

Inventions of the Mother: A Waking Dream



Midwinter Day No More, parts I-III & IV-VI, 2020-21

Pauline van Mourik Broekman

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This poem started life as a proposal — initially very light-hearted and fleeting — made by Mira Mattar to Jennifer Hodgson, Julia Calver and myself, to read Bernadette Mayer's poem, *Midwinter Day* (1982), out loud, online, on the day it was written. We later learned such performances are popular and widespread — an annual celebration that, for some, has come to replace Christmas. For us, the experiment was so catalytic that we continued performing it, peripatetically and in various formations (shared working; anniversary readings; a part of Mira's *The Bow*, The87 Press, 2021).

It is difficult in my case to mark the precise moment that the 'transcription' — as I soon called our activity, in memory of an exercise in interpretation I was set during my Fine Art, Painting, BA, in 1988 — came to occupy the central place that it did in my PhD. Initially, the reason was nothing greater, or lesser, than that the exercise helped me write, in a flowing and sustained way.

Once under way, I realised that *Midwinter's* power as a pedagogic object meant work with/on it could be made compelling, even in the formal terms of a doctoral project. The points of divergence between our lives, homes, and historical times might be juxtaposed. She was in a heterosexual couple, content and creative; life had made me question the couple form. Her dreams proliferated — a wide open channel between night and day — mine were on the wane. She celebrated, tentatively, the figure of homeostasis; to me, violent climate change seemed to mock it every day. In every line of its poetry, *Midwinter Day* also rendered incandescent the phenomena that persisted across the gap between us — which I had been seeking words to describe in the 'theoretical' language of scholarly research. How should this convey the corporeal, emotional and intellectual experience of everyday life, shared between adults and children; our sense experiences of reality; art, poetry, labour; the social, economic and environmental conditions shaping all these?

My every decision regarding 'content' and 'form' had, then, to uphold both distance and proximity, difference and sameness. The working title, *Midwinter Day No More*, adjoined a sense of homage and loss (or so I hoped). The poem exceeded these formal terms, in the end, and images that I included — shared with me by my mother and my daughter — begged a more apposite title, naming the relations, concepts and events housed in my words and pictures.

Farringdon, June 2022

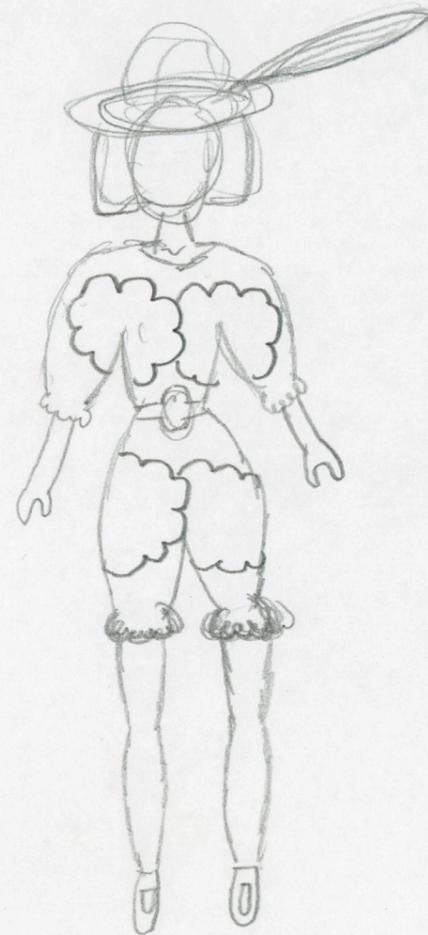
DEAR MUM

THIS IS HOW I SEE YOU ON

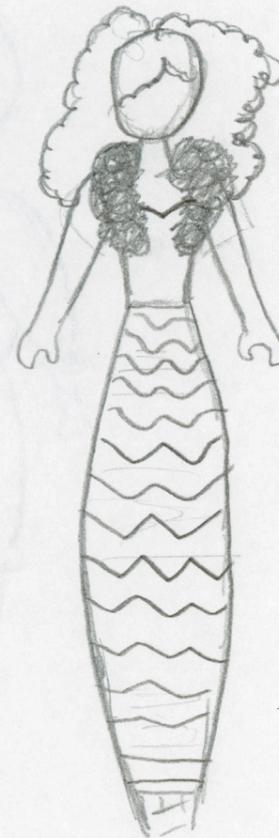
MONDAY



WEDNESDAY



FRIDAY



PART ONE

It was a sight for sore eyes, nestled in undulating hills of green
Far on the horizon
The giraffes' necks stuck out highest
But balloons and other party decorations floated up high by their side
Set crisply against the clear, turquoise sky
Fluffy white clouds
Perched perfectly
Half-way between Heaven and Earth
Icons of themselves
I gazed at the scene of happy abandon -
All the generations mixed
Children, running around, elders, sitting easily, chatting and being catered to,
Us, somewhere
A peaceful and contented final station for everyone we had ever known
One that, I remark to myself now, was nonetheless full of movement
Glorious epitome of circulation &
Not outside history
Encapsulated in that open building and its celebration
Distant, but visible, and so within some kind of reach
A consolation
A possibility
A dream
But I am grateful I hardly dream of you, or our places, any more
Even if it was never, technically, a recurring dream
The running made me tired
Where were you going?
That you could never look back
That you were always around a corner
One step ahead
In all those dark passages and corridors
Unable to lend a hand
Look behind you
Wait
For me
Long gone, too, are the days when I used to swim in the air
Pivot upright until I was at speaking height for my friend's head
Fold over, in a carefully-drawn L shape, to then elongate myself perfectly flat -
Our nightly walks with the dog
Had me, on those suburban pavements

Image: Violet Davies, pencil
on paper (costume sketches
of / for her mother), 2019

✿ *Where the Wild Things Are*, Spike Jonze (dir.), 2009.

✿ I cannot remember whether, in Winter 2020, I sought to make an explicit reference to the role of the figure of the circle in the black-feminist writing I was reading, but it seems an inescapable reference in 2021. I had for example been reading Angelyn Mitchell (ed.), *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994). Mitchell's book and title cites Frederic Douglass: "I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension..." (while a shorter excerpt acts as an epigraph to the collection, the longer citation is from Robert B. Stepto's 'I Rose and Found My Voice: Narration, Authentication, and Authorial Control in Four Slave Narratives' (1979), p. 256-281). For a recent example of its use as a figure and device, see Lola Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (London: Hajar Press, 2021), especially pp. 108-113 and the cover.

Swimming along with breaststroke

Rhythmically paced

Frog legs jutting out, and in, apart, and together

Hands like a sharp point

Chisel cutting into space

Calmly chatting in the dark

Pondering questions and answers, as if conventionally ambulant

There were rare occasions, too, dreams of unique and cherished exhilaration

Where I rose higher

Floating above the sheer drop of a valley, I recall

Taken up by a propeller sprouting from my back - was it?

Looking down, confident, and smiling inwardly

In complete control of my aerial craft

Mostly, though, it was a swimming and a floating, at head-height

Sure, and steady

An everyday kind of thing... prosaic, regular, nothing of note

It's astonishing how much more identificatory detail the dreams

Of others would seem to have

With their names and places and dates and times

Sometimes I think the dreamers must be faking it

In their books, and their essays and tweets

But, no, I have come to realise it is me

Who exists, night and often also day, in this a-verbal mush

Of sensation, space, matter and feeling

Like those hairy clumps in *Where the Wild Things Are**

- which translates the children's story into a film about the basest affects

A world populated by gigantic toddler-beings

Be they monarchs or no

Grunting and objecting and crying out their pain

Primarily of fear and humiliation, the hurt at exclusion

The existential longing to be inside the circle*

But...

Do you think the fact that

I have (mostly) stopped dreaming

Means something?

I tell myself it is a sign of the times

Or perhaps of my age

The stage of life

As my body gets busy

Sweating and bleeding itself out of itself into whatever next due phase

To which I attach my fables of transformation

Of boundless grandmothers

Of sexual septuagenarians

Of wisdom and levity attained equally

A new inhabitation of the body: my & yours & ours

And, therefore, also of the mind

Which again makes me forgive and forget

I seem to be losing all the names and words

Changes this from apocalypse of perception, that

Catastrophic descent into

- old age and decrepitude -

- social and existential disappearance -

- the special suffering and sacrifice of the feminised -

To which we pay no heed

For which we created no words

...if we ever did, we buried them

Deep in the ground, the filthiest earth

At the edges of the city

Where no-one ever walks, safely

Where the lights go out, and no electricity runs

Just dirty water, effluent and mud...

