl back into her life, spinning her through the entrance of The Hunterian. Turning back, Ms Real takes a photo to record her spinning. She doesn't realise where she's been until she gets to the other side. If you slam a revolving door, does it spin faster? She wonders to herself. Traversing this one feels like trudging through a thick mud, like going through a big golden department store one as a child, where you must reach your arms right up, your body at a forty-five-degree angle, and really go for it to get it to move much at all. A little pink face really trying to get somewhere. A parent sharing your segment, shuffling behind you, hands also on the door ahead, doing the greatest part of the shoving really and trying not to step on any toes till you both burst through into another air.

Upstairs in the group show, *Flesh Arranges Itself Differently*, her stomach throbbing from the mountain of kimchi cheese fries she gobbled down at lunch, Ms Real stares through a Tamara Henderson sculpture. An invigilator, who she presumes male is loudly monologuing to two younger invigilators, who she presumes both female. She walks around the corner to a row of Paolozzi prints that make her eyes whirr just as one of the younger invigilators taps her on the shoulder to tell her that she can't have her coffee in here. After ambitiously placing her coffee down by the door to collect later when she leaves, the invigilator tells her again to remove it. Feeling her face

warming to an uneasy pink, Ms Real stomps downstairs to a bin at reception, stomps back up, now with all her concentration withered and her brimming stomach begging for a bench.

Feeling really done in now and recalling all exasperation after reading Alexander Kennedy this morning, Ms Real remembers an article by Martin Herbert, a critique of the use of *I* in critical writing, and slops into a hazy pile at his sarcastic suggestion that we adopt a third-person—Didion did the second after all, he chaffs—so why not push it to the next level, *scribe*? Ms Real rolls her eyes and stretches out relieved and queasy on the leather bench in front of a large Joan Eardley painting of Catterline and imagines her blowing around in a stormy gale on the beach streaming sand and oils across the wide and sturdy canvas. She reaches for her phone in the bottom of her bag and begins to tap out notes in the hope that they will soon become something of substance on a larger screen then printed out and read by others.

Her mind wanders back upstairs to the Loie Hollowell painting ‘Squeezed Cheeks’ which is replicated on the front cover of the plush exhibition booklet. The furry brushstrokes that curve red around circular yellow forms have lodged in her mind. The male co-curators describe them as ‘swollen’ and Ms Real’s stomach rises again. She imagines lying beneath a naked standing figure, their buttocks pressed together, the warm shadow of labia pressed together, and at the top, a firm knot, here painted as a large flat black dot. To the co-curators the dot suggests ‘a puncture release’. Ms Real raises her eyebrows. The clitoris as puncture? How Lacanian of these men to describe a clitoral orgasm as a ‘puncture release’. It’s about sex, it’s about birth! HA! Her own release accrues several sharp looks. She shuffles across the seat, her own swollen forms squeaking slightly against the shiny leather and continues to read the booklet.

Preceding the introduction is a skinless body walking, a medical illustration by William Cowper from 1694. Ms Real laughs again. Its right arm looks like it’s been left behind, hanging from a thick sinew labelled ‘C’. The exhibition has been organised by both The Hunterian and the David and Indre Roberts Collection

and features works from both archives, spanning anatomical drawings from the 18th and 19th century to abstracted, collaged and reimagined bodily forms from the 20th and 21st century, Ms Real reads. She lingers on the co-curator’s offer that shoving two vastly different collections together allows us to ‘tease out these trajectories and connections’ while also highlighting ‘the sometimes stark contrasts.’ Isn’t it quite obvious that comparison will offer both similarities and differences, thinks Ms Real, she wonders about how the partnership came about and how the statement suggests that in actual fact the partnership is really the most important thing about the show for the co-curators.

Ms Real ponders over the quote from Jean-Luc Nancy which also precedes the introduction. ‘A body isn’t empty. It’s full of other bodies, pieces, organs [...] It’s also full of itself: that’s all it is.’ This exhibition is full of itself, she smirks. In fact, every exhibition really is full of it itself: that’s all it is. Itself being many bodies, parts, organs, works, words, walls, technicians, invigilators, etc. ‘A body’s immaterial. It’s a drawing, a contour, an idea.’ She glances up from her phone notes and notices an easing in her belly. She rolls her head slowly, first clockwise then counter-clockwise, feeling her neck pieces pop and creak. Locking the phone with a click and easing it into her coat pocket, she stands and walks back towards the revolving door.

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This text is an extract from *ALWAYS OPEN, ALWAYS CLOSED*, Caitlin Merrett King, 2022

Post-Nut Clarity

Donald Butler

In *Ricerche: three* Sharon Hayes abruptly asks one of the nervous students gathered around her on a women's college campus, 'Do you feel like you have the same kind of sex or a different kind of sex from your mother?', which is answered with a youthful hesitation, 'uuuh... uuuh...what?'¹ If I were to straightforwardly answer that question, as a gay identifying man, then yes, of course I have a different kind of sex from my mum. But those differences, in the kinds of sex and the relationship with sex, I (and many other gay men) possess feel so vast to me when compared with each other that I'll allow myself a more indulged response.

I do have to admit that sometimes I'm not quite at home in myself; that really it might not matter where I might be or how I ended up there. This is a trait I share with my mum, a sort of disconnection that's hardwired in, or perhaps it's because we both spend too much time comparing ourselves to others.

It's a Monday afternoon, I'm sitting at the living room table and I'm waiting to be interrupted, but the interruption isn't coming. Maybe I'll meditate, but I'm looking to get away from myself, not closer. So, my thumbs open TikTok instinctively, although even here all the content has changed, every other video some tech-employee evangelising about six figures and PTO. I see one guy making out that WFH was like some kind of utopia expressed,

¹ Sharon Hayes, *Ricerche: three*. 2013, video

but then there's this girl and she's using a sound from *Grey's Anatomy*; Sandra Oh wailing 'Somebody Sedate Me!'