To a necessary phase-change, a deep status-update

We talked about it, didn't we?

How this loss and disorientation could be

Remade

(and yes, okay, probably was once)

As a productive disconnection

An untethering of the points where language and things are bound

So that we could make something out of the material of experience

For people...

our people...

all people...

We agreed at that table, looking conspiratorially into each

Other's laughing / knowing eyes

Fully aware that in our present no-one would agree or concur

There was a bigger purpose

To such a dissolution

And so we fantasised for a little while

"We gave ourselves permission,"

goes the saying

speaks the cheese of sentiment

accepts the we who has no choice

helps itself the we who must

As to what -

We, middle-aged,

In hock to hormones, bodies & their emotions

* The phrase 'femme moshing' was influenced by Vicky Osterweil's thoughts on the gendering effects of riotous togetherness. Answering Zoé Samudzi, in her interview in *Jewish Currents*, she says: "I think riots and militant violent action in general get slandered as being macho and bro-y, and lots of our male comrades like to project that sort of image. That definitely happens, but I actually think riots are incredibly femme. Riots are really emotive, an emotional way of expressing yourself. It is about pleasure and social reproduction. You care for one another by getting rid of the thing that makes that impossible, which is the police and property. You attack the thing that makes caring impossible in order to have things for free, to share pleasure on the street. Obviously, riots are not the revolution in and of themselves. But they gesture toward the world to come, where the streets are spaces where we are free to be happy, and be with each other, and care for each other." See: Zoé Samudzi, 'Stealing Away in America', 10 June 2020, *Jewish Currents* (online), <https://jewishcurrents.org/stealing-away-in-america>.

Notionally,

Practically,

Cast out and adrift

Sans currency and left to manage and be patronised -

Could do with this loosening?

How we might be lifted from this pit to

soar

float

see

feel

The landscape of being, that

Sensuous abstraction / shape / scattering / burrow / giant soft lap

And report back, or express, some of this seeing and feeling

And so, we dreamt, for that little moment

Of a role and a place

Of our femme moshing*

Of the otherwise desperate, deathly juncture, the

Necropolitics of

Mass human

Neglect and waste and discard.

We were good at creating, I think,

these structured rituals, remember?

inside the boundary; only we saw it as

Releasing

Producing knowledge

I see that other time

so clearly, too, for example

Another wooden-clad room

Another wooden table

Us opposite each other

You drew on my knowledge

Your trauma

Your image

Their rug, rolling & unrolling

His control & cruelty

His power, absolute

Doing & undoing

You

Just like the

- M-A-I-L ⇄ M-A-L-E ⇄ M-A-I-L -

My sister also can't

- open the post -

- answer the door -

- respond to the bell -

For fear of

'Friends', 'Acquaintances', 'Family'

All, always, forever,

Egged on, aided and abetted by, hers, an
emotionally stifled mamma, yours, an
emotionally blind mamma

Pursuing her own

Plans / desire / destiny

- ⇄ safety ⇄ -

Agency, it turns out, is

Face,

Chest,

Libido and cogito being

fear, actually, post-

mortem, she

Strode forward,

Forever forward,

Exactly like you-know-who

While you were forced to figure life out, oh babes. But...

You brought it,

we cracked it,

right there and then

What you needed and who you could be:

A detonation expert,

A cowboy in a movie

Turning up for the

Final showdown, the

Gunfight at the

O.K. Corral*

Someone, unlike us, we meant,

Someone, that means,

Given time and space

The carefully crafted cage, the indestructible armature;

Only it could act as a device and casing

To let the bomb go off, or,

The gunfight

Take its course

Battle between equals

So long in coming &

Long overdue

But the question then became...

* *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, John Sturges (dir.), 1957.

Who and how are we allowed, held, enabled
To be the detonation experts, the cowboys, we realised we need to be?
To relate to the life, to let it blow, go off, in all its certain violence?
Who and how are we granted that time and space
That cage or armature
Device and casing
An architecture
To support the explosions that need to happen
 - yes, they really do -
And which we know could release us (all of us)
 But in so doing also blast away
The routine and habits,
The homes and habitats,
The stabilities
Domestic and reproductive
That we otherwise spend our days and nights fighting for, or are
 Forced to, because
 No-one else will
Where are those others?
Where is that other?
What might it even be?
...that makes the space, the time
To have life continue
While some of us take a fucking break
Concentrate on what needs concentrating on
Which might, to be brutally honest, be an actual emergency
 You weren't even asking for much, were you?
 A few days, you thought it would take?
 Small change,
 Surely,
 In the greater scheme?
But no, it's somehow
Not possible - sorry
There is no-one, no-thing,
No people, no state, for us, for them
 No bloody mother, no mothers for everyone,
 Because, we are they
So, we, you and me, us all, dutifully go back to the
 Grindstone
 Cheerios
 Tik-tok allowance
 Onesies
 Microwave

Washing up
 Screen-time settings
 Online deliveries
 Recycling
 Rabbit hay
Work
 Within and around
 These on which I spend
 Hours
 But which remains
 Invisible
 To me
 Invisible
 To most
 Everyone
To make the rhythms, that make the space and the time
For our little ones, or so we think
For the present state of things to continue.
 Is the disappearance of my dreams
 Their reduction, evaporation, elusiveness
 Connected to this,
 in some deeper way,
 I can't help but wonder.
I spent hours at school,
Holy Cross,
Sweeping madly, every break we had, under the pine trees
Making room, using the
Ample curve of a fallen branch
A broom, bent down to a sublime utilitarian accuracy by
Repeated use
Making walls, corridors, bedrooms and sitting rooms
 - I'm sure there must have been a kitchen and a bathroom -
Worked so hard to make them all straight, even, proportionate
Each line no wider than an inch,
A whole building drawn out on the floor,
 Everything that might ever be needed,
 by everyone
Housed among these dense trails of minuscule needles
Ever-green and plentiful, was an infinite resource for this,
My extremely important project of
Construction.
 Is our task in fact to make

✱ Capitalism has an inherent tendency to produce surplus populations, as required (the 'supernumerary'). See, e.g., Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, London: Penguin, trans. Ben Fowlkes, pp. 787-8:

"After political economy has thus declared that the constant production of a relative surplus population of workers is a necessity of capitalist accumulation, she very aptly adopts the shape of an old maid and puts into the mouth of her ideal capitalist the following words addressed to the 'redundant' workers who have been thrown onto the streets by their own creation of additional capital: 'We manufacturers do what we can for you, whilst we are increasing that capital on which you must subsist, and you must do the rest by accommodating your numbers to the means of subsistence.' Capitalist production can by no means content itself with the quantity of disposable labour-power which the natural increase of population yields. It requires for its unrestricted activity an industrial reserve army which is independent of these natural limits." (The quote here is from Harriet Martineau, 'A Manchester Strike', 1832, p. 788, *Capital*, ibid.)

✱ 'Capitalism: Concept and Idea' was a conference organised by the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy to celebrate the 150th anniversary of *Capital*, Volume I, 13-14 October, 2017.

✱ The Locked Room, an experimental education project, was conceived and led by Peter Kardia, with Garth Evans, Gareth Jones and Peter Harvey, starting in 1969 at St. Martin's School of Art and Design. As notorious as it was influential, its signature method was to dehabituate students by locking them in a room, each with one – unpredictable – sculptural material (foam, for example),

This house right now?

(I look outside and something tells me
we haven't a second to spare)

One where living, loving, working and dreaming can coexist,

Not steal from each other?

Where walls are made of fragile pins that slip and slide underfoot,

Tiny and delicate, a nothingness,

But rock-solid,

Enough to carry

Everything

In that same light and perishable

State

I dreamed of, before, that

Numerous being?*

Would such a house make my dreams come back?

I keep on hearing noises in the flat, looking down at the laptop clock, time is astonished at how fast it is passing, we both are, yet you gobbled me up just the same and I walked straight in – oblivious to the lion's maw, its den, a cavern I knew was there and had been warned about, but which I still failed to see.

We are to our own waste the same; every day I look at the bags and bags of packaging we 'produce', the single-use plastic, the cardboard, the jars and bottles, the aluminium and steel cans, there it is, our Magic Mountain, sign and symbol – concept, idea, like capital* – sitting atop what I have dubbed the Man Cave, where the ginger-haired creature lives, and now sleeps, and last night whined, and barked and yelped, singing nigh operatically, from anywhere between 22.30 and 09.15, and I see and not see it at the same time, in that same way.

Then I look in the garbage and see and not see it all, too; chicken carcasses, rotting banana skins, a cup of lamb fat, endless horse-dung like scoops of coffee grinds – soft orbs, their brown slurry binding them together-yet-apart in slimy bubble formations, pegged some more, and with better structural surety, by old ballpoint pens we haven't used or which have gone dry, or by pastel prep-cards for GCSE exams that got filed in the wrong category (they should have gone to recycling, will Ava ever understand? though I don't really mind as I'm sentimental and will fish happily for the gems she possesses no scales to measure).

The ginger-haired creature brings a more serious message, though, as he too is a commodity, albeit a live one, and predictably I dreamt of him, you,

sweet darling, soon after we purchased you – there is no other word – and I saw you in that same rubbish bin, lifeless on your back, surrounded by all the banal detritus of our life. Transposing fears about Violet's safety onto you – auburn curls floppy and wet against the baked beans and Fairy, paws upward like when you sleep – it all emanated out; a frenzied fan, blooming enormous, growing up from the compost of my memories. Most immediately, I saw me, in a dream, miniature body in the foetus position; inanimate, forgotten, lying prone and defenceless among the Viagra and stored-up coppers, the one-night-stand hotel calling cards, the house-keys and Ibuprofen. There I lay, among all the paraphernalia of the frozen heart, in strict and callous equivalence. A mere bit in the bitty-crap collection dish – mere waste, in our very own domestic dump.

Looking on, I see that past and present, now and then, were glutinously wedded in that open grave; that meaningless, dusty bowl, carelessly perched, every single day, on the window ledge by the black front door. Entry and exit, slide and escape hatch, cat-flap and stable door, you moved through the portal – in and out of the locked room* – carried along by the floods, fires, sands and winds of an undetected apocalypse. There it is, come-all-ye, come and see the cruelty of the human animal. Who knew its true nature? Only you. The man with all the keys, licence holder for the hi-res assets, the titles absolute. But, my realisation is obliterated by an image of the greater violation of our commons; a more savage betrayal and offence. Crashing THUNDERCLAP of the homeless who merely seek shelter, find sleep finally in civic bins, only to be crushed by municipal jaws in their slumber. Great, heaving claws hoisting and throwing them into refuse vans, taking them away, lumped together with the actual garbage, all without anyone noticing. Yes, this is a 'common practice', a 'common occurrence', a seen-not-seen thing; and one that, while the news says is 'surging',† I should not be writing about here.

Being with you both;

Reading and writing

With Bernadette, as it was all day,

But also all the others I have read too briefly, and must

Read anew, or read again, the

Tens, hundreds, thousands I have researched, pinpointed, stored, like

Butterflies, flowers, leaves, which

I conjure, think hard about, and yearn for,

Then, file away...

Quietly...

For another day...

Those far away, and those close

to then surveille and review how each student behaved; what they made (or did not). Heavily male-dominated, its seemingly cruel practices were always defended as radical, not coercive; and most alumni attest to this enthusiastically (Richard Deacon, among them). In 2011, after decades of neoliberal restructuring and mergers, the school's parent body, the University of the Arts London, sold and closed the Charing Cross Road site to occupy a new campus in King's Cross. During this move, the historic St. Martin's building – by then a deep psychogeographic warren, covered in the markings of thousands of students – was hurriedly emptied of decades of educational history, including administrative and teaching archives, furniture, drawing props and architectural features (including the black door that had locked the room). Having lived in close proximity to the remnants of this heavily mythicised project, I am moved to wonder where its contours came to lie; what institution, and social formation, ultimately housed it; where its values were most powerfully expressed. See also: Marina Vishmidt, 'Creation Myth', 2010, <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/creation-myth>.

◆ One account of these deaths is Amy Walker, Patrick Greenfield, 'Deaths of homeless people sleeping in bins prompt calls for action', 24 February, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/feb/24/deaths-homeless-people-sleeping-bins-calls-action-uk>.

✱ Danny Hayward's recent writings are compiled in *Wound Building: Dispatches from the Latest Disasters in UK Poetry* (Earth, Milky Way: Punctum Books, 2021).

✱ My concern with nominalism – the relationship we have with reality via the abstractions of words, names, concepts – is dealt with in this poem through my management of personal identifiers; the first and second names, which, for many women, are the first and foremost casualties of menopause's 'cognitive fog' (nouns being close behind). When one speaks of a friend, or cites an academic author or famous artist, one does that in a particular way – choosing the first or second name to indicate distance (or closeness). This codifies – often gestures knowingly – a certain familiarity, authority, or intimacy of connection. Authorship's respectability and trustworthiness, its stability, relies on it. This section mixes these conventions; notes elisions as a technique of anonymising, hiding/camouflaging and/or collectivising/blurring, towards a description of the environment (of social and parasocial relationships) I partake of, as well as truthfulness about the biological reality of memory loss. In "Being with you both" (previous page), "you" is meant as a hovering appellation that could point to my daughters, Ava and Violet, or to the two friends I was working with, Mira and Jen, or indeed anyone who the reader places here, based on their own feeling and interpretations of what went prior. The 'Emily', plural, whom I was influenced by, and looking to refer to is, firstly, Emily Dickinson, whose name and work appear with what became a quite uncanny frequency across the fields of my research (not just poetry, but animation, film and artists' books, where her fascicles have invited a welter of interdisciplinary scholarship, including by the Soviet-film

Mira, Danny (who she's reading)✱

Emily, Emily, Emily,✱

And Susan and Anne

(which also means Emily again, and even also her plural, the Emilies)

But also, the nameless, the non-memorialised, the hidden; the so-called

unpublished poets, like the grandmother sitting on a secret stash, whose

incendiary anti-bureaucratic piece, leaked by her grandson, set a hell-site alight

for a day in November.✱

Ave brava!

historian, Jay Leda).

Secondly, Emily (LaBarge), my supervisor, in a deliberate circuit, because she discussed Susan (Howe) with me – as did Anne (Boyer), in her 2019 Cambridge poetry workshops (see: Susan Howe, 'Sorting Facts; or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker', in Charles Warren (ed.), *Beyond Document: Essays on Non-Fiction Film*, Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1996, pp. 343), and *My Emily Dickinson*, New York: New Directions, 2007). The logic of these footnotes dictates that I admit I have forgotten who the third Emily was, in spite of frantic searching. It could be Emily Apter, but that doesn't ring true to feeling.

✱ I have not been able to retrieve the viral tweet to which this is a reference, but it was a moving outburst of surprise, written in Winter, 2020, when a grandson found a collection of poems authored by his grandmother, the existence of which had been unknown to all her relatives during her life.



PART TWO

Ava makes her way round her phone like a skilled jet-fighter, while I have capacity, only, to move potted plants from A to B, and it turns out nothing more is needed today, or yesterday, while I make the most of the light and the dry, the dead yucca leaves; draw hashtags, an open grid and grammar on the tarmac floor; and you are prone, full-time, to wagging tail, backside in the air.

Ella wafts in on the waves,* which from 2015-19 would have been my certain death,* but I can listen to, even luxuriate in, now that Ava, and not memory, is the medium. All the food of the festive season tightens my tummy into a hard, wooden plank. Fit for the underside of a barge, or to play at being bridge, I wish a kind doctor would come and relieve me of it, like they did my Achilles in Nairobi.

All three of us clock in for work the minute we wake up, hello! You two make more dance, face and laughs ('TikTok', 'TikTok'); I tell myself I make more thought and words ('research', 'my PhD'), but we are doing the same - for hours, every day. *Hi, my name is Pauline, and I'm an addict, yes, no, three bags full.* Johanna says they only work here when they're on the toilet, because that's about all it's good for, and I wish I was the same.* Instead, the factory floor haunts my nights, seeps out under all our beds, and a feathery sovereign - so mean, reactionary and blue - reigns the land, uncontested.†

The platform is a bear pit, says the Vice Chancellor, with all the blind and mendacious righteousness of a monarch on his throne. High and dry, in crisp apparel likely laundered by others, he deigns to slander us, down here, in the mud, blood, sweat and sawdust. Mere bittersweet consolation, that intellectual somersault, which shows me the learning I do here, among the king's lower orders and beasts, whose wisdom and intelligence - unlike that of their masters - stands in inverse proportion to the resources they are given to express it. Or, that their education only seems to matter as much as it does - keeps me coming back, seamstress to bench, moth to flame, carpenter to lathe - because the human cushion, our alma maters and community houses, were whisked away, hollowed out, replaced with copies and holograms. What use is sight when we cannot see? Still, we return to the bear pit in spite - well aware of our bondage and impoverishment, and look all blackmailers straight in the eye. You too used to suck dry my cerebral capacities, those bodily resources I have, as I stared at the ceiling, nightly, daily, for hours, more drawn-out hours, trawling through my animal perceptions - intelligence's only evidence - a benighted baleen, choking on the beach of existence. In shock, and complete mental absorption, I tried to figure out what had happened, but the answer lay far away; and image nor sound, metaphor nor analogy could capture how... you

Image: Violet Davies, pencil on paper (portrait of her mother), 2018

*Ella' continues my elisions of first and second names. Now, even 'the waves' seem overdetermined by Virginia Woolf's eponymous novel, but this was not intended.