SLAMRUSH are a gay porn production company. They make films about twinks getting gang banged while smoking T. 'I look for vulnerable young men. End of the road type. I find 'em, slam 'em, and breed 'em. You don't like it...go fuck yourself. Plenty of us wanna see this'². SLAMRUSH have racked up almost nine million views across 89 videos on pornhub alone. Taking into consideration other porn sharing sites, and the brand's own subscribers, the viewing figures are definitely much higher. They are part of a larger group of gay porn productions called *MaleRevenue* who, across eleven brands, have a market hold on a realist style of porn which has emerged in response to the growth and popularity of amateur porn. These videos all have a similar set of production parameters: filmed handheld on phones; bareback; usually group scenes. They each attempt to portray these scenarios as reality, something which actually happened, a documentation rather than a production. Never mind that every guy in the scene happens to be a porn actor. *And now I see it, I see it in your eyes / The things you said to me / were really nothing but lies.*³

*'...the innovations of disco mirrored the ethos of gay liberation regarding the expansion of affectional possibility.'*⁴ A living room, it's approaching midday and the daylight is cutting through those blinds that are cut vertically, the ones that are always a pale blue which turn left or right, pastel green when the light hits. There are maybe five guys here, all naked and variously slouched over green leather sofas. Each are hot in their own way, one has particularly nice tattoos. The room is quiet though, every single one of them folded over their phones scrolling Grindr. Something is missing—there is more to come; this ain't it. More means *more*.

2 Slamrush. Accessed 18 July 2022 [<https://www.pornhub.com/channels/slamrush>]

3 Changin', Ms. (Sharon) Ridley. (Tabu Records, 1978)

4 Douglas Crimp, 'Disss-co (A Fragment)', *Criticism*, Winter 2008, Vol. 50, 1, p 16

The first time I used Grindr I was around sixteen or seventeen. I had just got my first iPhone, and this was when the adverts boasted *there's an app for that*. It was always said in such a sure, nonchalant manner: yup, there's an app for that. I used to stay awake when my mum was working night shift, amazed at what Grindr offered; a chance to explore my desires, somewhere to chat with real gay humans. Now I go on Grindr and don't speak to anyone for a few hours and call it quits. *'Sex is part of the universe of imprecision, of indetermination, a sphere that does not comply with connective perfection.'*⁵

SLAMRUSH exists because of a market demand. Even if these videos are staged (and the effect does dampen the more videos one watches) they reflect a common enough setting to be believed. In the gay chemsex scene there is a shockingly cavalier attitude towards men being sexually assaulted when they have passed out after taking G. Consent is assumed, taken as a given. When significant numbers of your community sedate themselves to facilitate intimacy, this is a crisis. We are forgetting how to be with ourselves. I am forgetting how to be with myself. Maybe I never knew who I was to start with. So, I'll continue comparing myself, try and steal some sense of others documentation, learn to be a better liar.

5 Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *Breathing: chaos and poetry*. (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2019), p 100

Collective Shock

Esraa Shanawaz

When we were kids, everything we did was a mistake. Dancing was wrong, singing and make-up was a sin, running and even laughing had to be done in a certain way.

In 1999, at one of our useless family gatherings, my cousin had the latest (*Free Mix 3*) cassette. Then, music companies released mixtapes because not every house had music channels, ours included. The radio streamed only three transmissions (News, Quran, and one that was always blurred). Together, we brought our cassette player and gathered in the living room to listen.



We would usually lock the door, so my grandmother wouldn't hear us. That day we invited the whole family to dance with us—it was *the latest cassette!* Everyone should celebrate the update. The small living room had fourteen happy dancing souls; the excitement raised our temperature and one of my cousins took off her shirt and tied it around her waist, pretending to be a belly dancer. My grandmother was clapping with joy until she saw my cousin with a tank top, 'GIRL! Turn this off! Satan came to the sound of music! He led you to do this sinful act!' Their faces were

filled with shame, mine, and my sisters weren't, they believed every word that came out of her mouth, we didn't.



I don't blame my grandmother for what she grew up to believe. At the time, we were constantly reminded that those were heresies. We were taught to excuse my grandmother and understand where her claims came from.

In 1979, while everyone was free and cinemas were all over the country, when life was simple and safe, a crisis happened; Juhayman happened. My mother was fifteen years old, 'I was in grade seven or eight, I can't remember. After finishing Alfajr's prayer we were getting ready for school, we sat at the kitchen table for breakfast, helicopters were roaming above us, and we heard her blades whooshing. We looked immediately at our mother, and we knew. We knew that when they showed up, something serious was happening. Our building was built on a mountain called Jyyad, it was next to the mosque where you could see the minarets. We ran to the windows to see what was happening and heard gunshots and people screaming. Men were running up the mountain, and smoke was covering the skies. My mother asked us to close the window and follow her back to the kitchen, she raised the volume of the radio and a man was giving a speech, claiming that he was the Messiah. We knew then that someone called Juhayman took over Al-haram (the holy mosque) and locked everyone inside. He seized all the gates and started shooting people inside and out.'



After the Juhayman Incident, my grandmother, and every citizen in the country, changed—there was mass trauma. The mosque was released from the cult's grip, but people's minds were trapped. From walking around the street in dresses to locking themselves indoors or covering entirely. New laws were set—not laws, superstitions—restricting international concerts and banning media coverage. Cultural norms were evoked by unknown individuals to control and prevent future catastrophes. The Islamic world was shaken, and the cracks were filled with misleading beliefs.

In 2019, at one of our useless family gatherings, we asked my grandmother if she would go to Mohammed Abdu's concert; 'How much is it?', would be her only concern.

Plot 4

While walking this dry deciduous woodland (and later when writing up what we've seen), I think of legacy. There's a canopy of mature woodland within this larger square with decaying matter and new, smaller growth beneath. Fallen trees make marking corners more difficult and we step over ragged trunks and lift the purple yarn (which is unfurling from a reused Steradent tube) and mark a 10 x 10 plot as well as we can, staking metal tent pegs into forested earth. In the shade we note a few favourites: wood sorrel, wood anemone and chickweed wintergreen, overlapping in their short seasons. Grasses, rushes, sedges. Mosses. Lichens. Baby rowan trees in the understory. F is on her knees, with her hand-lens that she's hung on a narrow leather strap around her neck for ease of access, close to her eye; I will find some thin elastic cord and do the same with mine on the next trip. As we walk this square, looking at the same area of ground, I think of attention and learning, in company. We call out what we see, ask questions, note species and prevalence. F knows the Latin names and me the common. They're equivalent but reveal varied contextual anchors. We see different things and that's the brilliance of it. Learner and teacher right in the muck together, noticing and able to name different things, in different ways. The plotted squares are measurable over time but limiting too—a stretch of wide-eyed wild pansies goes unrecorded as it sits just outside a boundary. Two aspects of what I want to learn are in tension, but then we roll up the yarn, unmark a territory and move on, continuing on with the same attention, noticing habits of grasses, flowers, birds and geology. We cross burns and fences and in this shared activity we finish each other's sentences even though we are basically strangers.