†My phraseology here has to do with the power of music, sound and images, as well as smell - physical sense experiences - to trigger memories (and thus also, trauma). After 2016, when I was forced to take a Leave Of Absence from my PhD. I noticed I was listening to far less music than before - possibly for fear of this triggering - and that this tacit censorship went quite beyond the musics directly connected to the particular memories I might fear. More consciously, I already edited my media consumption (scenes of intimacy, sex, joy), and threw away objects carrying 'dangerous' aromas.

†This refers to a comment made by Johanna Hedva in the context of a workshop I conducted with them at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in 2019.

†While this is a reference to Twitter's logo of a blue bird, the stronger mental image was of the tragic hero-protagonist in the Studio Ghibli film, *Howl's Moving Castle*, Hayao Miyazaki (dir.), 2005, which was sold to Disney Pictures during my PhD and, en masse with Ghibli's other titles, transferred to Netflix for streaming.

✱ *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Pier Paolo Pasolini (dir), 1964, Titanus Distribuzione.

✱ This section is based on the act of (re-)watching video documentation made by the *Mute* magazine collective and friends, in late 2008, of a walking tour led by historian – and friend of the organisation – Peter Linebaugh. Together with Fabian Tompsett, Linebaugh conducted a group *dérive* through London’s financial district, including the Royal Exchange and other venues, to discuss the violent histories of finance capital. While I looked up the video, absent-mindedly, to jog my memory and correctly cite the historical facts mentioned, this inevitably became a more intense examination of the film, its historical and urban context and protagonists (most shockingly, myself, heavily pregnant, when I hadn’t remembered being filmed). This made me decide to fold back into the poem themes of commoning, and capitalist plunder, through well-known folk songs, like ‘The Goose and the Common’, which had also featured in Linebaugh’s first article commissions. See ‘Forever Blowing Bubbles: a Walking Tour with Peter Linebaugh and Fabian Tompsett’: <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/video/video-forever-blowing-bubbles-walking-tour-peter-linebaugh-and-fabian-tompsett-2008> and https://archive.org/details/a_walking_tour_london_mute_magazine.

✱ ‘Lachen als een boer met kiespijn’ is a Dutch saying describing how we smile along – or laugh – feigning happiness when there’s nothing to be happy about, or we feel the opposite.

had pushed me through the veil of – appearance – down stairs of – empathy – experience, history – understanding, the – scaffolding of – truth and materiality – to feign disclosure, marshal trust, act sincere. Reality is the edit. Life, a *déjà vu*. Here they all come, over and over, those eyes of shame and lips of tremble; the crestfallen face, looming clouds and curtains of tears. I understand now: always the mirror and not the truth – there is no ground floor, no basement or final resting place to get to. The elevator shaft is me, tower block unto myself; Ahab *and* whale. But you stabbed me in that waking dream, right in the stomach, and I let you: eyes open, as close as in an embrace, I watched your familiar, freckled face, quizzically.

The platforms are the same.

We are, everywhere and everyone, traumatised, *ergo* hooked, *ergo* co-dependent, seeing others, ourselves.

These are the business fundamentals, the business model, the assumptions of each and every Excel sheet, the accounting year’s beginning and end.

There are old things where we live. Really old, like me, and the tufted orange rug – Simon called it the surface of the sun – and a painting newly arrived from Italy, with saints in gold haloes sitting around a table, painted on a bowed wood base in what must be oil or egg tempura. In another, the thief in the tree attempts to rob the chapel, but the saint – Antonio, this time in sober brown cloth, like Pier Paolo’s rolling & rollicking friends in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*^{*} – intervenes from his seat in the clouds, right hand up (or is it left?), and the gun detonates in the face of He the painting renders the robber. None of our alms for you, thief, says *Deus Ex Machina*.

I hear Peter singing, *The law locks up the man or woman*,^{*}

All of us walk the Bank and Royal Exchange, his fists holding up London’s dirt

We are happy, everyone laughing, *the Earth is a treasury for all*

You see me, forever blowing bubbles, *Who steals the goose off the common*

Pregnant and lost, black umbrella holding up the rain

Smiling, a farmer with toothache,^{*} *was transmuted into gold*

Vagabond, now, *But leaves the greater villain loose*

Lit by gas, but whether of highwayman or highwaywoman,

the jury is still out, *Who steals the common from the goose*

I see you, young and old, parading, *The law demands that we atone*

Garlands braided into hair, Easter crosses held up high,[†]

You hear me in your hamlet, *When we take things we do not own*

Seeking purpose and repose, creative spirit’s due material and vent,

My ritual shall be a gift to the community, *But leaves the lords and ladies fine*

Down those warm medieval hills, already richly draped in vines,

By private property’s thin decree, I say you need me,

Who takes things that are yours and mine

So many of us here, in this enchanted film of crisis,

Variously,

in cloaks, hats, scarves

in visible and invisible masks

Filming, recording, loud-hailing,

Whispering, speaking, amplifying,

The collective body, its throat and mouth,

as mic

Repeating Rachel’s words,^{*}

as she reads from the plaque

Can you hear it at the back?

...and quite get your head around it,

...so sonorous together,

...we loud-hail and occupy the City

...before 2011’s Occupy (hers, of us, our life)

...in 2008’s dark November (my body’s, by pregnancy, and birth)

“So we’re standing at something called the London Stone...”

“This is a fragment”

“This is a fragment!!!”

“Of the original piece of limestone”

“Of the original piece of limestone!!!”

“Once securely fixed in the ground”

“Once securely fixed in the ground!!!”

“Now fronting Cannon Street station”

“Now fronting Cannon Street station!!!”

“Removed in 1742”

“Removed in 1742!!!”

To the North side of the street”

“To the North side of the street!!!”

“In 1798 it was built into the South wall”

“In 1798 it was built into the South wall!!!”

“Of the Church of St. Swithern... Swithin, London Stone (sorry)”

“Of the Church of St. Swithin, London Stone!!!”

“Which stood here until demolished in 1962”

✦ Pit, my paternal grandmother, organised festive rituals, especially around Easter, in Fonterutoli, an Italian hamlet where my grandparents bought a plot of land in 1969.

✦ Rachel Baker was a participant in the walk, and was recorded on camera while reading this plaque.

✿ Henry Fitz-Ailwin de Londonestone was the first Lord Mayor of London, holding office from 1189-1212.

✿ This lifts a phrase from Olwen H. Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, pp. 23-24, where she writes: "Another early militant was Pauline Léon who on the outbreak of war presented to the Legislative Assembly a petition (which was denied) signed by three hundred and nineteen women asking to be allowed to form a *garde nationale* to defend Paris. The intention, the petition stressed, was defensive. Women did not, when the enemy reached Paris, want to stand by and have their throats slit like sheep. The grounds for refusing the petition were that the order of nature would be inverted. Twenty days later, Théroigne de Méricourt called for the creation of *legions of amazons* to defend the Revolution and insisted that the right to bear arms turned women into citizens." (my emphasis).

✿ 'Glamazons' is one of the many neologisms and catch-words introduced by the Netflix show, *RuPaul's Drag Race*, whose many series Ava, Violet and I watched together.

◆ This is an elision between Esther (Leslie), my supervisor, and Esther (Wajiru), my Kenyan nanny, whom, as I was told repeatedly throughout my life, was very important to me. Because we left my birthplace, Nairobi, when I was two years old, I cannot consciously remember her other than through photographs.

"Which stood here until demolished in 1962!!!"
"Its origin and purpose are unknown"
"Its origin and purpose are unknown!!!"
"But in 1188 there was a reference to Henry"
"But in 1188 there was a reference to Henry!!!"
"Son of Ailwin de Londonestone"*
"Son of Ailwin de Londonestone!!!"
"Subsequently Lord Mayor of London"
"Subsequently Lord Mayor of London!!!"
"That's it!"

(signing off, Rachel smiles wryly,
her black beret cocked
proud & gorgeous to
legions of amazons*
her grey flowing hair,
the foggy channel,
connection and solidarity,
her demeanour overall,
a rear-view emancipation, a
revolution of knowledge for glamazons,* all)

Fabian, Maija, Suzy, Rachel, Rachel, Mark, Chris, John, Max, Nils, Kirsten, me,
Tim, Jaron, Stewart,
Anthony, Josie, David (behind the camera), you,
Those I don't know personally,
but know by name (and now, in hindsight, by face),
namely Chris and John (the second ones, the other ones)

The fulness of our labours,

Yours,

Taken,

from Africa, Asia, South America,

into this spot,

says Peter,

There he is, again, Orator born,

as we move, back and forward, in time, on tape,

...this goes back to the 1690s

...our present crisis, now, we can go back to the 1690s

& further on, again,

near the Great Fire,

...it excites me to remember

...the bakers

...the fundamental principle

...we are not afraid of ruins (are we?)

...we can build and rebuild (buildings come down!)

& so,

to conclude,

I won't say I'm glad to be here,

But I'm glad to be here with you!

I feel Esther cradle my body,✦ *The poor and wretched don't escape*

Stipend undeclared, she acts as witness to the crime

You hold me heavy on your ample bosom, *If they conspire the law to break*

In exchange I remember you not, though my body may

Wind its way along untold drives unconscious, *This must be so but they endure*

The mountains, plains and savannahs; the flamingos, caribou and vultures

Even the beetles roll over in the end, *Those who conspire to make the law.**

We store the pictures in our big old chest, *The law locks up the man or woman*

Mothers the guardians of family memory, sequestered by nature or nurture*

They refuse to say, *Who steals the goose from off the common*

But it is labour; storing, sorting, making the domestic archive and family story,

The timeline onto which we all cling, *And geese will still a common lack*

Like ants to a leaf, koalas to a trunk, or you – the sloth,

giant curly toes grabbing every dangling branch, all the low-hanging fruit, yet

We also twist, turn, break; kindle history's warm fire, *Till they go and steal it back.*

Ms. Marple "grew a spiderweb with her domestic neglect". She asserts proudly, comedically, that "it is perfect",* and I realise my kitchen window germinated the same, behind the ZZ plant, and that neglect might have made *it*, too. Zemioculcas zamiifolia, the indestructible, "originally from Eastern Africa", says Search, and my stomach turns over; heaves at the cruel, unceasing precision of the conjuncture.

A bomb still goes off in this flat every day: centuries, millennia of thought blasted, broken, blown open. Bits, shards, smithereens – compacted, flattened, repackaged in the cloud and sent back from the fulfilment centre to be tracked and delivered by gloved, masked, stressed and out-of-breath couriers to the three of us, so that we might consume them. Masks off, gloves off, clothes off, or on (to those *locked down* it really doesn't matter, if truth be told), lounging over breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner, in bed and bath, on toilets; standing, seated, running, limping, crying, calling, shouting, roller-skating, skate-boarding, lying down and crumpled up; as happy babies, warriors and downward dogs; as child and tree; before and after homework, and university and housework; on the verge, and inside of, sleep, that unplumbed pocket and fold; fathomless loch, flowing over octopus legs, in the Monterey Bay Aquarium.* We obey and take them in – deep, so deep – using

✿ My decision to observe/not the correct spelling of 'beetle' – the insect – changed in each draft. I wanted to encode the hidden power in my life of Shell, the multinational, but wasn't sure where, how and to what degree of exposure. "[B]eetles roll over" refers to knowledge I have, and want to share (but also hide); that the company got a version of the famous Beatles record, *HELP!*, released on which they stand – hands raised – in front of the giant scallop. I learned, online, 2000 were pressed to give to staff and managers (ours) introduced me to the Beatles.

✿ Marianne Hirsch has documented women's role as conservators – and curators – of families' photographs, noting their role in 'plotting' family narrative. In my family, my mother certainly took this role. Elizaveta Svilova, too, was the archival guardian for her husband and the kinoki. My own maternal experience was, initially, to lament not having enough time to make more, and better, documentation of my children. Later, I realised it was I who was missing, as no-one sought, particularly, to document the mother. A friend observed that, if there is to be a conflict between caring for children as humans, and as images, it is better to have chosen the former. See also Lauren Collins' review of Laura Larson's (problematic) *Hidden Mother*. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-hidden-mothers-of-family-photos>.

✿ @minxmarple, Instagram, 3 January, 2020, "I grew this with my domestic neglect, isn't it perfect..?"

✿ I had in mind Henriette Heise's photographs of drawers, pockets and other crevices, and also Johanna Hedva's 'A Decade of Sleeping', which speaks of sleep as a pocket, and was read, live, over a link to the Monterey Aquarium on 13 December 2020.

* The connection between capital and the 'sick', or disturbed, colon (or gut) occurs in much literature on chronic illness, notably Hedva's, Boyer's and Carolyn Lazard's. See also: Elizabeth A. Wilson's *Gut Feminism*, Durham, North Carolina and London: Duke University Press, 2015.

* This refers to the widely criticised government campaign to have people retrain for 'cyber', the most infamous instance of which (considering the concurrent job losses occurring in the culture sector during the pandemic) was a billboard featuring a ballerina with the strapline: "Fatima's next job could be in cyber. (she just doesn't know it yet)". See: Lanre Bakare, 'Government scraps ballet dancer reskilling ad criticised as 'crass'', 12 October, 2020, *The Guardian* (online), <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/oct/12/ballet-dancer-could-reskill-with-job-in-cyber-security-suggests-uk-government-ad>.

eyes and ears and fingertips, into nerves, arteries, minds; through lungs, hearts, kidneys and livers; down stomachs, intestines, colons and bladders,* though no-one knows how, where, and as what, they then come out --

(Remember...)

IT IS ONLY EVER
THE PHILISTINES
WHO SAY THIS WILL BE AS
"NEW KNOWLEDGE"
(& "CYBER")*
& WE WILL
DESTROY
THEM ALL
BEFORE THEY
DO US

Image: Violet Davies, pen and pencil on paper (portrait of her mother), 2019

✱ In V. I. Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, there is a remarkable emphasis on the role of habit, which is ascribed an essential function in the transition from capitalism to communism: "Only in communist society, when the resistance of the capitalists has been completely crushed, when the capitalists have disappeared, when there are no classes (i.e., when there is no distinction between the members of society as regards their relation to the social means of production), *only* then 'the state ... ceases to exist' and 'it becomes possible to speak of freedom.' Only then will a truly complete democracy become possible and be realized, a democracy without any exceptions whatsoever. And only then will democracy begin to *wither away* owing to the simple fact that, freed from capitalist slavery, from the untold horrors, savagery, absurdities, and infamies of capitalist exploitation, people will gradually *become accustomed* to observing the elementary rules of social intercourse that have been known for centuries and repeated for thousands of years in all copybook maxims. They will become accustomed to observing them without force, without coercion, without subordination, *without the special apparatus* for coercion called the state. / The expression 'the state *withers away*' is very well-chosen, for it indicates both the gradual and the spontaneous nature of the process. Only habit can, and undoubtedly will, have such an effect, for we see around us on millions of occasions how readily people become accustomed to observing the necessary rules of social intercourse when there is no exploitation, when there is nothing that arouses indignation, evokes protest and revolt, and creates the



PART THREE

Rhythms and behaviours are set*

Language, etiquette and manners just so,
by now it is hard to ask (or myself to know)

What I am:

Dentist, hygienist, farmer, cleaner, nurse, secretary,
Teacher, youth worker, therapist, chef,
sous-chef?

Just as hard to ask (or myself to know)

What century

What time

What place

What work

What age

it is / I do

Though I know I am definitely no*

Man, security guard, taxi driver,
construction or processing-plant worker

Not frontline,

not key,

not elderly,

not vulnerable,

not pre-existing conditions,

not 'BAME'

The injurious categories / the work they do

trot out, rolling boldly & reliably, a

putrid, poisonous, semantic green wave – pre-programmed & by now

flowing wildly

automatic & unthinking –

from a badly neglected public pool

THEIR WORDS, THEIR STATS, THEIR EVIDENCE – all

horses summoned to battle, trained & groomed,

tacked up; saddle, stirrups, bridle, blinkers, valiant

serfs, dressed in equine loincloths & bra-lettes

Minuscule, gargantuan,

minoritarian; no, majoritarian

popular, fringe, 'radicalised' & lethal;

killing machines

My little pony*

comes to murder's rescue

over & over & over,

adding & adding

need for *suppression*" (his citations are from Engels). V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, p. 127, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014. In this poem I consider this in relation to domestic routines and their intersection with social media – thinking, for example, of Wendy Chun's *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016.