Plot 3

Sharp yellow petty whin, cross-leaved heath, and, *oh*, a meadow pipit shouts, scrabbles away low and then flies, attracting all the attention it can. Its departure reveals a small nest-hole. We walk, sweep from one side of the marked square to the other quickly, observing, noting down, & then re-wind the yarn, pull up the pegs, softly shouting out, that's us away, come back to your babies.

Plot 2

We are keen amateurs while F, in her early seventies, is a naturalist of incredible knowledge & skill, which she holds beautifully, lightly. She has offered to help us learn to survey plant life for a national monitoring scheme. She has her own survey area; this is ours. Plot 2 is highly grazed grassland & holds 10 grasses, woodrushes, sedges that F can name but we can't. Yet. Devil's bit scabious leaves hint at August colour; a single violet is still in a faded purple bloom.

Plot 5

Wild
thyme
grows
in
clumps
beside
the
farm
track
& 16
grows
and
seed
bags
& Rush
es
& 16
flowers
& tiny
purple
blooms
of
speckled

Plot 1

For each 5 x 5 square, we push a first tent peg tied with purple yarn into the ground. Then we unfurl purple wool for 5 metres to the NE corner, anchor, to the SE, anchor, to the SW, anchor, to the NW, loop over. The yarn marks an uneven square over thick marshy ground that is alive with bog myrtle. Female & male catkins are on different plants, we note; we reach over, pluck a few leaves, crush them between our fingers, inhale.

Learning From Our Elders

Rachel Loughran



1. On 4 July 1961, Audrey Lenon was swimming at Jefferson Park pool, Lynchburg, Virginia. The day was hot. Temperatures exceeded 80 degrees Fahrenheit. As the fifteen-year-old and her friends cooled off, swimming and playing in the water, a uniform line of shade appeared on its clear-blue surface. ‘There was a ramp that you walked down to get to the pool,’ Lenon recalls. ‘We looked up and it was lined with police officers. They told us to get out of the water.’ The police instructed Lenon and the other swimmers that day to collect their belongings and leave. ‘We asked, “What happened?” and “Why are you closing the pool?”’ but we didn’t get any answers. We were just told to put our clothes on, and the pool was closed. That’s all they said. I guess they didn’t feel like they needed to tell us.’ At the time, Jefferson Park pool was the only public swimming facility in Lynchburg open to African Americans.
2. Construction began on the Jefferson Park pool in 1923. The pool’s natural basin was excavated by convict labour and ‘was set to be much larger and more impressive than the pool in use at Miller Park’—one of two public swimming pools open to white people only. On 9 August 1924, Jefferson Park pool was officially opened. On Independence Day, thirty-seven years later, as Lenon and her friends were swimming over at nearby Miller Park pool, a group of black children and community leaders staged a swim-in. The City of

Lynchburg's retaliation to this act of public disorder was to shut the three city pools that day: Miller Park, Jefferson Park and Riverside Park. Later that year the pools were drained. In response to their drainage Philip Lightfoot Scruggs, editor of *The News* wrote: 'Negro leaders forcing the issue knew that this would be the result of any attempt to integrate either of the pools used by whites. Perhaps, today, they are proud of their accomplishments and consider their "sense of justice" somehow satisfied. If so, we suspect that all the other swimmers, both Negro and white, question the value of the accomplishment and wonder a bit at such a strange "sense of justice".'

3. The summer of 1961 was marked by several other civil and legal disputes over desegregation. In Nashville, when a swim-in was followed by a lawsuit, the city was forced to desegregate their pools. The facilities were promptly shut. In Memphis, Tennessee city-officials announced a gradual ten-year desegregation plan, justifying the lagging pace on the 'avoidance of confusion and turmoil' and the 'maintenance of law and order'. Two years later, the plan was overturned by the Supreme Court. The pools soon closed. In Lynchburg, the federal district court responded to a similar lawsuit by demanding the city abandon its policy of pool segregation. The ruling could not however force Lynchburg to reopen its pools. In 1968 the Jefferson Park swimming pool was filled in and permanently closed. The concession stand was knocked down. The bathhouse too. Its four separate rooms, two of which were for men, one for boys and one for women and girls to share, was completely demolished.
4. In response to the closure of the city's public swim facilities, and despite protest from many of Lynchburg's white parents, that summer Reverend Bev Cosby welcomed children of all colours and genders to swim in the pool at camp Kum-Bah-Yah. The democratisation of recreational activities prior to the 1960s was not unusual. During the 1930s, the period of President Roosevelt's New Deal, the federal government spent 750 million dollars widening access to public recreation

facilities by building and renovating thousands of pools, parks and leisure centres. Swimming pools, however, were frequently still segregated. In 1940, the New York *Learn to Swim Campaign* flouted this convention. The Department of Parks programme, which was commissioned by Robert Moses, welcomed both black and white children to its city pools. The campaign's promotional poster—a colourful silkscreen designed by John Wagner—depicted children of different ages, races and genders sharing the same space. Although the shading of the central figure lends a racial ambiguity to his appearance, the dividing line between black and white is clear. Its effect is a shade more hazy: is it the children's alignment or segregation that causes the potentially-chaotic instability on the bending board?