✱ See: 'Coronavirus: Male security guards, chefs and taxi drivers among those most likely to die with COVID-19, says ONS', 11 May 2020. <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-male-security-guards-chefs-and-taxi-drivers-among-those-most-likely-to-die-with-covid-19-says-ons-11986382>. This story returned in the news in winter, framed as if it was novel information, not an immediate finding of Covid in Spring 2020.

✱ This means, firstly, to invoke the predilection among the British monarchy and Conservative party for equestrian sports and ownership: HRH herself is known as the 'equine queen'; Nadhim Zahawi, Stratford-on-Avon MP, entrepreneur and UK Secretary of State for Education, is known as a passionate owner and breeder; the NHS's test-and-trace fiasco was managed by Jockey Club steward and racing enthusiast, Dido Harding. Secondly, it is a reference to horses' status as allies or enemies in battles and revolutions; their faith or betrayal, obedience or disobedience. Horses are used as the avant-garde of police and state when protests are quelled (Orgreave, the Poll Tax riots and 2011 student protests), but, in 2020/21, behaved in 'comradely' ways during the uprisings (in Texas, bareback-ridden horses routinely participated). Their gendered associations with cowboys, cops and soldiers have, also, been brilliantly queered by Lil' Nas *Old*

Town Road, 2018) and Jane Campion (*The Power of the Dog*, 2021), being reminiscent of the beautifully ambiguous status they also had in revolutionary Russia – viz., Vladimir Mayakovsky's 'Good Treatment of Horses', 1918, and China Miéville's unforgettable passage, in *October* (London: Verso, 2017), of Cossack horses lending the progressive forces invisible shelter under their bellies, so that they could enter Petrograd.

✳️ What role do abstraction, number, code, mathematics, encipherment and decipherment play when death, illness, tragedy, pain are counted in a public 'dashboard' maintained by the neoliberal state?

✳️ Having as a Prime Minister a successful columnist and television personality who perceives himself as a wordsmith is a special sort of agony for anyone who cares about language.

✳️ This refers to the BBC's original rendition of John Le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1979).

◆ There has been endless media coverage of the impact of the use of metaphors in public messaging of pandemic science, with Jonathan van Tam perceived as most effective. This passage refers to Johnson's execrable efforts: "The PM said the vaccine had cleared a 'significant hurdle' but there were more to overcome before it can be rolled out widely. / Mr Johnson said he had talked about the 'distant bugle of the scientific cavalry coming over the brow of the hill' with a breakthrough. / 'I can tell you that tonight that toot of the bugle is louder, but it's still some way off." See: Alan McGuinness, 'Coronavirus: Boris Johnson gives cautious welcome to COVID-19 vaccine news', Sky News, 9 November, 2020,

the insult, the injury,
the ideology of the magic number,* their
sham claim to innocence &
poppycock acts of God, their*
bullshit invocation of the
natural disaster & 'tragedy'
Drafting us into their army & navy, their
cadettes & mercenaries, their
captains & sergeants, their
tinkers & tailors, their
soldiers & spies*
As if we're them, as if we're with them
yearning for bugles & cavalries
dreaming of winds in sails, of
saviours arriving over brows of hills, of the
'loud toot',◆ or
ANY SUCH THING
(as if / as if / as if!)
over & over & over
10K, 20K, 50, 60, 80; 1,564 'sadly died'; precisely 84,767 today*
Go on...
Do it again...
You know you want to...
Speak in numbers & percentages
Duck and dive
Charm their pants off
with your language, your private
education, knowledge, property, your inaccessible
Latin & turns of phrase
Hide your acts, rely on the
sheer force of attrition, the sediment of institutions, language, norms
– you cowards – the
systematic & algorithmic erasure, of
witnessing, of memory, so
'we' don't 'see' or 'recall' the mortuaries & graves, the candle-lit processions;
desperation and public obscenity on the night there could be
no further burials,* the
condensed, freezing breath of faithful families, observant, doing right,
sharing, suffering
the scale of the pain
the scale of everything
Ad nauseam et mortem
Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem, ad ignem et astra*

Ad nauseam et mortem, ad ignem et astra

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

✳️ These were the significant milestone numbers for deaths, writing on 13 January 2020, when a record was achieved – again – of 1,564, and 80k (long since surpassed).

✳️ This refers to a Channel 4 news segment filmed in a Muslim burial ground, where space to bury the dead had run out.

✳️ The number of rows here was deliberately chosen.

✱ This phrasing is lifted from a letter sent by the HR department at University of the Arts London, on 13 January 2021, on behalf of the government, explaining why staff could still proceed with work.

✱ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>. This government guidance on who was legitimated as a 'critical' worker to go to their – possibly dangerous – workplace has since been withdrawn. Educational settings showed, acutely, the lines of risk between 'intellectual' and 'manual' labour, meaning: cleaners and guards were expected to attend, and until later – when they too were expected to take the risk – academics and university manager were not.

✱ Internal to the poem, this refers back to the PhD's subsection title, 'Still', because this has a meaning in media history – a static photograph – as well as denoting a lack of activity or sound-making (being 'still', but also, persisting). The climatological connections and puns that I make throughout are also made here via the phenomenon of a 'global stilling'. See: Steven Bernard, 8 October, 2021, *Financial Times* (online), 'Europe's electricity generation from wind blown off course' <https://www.ft.com/content/d53b5843-dbe0-4724-8adf-75c66127ea80>.

Ad nauseam et mortem

Ad nauseam et mortem

Nor do I work at Royal Mail,

Mount Pleasant,

like you have had to

(though it turns out I am certainly 'critical',*

meaning designated by this

free-market, private-sector

obsessed & blinded, this

centralised, decentralised United

Kingdom, this state, as

FREE, as entirely at

LIBERTY

to work &

make economy,

produce BTecs &

nurseries,

film & television &,

of course,

– of effing & blinding bloody course –

CHARITY).*

Still,✱

here I am

Hurry, hurry, Pauline, dear,

bereft of seasons,

nor yourself growing –

apples, pickles,

trees for wooden nickels,

turnips, peas, molasses, cheese, butter & beans –

you also lack

the man, the

other half, him

indoors in

2021's first week, no

tacit assumption,

urgent request or

strong instruction to

pick, dill, chop, dig, split, cook, curdle!

churn or string, no

frost, snow or snow shoes, no

ladders & shutters, but also not

“a moment to be lost!”, no

“in an hour we get snow!”, no

“bring my glasses, mail my letters”, no

“what my dear, you feel exhausted?”, no

teapot tipped on

head.✱

Still,

here I am

fabricating & constructing,

washing up & scrubbing,

checking, counting,

advising, consulting,

providing succour & support,

in & on / via & around

the com-puter, ✱ shared

struggle & joy, rage & fury,

no more private

sadness & loss.

All in all,

making for an extremely

busy day,

here I am

writing

in & on / via & around

daughters & sisters

dog, rabbit, moths,

meat, pellets, cedar,

buckets, straw, carrots, sheets, pillows, folders, files, paper, vanilla,

eggs, flour, the kettle, oven, toaster, fridge, microwave, laptop,

earphones, iPhones,

tooth & hair-brush & floss, the

utterly unnecessary but 'life-saving'

espresso machine, blender, toastie maker, though

WhatsApp, Telegram & Signal

use up probably most everything,

if calculated

in the *honest* terms of

the hours that the phone clocks,

PLUS or MINUS,

Ava, Violet, Leo, Jupiter

(poor Saturn passed away)

✦ These are all direct quotations or descriptions from the children's book, N. M. Bodecker, *Hurry, Hurry Mary Dear*, with illustrations by Erik Blegvad (New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1998). For online documentation of this classic, see: <https://www.slideshare.net/jano11/hurry-hurry-mary-dear>.

✧ The word is separated into components to draw attention to the computer's ontology as a co-counter (with human beings), as well as the gendered nature of this human-technical apparatus (as has been documented by many feminist scholars, e.g. Sadie Plant, Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Rosi Braidotti, Helen Hester). Karen Brodine's *Woman Sitting at a Machine, Thinking* (Red Letter Press, 1990) and, from the same era, *Processed World* magazine – which covered the introduction of the computer into the workplace – have been especially important to this project.

✱ This contemplates the embodied foundation of language/s, including that of mathematics. See: George Lakoff and Rafael Nunez's *Where Mathematics Comes From: How The Embodied Mind Brings Mathematics Into Being*, New York: Basic Books, 2001.

✱ I defend the fact of a man (Seb Franklin) explaining something to me, as if in court (meaning, as if it would necessarily be open to a charge of 'mansplaining'). Indirectly, this refers to the becoming-juridical of communication, intensified by that part that occurs online (the experience in question was a very interesting discussion among four people – myself the only woman – hosted by Bernard Geoghegan on 7 January, 2020, of Anna Wiener's Silicon Valley memoir, *Uncanny Valley*, London: Fourth Estate, 2020).

Still,
altogether
we speak of
the mean average, of
BIDMAS, of
stay inside your BRACKETS &
stay inside your lane, you
Indices, Division, Multiplication, Addition & Subtraction,^{*} of
stay inside your baby-gates &
boundaries, of please be penning-in the
wee, poo / piss, shit / urine, faeces / the
disgusting, transgressive leakage, of
anger, pride, shame, hurt, an infinity of
limbs, lips, lashes & lids, of
brows & lobes,
skin & scratches,
creams & creaming,
potions, lotions, shampoo
Viscosity and oil without end, meaning on
~~[the 12th I ran out the room for your tear-soaked toast-baked-beans disaster]~~
– because we are all girls –
– and they, all boys –
in the face of all this, still destined to a
commensuration, a conjugation and declension, which,
Seb explains (I asked him to, your Honour)^{*}
Uncanny Valley is performing
on our whole life
world.

Still,
However,
As I said,
Given that,
At the end of the day,
When all is said and done,
the EU's milk lake, its butter mountain,
spill of four continents' unused, pandemic potatoes,
the rotting fruit & veg, the smashed eggs,^{*}
ethanised chickens, and again those lakes of milk,[†] are no
rival, or any kind of equivalent, to the
sea of coffee & tea we do consume, the
majestic white bergs of sugar & salt we devour, and collapse, daily, so I deduce
there must be some kind of plan for this factory, my

YMCA-farm-laundrette-office-leisure-recycling-centre-tv-station-school-canteen
Is there, I keep on asking everyone,
IS THERE???

No – don't you know?
You, then... didn't get the proverbial
memo? the
Sorry to bother you? the
courtesy card? the
Sorry we missed you?^{*}

Which always says:

The boundaries
will still dissolve
Just harder and faster,
while the borders & fences, the walls,
will still go up, to
A handful of fathers, mothers, children
A score of dinghies and toy sailing boats
Papers in the wind; that
sailing & bravery we can't divine or emulate,
pull out of ourselves
They have no choice but to be
Fugitive; migrate, flee!
While the rest of us fly in and out, big steel
birds with no care or carriage
Nestled in our status quo, of one shape or another, that
Feathered, silken hammock,^{*} of one time or another
I hear it said that
“Women are disproportionately affected by care duties”; or
We should “roll back austerity”; that
“marketisation”, is, indeed, a problem, though
“fiscal forecasts” claim
the current debt will
“BALLOON” and,
“because of demographics”
long-term care for the elderly is a “nettle”
we should have grasped 25 years ago
Meaning in 1995, if we count that right, *right, RIGHT?!!!*
(And what might that signify, exactly?)
When they say *late to the party*^{*} or
dither & delay?
I hear a whimpering,

✱ David Yaffe-Bellany and Michael Corkery, 'Dumped Milk, Smashed Eggs, Plowed Vegetables: Food Waste of the Pandemic', *The New York Times* (online), 11 April, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/business/coronavirus-destroying-food.html>.

◆ Adam Jeffery and Emma Newburger, 'Wasted milk, euthanized livestock: Photos show how coronavirus has devastated US agriculture', CNBC, 2 May, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/02/coronavirus-devastates-agriculture-dumped-milk-euthanized-livestock.html>.

✱ *Sorry To Bother You*, Boots Riley (dir.), 2018. *Sorry We Missed You*, Ken Loach (dir.), 2019.

✱ The material sensibility of racial capitalism reached its apogee during the pandemic, with those 'locked down' and on furlough turning to extreme forms of domesticity and nesting: there was a reported increase in dinner-table accessorising on Instagram (sales of the required products rocketed); there were adult onesies; there was velvet – a universal softness for those said to be 'imprisoned' in their homes. Boat sales jumped too, for weekends and de luxe *staycations*. Meanwhile, construction and key workers sustained a death spiral of acceleration and badly-supported expansion of work (the only sounds, everywhere, a cacophony of sirens and drilling).

✱ All the quotations, above, are from radio news and commentary. When I copied the final phrases (*late to the party, dither & delay*), they had some, but not all, of the associations they do a year later, in 2022, as 'Partygate' – as well as Keir Starmer's adoption of Tory tropes – drags on.

✱ Martine, my sister,
learned how to touch-type
– at lightning speed – when
she was in her mid teens
(the early 2000s), which I
experienced at the time as
a moment of shock; a deep
and tragic loss of something.
What, exactly?

✱ James Bridle, 'Something
is Wrong on the Internet',
6 November, 2017, [https://
medium.com/@jamesbridle/
something-is-wrong-on-the-
internet-c39c471271d2](https://medium.com/@jamesbridle/something-is-wrong-on-the-internet-c39c471271d2).

✱ James Bridle, 'The Great
Distractor' (re-release), 8
November, 2021, Centre
for Media, Technology and
Democracy, [https://www.
mediatechdemocracy.com/
work/the-great-distractor](https://www.mediatechdemocracy.com/work/the-great-distractor).

◆ Anna Davin, *Growing
Up Poor: Home School
and Street in London,
1870-1914*, London: Rivers
Oram Press, 1996. The
interview I conducted with
Terry Dennett – included
elsewhere in this PhD – also
informs this section.

☀ Women with spina
bifida occulta, like myself,
cannot enter the process of
childbirth 'naturally', taking
the gamble that they may, or
may not, need anaesthetic
delivered epidurally, since
the gap and lassitude
required for the needle to
go into the spine ('epidural
space') isn't as open and
free as in 'normal' spines.
As a precaution, epidurals
are inserted before active
labour starts. Based on
my (anecdotal) evidence,
this preventative act, made
in the name of safety, cuts
off the path for labour
where participation in birth/
delivery might be more
active/proactive for the
mother. The length of my
first delivery was over 36
hours. Due to the amount of
anaesthetic required for, first,
the epidural, and then, the
emergency Caesarean, its
length led me to experience
real danger (I was wholly
unaware, but family and
friends feared I was close to
death). Ava, our daughter,
also had to go to ICU, with

an acoustic hallucination

I check it out; silence in the basket,

inside the metal crate,

I hear a whimpering,

over & over & over

Lying under, the louder sound of days,

I hear money taps & money trees,

Perhaps the ones they always spoke of

– and still insist on –

– speaking of, now –

A tinkling, thrusting growth, in the

Clink,

the tinkle & the crinkle, a

winkle, in the

Chains, always a

clinking & a clanging,

a surging & transmitting,

ping, ping, ping – *is that more like it?*

Is it a bit like a coin; a key, in the hole?

Or is it a flowing,

a folding & a creaking

Soft, softer, softest; loud, louder, loudest?

Or more of a

tap, tap, tap – like when you

learned to touch-type at fifteen or so,

in 2002 or 2003, we guess together, today,[✱]

making my heart break at

work's incursion into childhood –

another facet of my ignorance, since now, in the

third millennium, that happens in your nappies,[✱]

hand-eye-keyboard-cursor, The Great Distractor[✱] &

you were / are

fully registered for work

before leaving primary, not to mention the fact that

you sold matches, manned cotton mills, scavenged metals,

then & now & that

Childhood never was[✱]

Universal,

because

Humanity

wasn't.

Crisis and contradiction,

creases and contractions

(I knew they wouldn't come, for me, in this time of

T-cuts & epidurals)[✱]

No VBAC for me[✱]

No homeostasis

No ripples, only

Ripper, rip,

No R.I.P.

Quite yet, but an

Icy cold wind, the

Anaesthetic death

No birth canal, but life^{*}

For her, me, us,^{*} them

They tell of the "dignity and choice" provided by privatisation

In care^{*}

Where do these people live, that they can call

the ouroboros, a friendly garden worm;

the human centipede, a pretty, tropical salamander,

Reveal thyself, state voice, or forever hold thine peace!