5. The gender disparity in Wagner's poster correlates with the greater proportion of male to female swimmers who used NYC's public pools. The artwork's absence of white women, however, underpins a more hostile trend. The objection to close contact between black males and white females was often supported by racist claims of disease, dirt, and sexual intimidation. Gender-segregated pools ignited fewer of these concerns. In the 1920s, the municipal pools which served the city's working-class male community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, were racially inclusive. According to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the city's African American newspaper, the decision to allow black and white men to swim together caused 'no problems'. However, the opening of a large, resort-style, mixed-gender pool in 1931 caused significant civil unrest. The ensuing violence was met with institutional racism. When a group of white male swimmers physically attacked a group of black teenagers in the Highland Park pool the black youngsters were arrested and charged with inciting riot. Racial violence quickly spread to the city's gender-segregated pools. On 7 July 1935, nine-year old Frank Reynolds was beaten by a group of white youths at Paulson Pool. When his mother reported the crime, Inspector Kellie of Police Station No. 6 responded: 'Why can't you people use the Washington Boulevard pool, I don't approve of coloured and white people swimming together.'

6. There is little evidence of the old city pools at either Miller or Jefferson Park. At Riverside a trace remains. Though the swimming complex now looks more like a lawn than a pool, its concrete sides are still visible. An elder tree stands stately at the top of the old foundations, growing through the retaining wall, above which the bathing house used to sit. The tree's roots dig down into the filtration system, where chain-gangs once hammered. Its branches provide shade from the southern sun. 200 miles East of Virginia (in Los Angeles), the provision shade is a race issue. People living in poor neighbourhoods in Downtown LA—a high-percentage of whom are black or brown—are not only exposed to higher levels of air pollution, soil toxins and water contamination than wealthy communities living in areas like Bell Air, they are also subjected to higher temperatures as they traverse unshaded sidewalks devoid of trees. The region's policy of prohibiting the planting of trees in parkways less than five feet in width, because of potential damage to sidewalks, means that shade is scarce in poor neighbourhoods. Residents are left to feel the heat. In Lynchburg, two weeks after city-officials closed its pools, Brian Robinson, a twelve-year-old African American boy drowned while swimming in a canal lock. According to a local newspaper, the boy would normally have cooled-off at Jefferson Park pool.

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Outside Job, Locky Morris, Void Offsites,
Derry-Londonderry, 2021.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

Parting, Picking Lucie McLaughlin

In the moments before lines of writing tip out, from limb to fingers, onto page or keypad, I want to look away. The feeling of waiting arrives, as Elizabeth Hardwick says of boredom, ‘always ahead of time, ready.’¹

I’m scared of missing thinking. Of that which is not written down in time. The pencil grazes the wall as I walk from room to room, with my notebook in hand.

When I can’t get the words out, but do, anyway. The words might be woefully inadequate, boring, or just wrong. But now that they’re said, they can’t really be unread. My version of not-writing is making lists, small observations, whatever hums, or echoes. This means that when the words aren’t the right ones, at least their movement and rhythm give a feeling of it having been swept in; thinking. Although effusive, ‘there is pleasure in poetic exactingness.’²

Denise Riley talks about cutting through the thickness of your own silence in her book *Impersonal Passion*. An atmosphere is inhabited, just before speech occurs, of ‘linguistic aggression which the speaker knows she is about to commit, the aggression of cutting through some settled state.’³

Circling a line to hear the sound of circling. Chalky pencil, the rough of paper.

Walking through the street, a poetic proposition enters my field of vision. A new image written over the space where fast food adverts and jobs for tech companies arrive each month, lustreless and tall.

I stop. The art on the billboard speaks to the street, conversing, holding the etymology of this word, it 'turns with' my feet. Looking feels like 'trying vainly to weigh the quiet fringes [...] the trailing filigree of association which are part of its meaning.'⁴ The viewer knows in their un-seeing of what would normally be on the billboard that they've encountered something else, interruption as a place, an interstice, a station.

Salomé Voegelin writes in *The Creative Critic*, 'how do you know how to listen out for something you do not know?'⁵ Here, in the stopped walk, or passing glance that echoes loosely inside the rest of the day, interruption reveals itself as interval. One might propose to 'attend to the interval [between art and words] as an active space.'⁶ But what happens when we think of this interval not as active, but acute? An acute angle, the two sides pulled close enough to touch, where doing and thinking meet.

A happy drowsiness so shallow that it feels deep, the artificial breeze from passing bus exhausts, hair at the crown where the parting curves, fricatives, the pop of a pillowcase shook out, motes in the air.

'Doing nothing and saying nothing is an important statement that should be considered, even if I end up rejecting it,'⁷ says Jutta Koether in her text on the 'things that make art.' I think I am saying little, instead of nothing. Or; little nothings.

The sounding of words as interruption is part of a cycle. There is thinking, unfastened in its light wordless movements, until words do arrive, and with them all of the difficulty of setting down on the page the tenor of the previous associations, some of the arc of its movement.

I looked for a long time for the fly I saw in the fridge earlier. How to keep thought porous, by not thinking spatially, but in forces? The same forces holding the ordinary and the exceptional together.

A pocket full of lighters. Picking over stones on the ground with my feet. The panoptic shudder windscreen wipers lend to the inside of a car.

When you roll over in bed and ‘write down the thought which is just enough of a thought for you to know you are thinking it when you should be sleeping [...] the one that rattles,’⁸ or seems made of little nothings, maybe, ‘the force [of writing] is on loan’⁹ from a place that traffics in emotion and excess, from things that build, without stopping or full stops. Sleep codifies, the billboard says: around me there is only blankness! There must be some sort of gravity working for anything to end up on the page, yet the words don’t have any weight, making work instead.

I watch a golden shaft of sun for a long time until it fades. I watch the sky slope off somewhere, a blue reflection on an open window, all warped. The frosty roof tiles, the lines of boning across the back of the neighbours’ heavy cotton blinds. The radiator stretched and sagging at its centre. The smooth streams of liquid formed down gutters. A van turning a corner, a full stop; floating. The plastic tablecloth, wet with strawberry jam. Now, what was it I was going to write?

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- 2 Denise Riley, *Impersonal Passion, Language As Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p 71
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- 7 Jutta Koether, f., translated by Nick Mauss and Michael Sanchez (Frankfurt: Sternberg Press, 2017), p 33
- 8 Sarah Tripp, *The Self-Illuminating Pen*, (Glasgow: MAP Editions, 2020), p 26
- 9 ‘Writing is...Art’ online event with Kathryn Scanlan and Maria Fusco, Maynooth University, accessed live 16 March 2021, recording available at [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGnUPNCwwII>]

This text is inspired by *Outside Job*, Locky Morris, a billboard art project by Void Offsites, Derry-Londonderry, 2021

Score for Two Voiced Turntables

Ben Redhead

Cuts which are incisions, like decisions,
Cuts which are incisions, like decisions,
because they give shape to the world. Cuts which
Cuts which
Cuts which
Cuts which are incisions, like decisions,
Cuts which make wounds,
because they give shape to the world. Cuts which
make wounds,
wounds which secrete and leak,
wounds which secrete and leak, following Burroughs'
following Burroughs' suggestion that the
suggestion that the cut holds the potential to leak
the future.
cut holds the potential to
make wounds, wounds which secrete and leak,
leak the future.

Cuts which are the marks which mark us. The
Cuts which are the marks which mark us. The
scar represents a breach in the symbolic fabric and a
marks which mark us. The scar represents
the marks which mark us. The scar
a breach in the symbolic fabric and a break in the
represents a
seal of unity
break in the seal of unity which must be repaired in order to
beginning from this point.
begin, beginning from this point. As such, a
As such, a small scar is often at the origin of
small scar is often at the origin of literary writing.
Scenes of adulteration,
Scenes of adulteration,
intrusions of alterity,
intrusions of alterity,
infractions.

Wounds which
Wounds which secrete again, by concealing and
Wounds which secrete again,
sealing themselves in scar. Scars like
by concealing and sealing themselves in scar.
Odysseus', caused by the tusk of a wild boar
Scars like Odysseus'
driving over the knee. Through this rupture in the
Through this rupture in the
again, by
narrative of the Odyssey produced by the
concealing and sealing themselves in scar.
disclosure of the scar, emerges the story of Odysseus' naming.
emerges the story of Odysseus' naming.

Not just a

Not just a sense of

Not just a sense of

Not just a sense of graft or hybridity,

graft or hybridity, but of the arrival of the completely undomesticated.

but of the arrival of

The feeling that

The feeling that

The feeling that no anticipation could have

The feeling that no anticipation

prepared you to identify this.

The beautiful is

Not just a

The beautiful is always strange.

Not just a sense

The Disneyfication of the Gloryhole *situated within a bathhouse* Ciarán Mac Domhnaill

Janet Wasko discusses how many Disney plots ‘revolved around characters wishing to escape from their current setting or situation’. This claim is mirrored by the need for gay men (acknowledged as sexual outlaws) to escape from current homophobic settings and seek safer environments, such as bathhouses.

My criticism is not that gloryhole activity is now in a safe environment; the criticism is that such activity is not freed from institutionalised definitions, but instead placed within a commercial establishment.

When looking at a gloryhole ‘in the wild’, one will see a crudely drilled hole. However, a bathhouse gloryhole is known for its paying patrons and the use of gloryholes that are perfectly cut. Does this mean the experience becomes standardised and the pleasure predictable?

On entry the smell of chlorine greets you. Membership and familiarities are asked at reception. The lockers stand shiny and secure as you place your ‘passing’ life inside them. It’s late and many of the patrons are here after a long day at work. One man places his construction gear into a locker—a hi-vis jacket, work pants and heavy boots.

The tiles and showers are shiny and new. There are no signs of verbal conversation but instead silent forms of communication avail.

Your eyes and body become the medium of communication.
You are left unaware of people's accents.
You are left

My companion and I find a quasi-private room. It has porous walls of multiple gloryholes. Shortly after entering and closing the door behind me, I see the eye of an older man intentionally loitering in the adjacent room. Because of the diameter of the hole, I cannot see his facial expressions. I can only see one solitary eye or 'I'. Be as it may, things quickly change as the second gloryhole has a bodily visitor. A silent penis protrudes like a rogue periscope or a nosy Brontosaurus.

I am completely unaware who this penis belongs to. It is truly a body without organs.

I do my best to ignore the wall decorations and I whisper to my companion that 'we have an audience'. I say 'audience' as I am unaware of how many spectators occupy the adjacent room. The silence and non-verbal communication are of no assistance.

We leave this space and find a room without porous walls. We close the door and return to our activities. Unexpectedly, someone opens our door and I realise that I did not lock it. The patron apologises for the interruption and appears to close the door. However, they keep the door ajar and peek through. Wanting privacy and with my newly found confidence, I close the door fully and slide the bolt lock over. We restart our activities to the background music of The Weather Girls.

At reception I paid the membership fee
At reception I paid tonight's entry fee
At reception I paid for exclusivity

At reception I became part of something bigger
At reception I excluded the other

The dim light *compliments* the body
The dim light *hides* imperfections
The dim light *adds* to the mystery
The dim light *alludes* desire
The dim light *replicates* the sleazy

Astronaut Suit

rebekah raine probert

The first time I could capture the feeling of anxiety was after reading *The Taste of Blue Light* by Lydia Ruffles. Lex, an art student who struggled with mental health, referred to her anxiety as her astronaut suit. It stood as a separating tool—a suit that split the reality from the self. I imagined the wall of oxygen keeping the body from the world and instantly understood what anxiety felt like and could specify my description to others. Anxiety is wearing my astronaut suit.

‘I’m broken. I feel really, really broken and lost. I just want to find myself again.’

‘I know. You’ve got to work at it.’¹

Throughout the first summer of my undergraduate, I spent each Wednesday in a stuffy room at the community club. I was by far the youngest there and just *that* made me feel small. The others looked at me with kind but confused faces, thinking ‘surely not, you’ve barely lived yet!’ And it was true, I had barely lived. My life was made up of education and movies—there really wasn’t much more to it—but something kept me motivated to stay in that group meeting for ‘low moods and anxiety’.

Each of the attendees briefly told their background story, some as severe as seeing another die and others like mine in the

¹ Lydia Ruffles, *The Taste of Blue Light* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2018), p 152

sudden occurrence of panic.

'i was in a shop and suddenly i couldn't breathe.'

'i was at work and the fire alarm went off and i just lost it.'

'mine was at the park—my wife had to take me home!'

But I would always fall silent, organising the stack of paper in front of me into a perfect straight line. Each week we'd circle the numbers on the page to indicate how much we were struggling at certain times. To start out, I circled 6 for almost every part. That meant I was relatively stressed, depressed, anxious. The only number I kept separate was for the 'self-harm' or 'feeling suicidal'. For those, I would calmly circle a 1, in a *i haven't really thought about it* kind of way. I'm sure I had, but there was no need to pull away from Peter since he could barely leave the house each day. We would congratulate him each time he reported his occasional trips to the supermarket. His wife was away one week and he worked himself up so much that he spent the whole week inside and couldn't even walk his dog. After that, with the support of his wife, he began making trips to the end of the drive to bring the bins in and out. His wife would often drop him off and pick him up afterwards. She was his support.

I sometimes wondered how he was able to sit in this room for three and a half hours each week without any perceptible difficulty. Though, none of us made it obvious that we were *meant* to be there, but we were still suffering.

Alongside the numbers, we had a list of statements to add a lightness to our current situation. *How do you eat an elephant? Small bites at a time.* We learnt about the 'vicious cycle' and the domino affect it could have on our everyday decisions. For example: Lisa was feeling down, this meant that she didn't go out to see her friends, this meant that her friends didn't think she was reliable, and this brought us back to Lisa feeling down. It worked in many different scenarios. Lisa had a bill to pay but didn't like speaking on the phone, so Lisa decided to leave it for later that day, but lo, she had forgotten so planned to do it the next day and so on. Lisa was always struggling. At the bottom of the introduction to the vicious cycles page, it said, *Eat the frog in the morning, that way everything will taste better after.*

On the final day, the instructor of the course took us one-by-one outside to speak about our progress. *Do we feel like we might be able to get a stronger hold over our anxiety and low moods? Do we think we'll attempt our end goals and silently circle numbers if we feel we need to? Do we think we'll take what we've learnt from these sheets into our everyday lives? Do we know our vicious cycle?*

'It'll come to you one day,' she said, 'you'll notice that overtime things will just click, and you'll be able to just work through it. Just let it sink in.'

Anxiety can be rooted from a list of things. Several things. What they do is just sit on each other until you have a weight that is too unbearable contain. They all hold hands and dance around your insides. I imagine two-dimensional shapes containing dysfunctional memories and fears creating a vintage cartoon scene. This most definitely reflects my rational fear of Disney's *Oswald the Rabbit* and the way it creeps under my skin until I need to shower the uncomfortable tang away. And although it makes me want to be physically and violently sick, my sister does love to tease me with it. I say 'it' because frankly, I'm too scared to research its gender in case an image comes up. Oswald is my nightmares.

But overtime, it did sink in.

Each day I circle the numbers.

...

A few years later, my learning advisor suggests that anxiety might have stemmed from my difficulty in learning. He mentions that there's a high potential that I never quite felt good enough. He tells me that my working-memory isn't very good after I list few examples of what it feels like in my head. I say that I struggle concentrating, reading, and understanding and he sympathises with me. He even tells me to note down the astronaut suit—'write that down!', and so I do.

BeatTime

Sarah Long

Dialogue exists out in the ether. I take a pen. I index my consciousness. I'm making a mark; I'm signing my name. I'm committing an idea to my studio wall. I am scrawling my name to a petition on the street. I am signing my name in a visitor book—I WAS HERE. I pitter patter my fingers along the silent screen of my phone; I am whispering secrets. Here I say all sorts of embarrassing things I dare not say aloud. I would be mortified; I would die and then who would own my story? Can I not take it with me to my grave? Can I please let it die with me? I have the right not to tell my story. She will not be published. Perhaps she deserves to die? On my laptop now and typing furiously, it still retains some of the clickety-clatter of the typewriter—and now I am clever, now I have something to say, now I am a conductor—here is the score, here I am setting things to rights. Now I'm sending a voice note and here is where I 'um' and 'ah' and leave room for thought. Here is where you feel the presence of reflection, the doubt—the doubt! the deep, deep doubts—the trailing, the teetering off, the helplessness of handling language in my mouth. The words are too small; my mouth is too big—a lot of hot air and empty space surrounds them. Now I'm texting someone, I'm sending a sunny emoji so I don't seem passive-aggressive, now I'm texting someone who lives in my echo chamber and I respond with 'class' and it contains multitudes of hilarious meanings and meaningful memories. Here I am, now, sending an email and I wonder how many exclamations points knock the balance over from peppy

and easy-to-deal-with to manic, overly excitable puppy. Now I'm writing something I know I will read aloud and suddenly there is rhythm—there is form, there are words to perform!—and I wonder, have these dead poets and their lyricism been there waiting in the wings to well up once given the right dress? Ring, ring! It's the telephone and now I'm again relying on my voice alone to communicate—but I don't have time for reflection. I must be quick, sharp, snappy with my answers or the listener—read reader—will think the lines gone dead. Here we all are on Zoom, exhausted but gazing intently at our own images; smiling, smiling, smiling—never quite succeeding at balancing the long, awkward silences, when the discussion opens up, with the chaos of everyone unmuting their mics and accidentally talking over each other at the same time—all scrambling, scrambling to read social cues. I shrink, I expand, I exist in many, many forms. Here comes the drop-down menu on a dating app: I am male/female, I am looking for male/female, I am a smoker/non-smoker, I am liberal/conservative, I like dogs/I am a normal human being who doesn't rely on a pet as a personality. That was mean, I'm sorry—but now I am in essay form and sometimes she is sassy. I can't control it; she just writes and writes in this space, hitting up against whatever limits, whatever confines the square keys of her keypad control. The QWERTY keyboard was designed to keep all the letters you would use most frequently far apart to slow the typist down so that the typewriter machine didn't snag. Now QWERTY is printed in my brain as a thought process—but there is still an act, a gesture in pressing these keys and there is still a moment, now—even with me lashing the keys as hard as I can, knowing I can go back later with autocorrect and tidy these thoughts up a bit, even now, amidst this frantic typing, there is a pause, there is a moment when I think the thought, put the thought into the words that I have to think of it, phrase these together, string myself a sentence and then break this back down into the letters that make up this sentence and then tell my fingers get cracking this could be a good thought, let's capture this one, let's hold on to this boyo, let's use up every clichéd, weird phrase we have in our repertoire to examine this experience—but there is still time that exists in between all this...

Time—I cannot beat time—I cannot beat time—beat time, beat time, beat time. No, I cannot beat time; I must try and write. I must be content with the fact that my existence is controlled by language and forms and that is all.

Author Biographies

Alex Bottomley is a writer based in Edinburgh.

Kate Briggs is writer and translator based in Rotterdam. She is the author of *This Little Art* (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017) and translator of two volumes of Roland Barthes's lecture and seminar notes at the Collège de France: *The Preparation of the Novel* and *How to Live Together*, both published by Columbia University Press. Her forthcoming novel *The Long Form*, will be published by Fitzcarraldo Editions in 2023.

Donald Butler is an interdisciplinary artist, writer and programmer from Grangemouth, Scotland. Their practice sits between class struggle, queer utopianism and trash tv. Recent work has focused on queer life guided by capital, the capture of queer relations by the market, and chem-sexualities. Donald is co-founder of the artist group *Tendency Towards*; recent projects include *From Here a Home Was Imagined*, for CCA Annex, Glasgow, an online programme of moving image works questioning queer nostalgia. Their writing has been published by Map Magazine, The Skinny, Lunchtime Gallery, TACO, and The List.

Rebecca Fortnum is an artist, writer and academic, and is currently Head of the School of Fine Art at The Glasgow School of Art. Her books include *Contemporary British Women Artists*, *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think* and *A Companion to Contemporary Drawing*. In 2019 she was elected Visiting Research Fellow in Creative Arts at Merton College, Oxford, where she developed her painting project, *A Mind Weighted with Unpublished Matter*. She is the 2021-22 Senior Research Fellow at the Henry Moore Institute working on *Les Practiciennes*, a project about the women sculptors in Rodin's circle.

Hazel Glass is a pseudonym. @quarkacademia.

Marie-Chantal Hamrock is a visual artist based in Glasgow. Using relics and inscrutable objects, she creates surreal and complex narratives, hinting at arcane and clandestine revelations. Her work seeks to blur the line between the real and the imagined through a multi-disciplinary practice, moving across drawing, film, writing, and object-making.

Laura Haynes is leader of the MLitt Art Writing at The Glasgow School of Art and an editorial director of MAP Magazine, an artist-led publishing and production project.

Sarah Long is an artist and writer based in Cork and Glasgow.

Rachel Loughran is a Scottish writer with an interest in urban and rural landscapes, archival research, literary criticism and digital storytelling. She holds a double-first in English from the University of Cambridge and has held editorial positions at Harper's Magazine among others. Her recently published work includes literary criticism for The National and a feature on the revitalisation of Scotland's apple-growing heritage for Linseed Journal. Rachel is currently working in collaboration with The Alasdair Gray Archive on an interactive exhibition about the life and work of the Glasgow artist and writer.

During the postgraduate programme, Ciarán Mac Domhnaill has spent their time exploring art writing through cross-school collaboration, curatorial practice, queer theory and activism. Projects this year include a screening at the Poetry Club, Glasgow, a publication in the student-led zine *Split Ends* and the curatorial projects *Inner Conflict and gayness* and *Don't believe everything Yves Leather tells you*. In September 2022, Ciarán will continue their studies in Curating Contemporary Art (MA) at the Royal College of Art in London.

Lucie McLaughlin is a Belfast born artist and writer. Her work is realised in forms such as image, sound and writing. She is interested in how art and language can be made unfamiliar by a collapse in distance between the ordinary and the imaginative, and how certain political atmospheres and socio-psychological states that in themselves cannot be easily articulated, emerge through practice. She has worked recently with Catalyst Arts, Belfast (*And, if we observe the present*, 2021, *A Line of Tiny Soaps*, 2022). She is a research associate at CCA Derry-Londonderry 2022-2024.

Paul Mendez is a novelist, essayist and screenwriter based in London. *Rainbow Milk* (Dialogue Books, 2020), his semi-autobiographical debut novel, narrates the life of Jesse, a Black working class gay man raised as a Jehovah's Witness in the Black Country. He is currently adapting *Rainbow Milk* for TV while studying MA Black British Fiction at Goldsmith's.

Caitlin Merrett King is a writer and programmer living in Glasgow. Her writing has been published by MAP Magazine, Pilot Press and Sticky Fingers, and will be published later this year in *Nothing Personal* and *Arts (MDPI)*.

Sara O'Brien is a writer based between Dublin and Glasgow. She graduated from the MLitt Art Writing in 2021 and in April 2022 contributed to the *Biographical Fictioning* Masterclass. Sara was awarded the GSA Foulis Medal 2021 for outstanding achievement and The Yellow Paper Prize for Art Writing 2021.

rebekah raine probert
is an overly emotional
artist and writer who writes about
feminism, feelings and past experiences.
she's attached and
romanticises just about
everything, but that's her art.
she over shares, she over
cares.
she feels in colour and
sees in blue.
she's angry and she loves.
and is very poetic.

Clara Raillard is a French artist and writer living in Glasgow. She has recently shown her work in le BBB centre d'art, Toulouse (*Activité Permanente*, 2018), La Cave Poésie, Toulouse (2019), La Maison Salvan, Labège (*L'île aux oiseaux*, 2019), or the *XXIVe Rencontres Internationales Traverse*, Toulouse (*L'Art c'est faire*, 2021). She is currently trying to figure out whether her computer wants to hurt her by interrogating history and engaging in art and film criticism.

Ben Redhead is an artist and writer from Leeds, living in Glasgow. Ben is interested in the complexities of silence and voice, language and non-language, and human and animal identity. Their current practice is in writing, performance and sound art.

Esraa Shanawaz is a writer and illustrator from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Her Masters Project scores a polyphonic narrative of events that have hit many souls and shaped a present.

Susannah Thompson is Head of Doctoral Studies at The Glasgow School of Art. Her research concerns contemporary art history and visual culture, with a particular emphasis on interdisciplinary and feminist approaches to art writing, criticism/post-criticism, art historical writing and fiction/literature and/in/as art.

Good Lighting

Exhibition and events programme presented as part of the School of Fine Art Postgraduate Degree Show at The Glasgow School of Art, 20 – 27 August 2022. Featuring an evening of reading, performance and screening from the graduating Art Writing students and including contribution from the inaugural School of Fine Art Practitioner in Residence, Kate Briggs (hosted by Art Writing 2022-23), 23 August, CCA Theatre. The graduating cohort will be in residence at Intermedia, CCA, presenting new work and a series of evening workshops, 24 – 27 August. The Art Writing presentation at CCA Glasgow will also include the second part of Kate Briggs' workshop 'Conversation as Social Involvement'.

Class of 2022

Alex Bottomley	Caitlin Merrett King
Donald Butler	Rebekah Raine Probert
Marie-Chantal Hamrock	Clara Raillard
Sarah Long	Ben Redhead
Rachel Loughran	Esraa Shanawaz
Ciarán Mac Domhnaill	Kate Taylor
Lucie McLaughlin	

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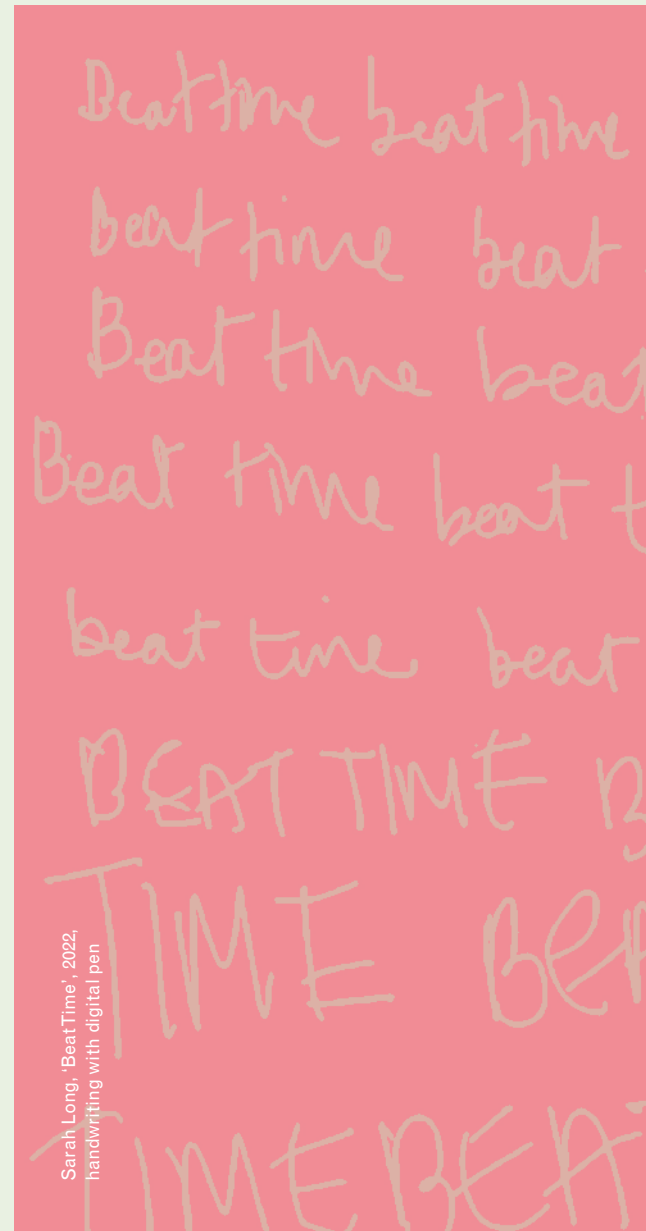
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Sarah Long, 'Beat Time', 2022,
handwriting with digital pen

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time beat time beat time

BEAT TIME BEAT

TIME BEAT

BEAT TIME

Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome, come on in!

A Brain-Dump Comprising 8 Anecdotes Roughly About Translation

Stephen Sutcliffe

Biographical Fictioning Proceedings, April 2022

1. The subject of translation came up in a recent seminar and I offered up the story of how Terence Kilmartin discovered that Marcel Proust had killed off one of his characters in *À la recherche du temps perdu* but had forgotten and included him sometime later, something his first translator had missed.

2. Later in the same event I mentioned Jacques Rivette's film *La Belle Noiseuse* and as I hurriedly looked for an English translation, could only find 'The Beautiful Nut', (the UK release was titled *The Beautiful Troublemaker*).

3. John Ashbury initiated student-writing workshops by asking his class to translate a text from a language they didn't know. Dick Hebdige did something similar at Cal Arts, suggesting his students use a speech to text program, mistakes and all. In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom uses the term 'misprision' to describe an act of wilful misinterpretation for creative purposes.

4. From reading Michael Bracewell's latest book *Souvenir* I discovered Prefab Sprout's name comes from a mishearing of the first line of Johnny Cash and June Carter's song *Jackson*. Misheard lyrics can produce images in the mind's eye that dissolve on correction. A friend used to believe Paul Young sang, 'Every time you go away, you take a piece of *meat* with you', while I thought Ziggy Stardust was 'making love with his *eagle*'.

5. At the height of the pandemic I presented a Zoom talk for the Royal College of Art from my kitchen. When the audience was asked for comments and questions, someone pointed out that I was keen on blending. I replied suggesting 'blending' was a good synonym for collage. 'No,' they replied, 'you have a lot of blenders behind you.'

6. On *Test Match Special* (Radio 5 Live Extra) the listeners were asked to send in their favourite business jargon. The best I heard came from a brainstorming session during which the chair replied to one proposal with, 'I'm going to put that in the ideas fridge and snack on it later.'

7. I once heard of an artist who had an Italian meal with a man who introduced her to all the dishes as if she had absolutely no knowledge of the country's cuisine. 'This is lasagne,' he would say, 'a layered dish made from sheets of pasta' etc. She, coincidentally half Italian, spent most of the night utterly bemused.

8. Someone else told me he knew a rather grand employee of the British Council who developed a habit of pronouncing the names of cities in the accent of the country they were in. Paris was ‘Parrees’, Milan was ‘Meelan’ etc. This didn’t stop when his job changed to the British Isles, where he would use local accents, resulting in exclamations like, ‘I’ve just returned from ‘Liverpeul’ or ‘In Noocassle I met a wonderful group of young artists’.

Of course, all of this may have been misremembered.



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