Or should I, just so, reveal mine,

Speak, now that

I have no more choice

– am up against the wall –

– where we all are, motherfuckers, hahahaha –

of its dysregulation,

of its hoarding, and its gluttony

Its oral, ocular and haptic fixations; denials

The fetish it makes of everything and everyone

Be, instead, 'honest', 'real', 'true'?

Tear off and throw down the mask

(as it was and not is)

Disclose and confess

(not cover and protect) that it

Can't figure out

How to relate

How to speak or behave

to / with / against a thing or a person

Let alone

to / with / against knowledge & the hallowed

"LIVED EXPERIENCE"

First and second nature, pah! (not ping)

Instead, I make libraries,

a misshapen skull (soft, of
course, since she was a baby,
but still a serious enough
problem to be taken into
emergency care). We went
into liaison with the hospital
after the birth, on account of
bad decisions made all along
the process, but decided not
to pursue legal action, since
our baby was healthy by the
time we were in conversation
(four months later). We also
had misgivings about this
form of redress – meaning,
legalised/financialised –
however the relevant notes
and documentation are still
in my possession.

✱ VBAC (Vaginal Birth
After Caesarean) can be
the holy grail for women
trying to avoid a repeat of
Caesarean intervention and,
as such, it is trained – and
meditated – for intensively.
Fear of Caesareans also
moves those who can afford
it to commission private
midwifery.

✱ Because they aren't
forced through the birth
canal, babies born by
Caesarean are, it has been
established, deprived of
cranial and bodily pressures
instrumental in building a
'healthy' immune response
– including the development
of the gut biome (that, in
turn, is an issue for mental
health). There are discussion
forums online promoting
the belief that this divides
babies into two categories
with distinct body-mind
experiences (meaning,
also, distinct dream worlds;
paintings dominated by a
blue palette, or featuring
'Jack Frost', illustrate the
'cold' of the anaesthetic).

✱ The poem switches from
'her', the other lover, to 'her',
the baby, though for the
reader it is impossible to
know what, or whom this
roaming appellation seeks.

✱ The poem is forced, as
we are, to obey the terms
of the debate on care as
set by a corporatising,
financialising state. The NHS
is in possession, uniquely,
of medical data that there

is speculation it seeks to monetise through privatisation by stealth. Critiques of this process' logic go back to the Thatcher era, and films such as Lindsay Anderson's *Britannia Hospital* (1982). However, decades of neoliberal policy, together with Covid, its mismanagement, and steady demographic change now make a 'care crisis' undeniable. This crisis is deeply gendered, raced and classed, as has been made evident in the detail of the recent maternity scandals in Shrewsbury and Telford, and Nottingham. Before the publication of Donna Ockenden's inquiry, in 2022, Channel 4 was contributing to investigations of this neglect, laying out the ways in which deficiencies in care were structured demographically. See: <https://www.channel4.com/news/revealed-dozens-of-deaths-and-stillbirths-at-maternity-units-cost-hospital-trust-103m-in-damages-over-decade>. For a summary of the interlocking factors underpinning the crisis, see: Emma Dowling, *The Care Crisis: What Caused it and How Can We End It?*, London: Verso, 2021.

* This refers to Ursula K. Le Guin's 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction', which was set for the RCA's Fiction as Method research group in 2017/18, and also re-published with an introduction by Donna Haraway in 2019 (London: Ignota Books, 2019).

bigger and better, grander, more total,

more full & absolute

A completist, always deferring to the imagined origins,

The Word, the Canon, the Man

the big ol' family tree

The vector, spear & line...*

If / then

I could speak,

sincerely & genuinely

truthfully & authentically

Of my making

locations, spaces, environments

More & more, stuffed to the rafters

Histories of the histories of...

Parents of the parents of...

As if there is a

beginning

there to

find

When there are over 600 items in my basket,

1,486 items in my carefully honed & raked

'Texts' folder

(not counting the 286 in

'Texts journalism and misc.')

Both of which reside inside

'Theory (Research)'

(not 'Theory (Writing)')

Which lives next to it, in

the ordered compact

with the other much

stroked & handled folders,

which mice are made to fondle

namely & e.g. & i.e. & c.f.

'Bibliography_Filmography_Images_Diary'

'Groups_RMC_SoAH_RFH2_Litgroup'

'PhDs of others'; 'Poetry'; 'Student conversations'

'Texts old folders'; 'Texts_Summaries'; 'Texts_Zoom transcripts'

& of course, the deep, voluminous & crystalline mine that is the folder

'Workshops'

- all of them,

all their thousands of files, being just three nests away from

paulinevanmourikbroekman and my

Mac's Documents folder

- and quite a way away from the bottom of the bottomest file...

On my shelves

And / or the hundreds of unread books

And / or the college and national libraries

And / or the digital palaces and archives, which

I have, often blithely, and certainly easily

taken them from...

With hardly a thought

or physical exertion

All self-made, meaning collectively

as an act of sheer spontaneity

the 'creativity', 'innovation', 'invention'

They're so desperate to see but which

they murder & destroy

Browsing and downloading, of

An afternoon

A morning,

an evening,

a night

If / then*

I be humble

Find the voice to speak

with the eye of rat and marmot

not eagle and drone; small

Claw, paw, beak &

Tongue, not hand & eye coordinated,

and admit, divulge, avow, I will say it

(keep up - I speak of the voice, not the self, the

persona - not you)*

does not move towards, take purchase,

then hold at a distance, just so that it can

look at these objects (the social relations) obliquely

Held in hand, as it were, to

Know where they are, or

Command the situation and the - safe - room

But not truly open up, that is,

suffer no affect, effect, ever, any more.

* A building block of computer programming, the verbal juncture 'if / then', is foundational to algorithmic capitalism. I use it partly to express nostalgia for that period of early Internet history when creative, coding/hacking and activist communities worked very closely together. See also: Jill Lepore, *IF Then: How the Simulmatics Corporation Invented the Future*, New York: Liveright, 2020.

* My encounter with the concept of 'persona' started with Vivian Gornick's *The Situation and the Story: the Art of Personal Narrative* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001).

✿ I was researching Lisa Lowe's work, including *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015) at this time.

✿ See: <https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/our-art-and-objects/founding-collections/tokens/> "Between the 1740s and 1760s, mothers leaving their babies at the Foundling Hospital would also leave a small object as a means of identification. The hope was that they would one day be able to reclaim their child. / Children were renamed on admission, so the token would help prove their relationship. Each object was kept in the Hospital archive, not given to the child. [...] When a mother left a token with her child, it would be folded up inside the completed admissions paper, or 'billet'. This would never be opened unless a parent returned to claim their child. But in the nineteenth century, Governors of the Hospital decided to put some of the tokens on display. No one thought to make a note of which token belonged to which child."

✿ See: Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1978; Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, London: Penguin, 2009; Darian Leader, *Hands: What Do We Do With Them and Why?*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2016.

◆ Sarah Gavron (dir.), *Rocks*, 2020; Josh and Benny Safdie (dirs.), *Uncut Gems*, 2019.

☀ Donald Trump created a false equivalence between alt right agitators and those who gathered to protest against their Unite the Right rally, in Charlottesville, Virginia, on 12 August, 2017. Conflict between these groups came to a head when James Alex Fields Jr. deliberately drove his car into the protestors and

Still,
here I am

Violet didn't see behind her &
the chair leg descended, making
a deep purple around the square indent, which
itself stayed
strangely unmoved,
red and white and blue

Bruises surround it manifold; a deeply royal hue; intercontinental flows*

Cries of pain, no end in sight or sound,
collective agony suffered, around the room, in our
whole cursed house

Then it's ok again & we marvel at the coloured

Foot,

so boney & slender,

long, veined, frail,

Its strange jutting edge bone, the outer side,

Its tiny-tiny toes, tumbling,

Like Tom's did, with Dickens, Marx & Soane

just down the road from the

Fleet, the Fields, of Lincoln's Inn, of Coram's

Foundlings,* those helpless, little neonates, the

oaths and gifts their desperate mothers made – on pain

(the dreaded certainty) of losing them,

their very own naked

product

but...

Do we really care

About all that, I ask?

What is the word and what the deed?

As the block moves around us, a citadel,

giant wedding cake & environs,

classic architecture of hierarchy,

penthouse / pyramid / pinnacle &

flats below

Converted warehouse

Punch, 1997, 'ere we go!

Illustrating, embodying, all

the new *haut-bourgeois* class strata –

the lawyers, consultants, surgeons, landlords,

those working in 'lifestyle'

intellectual labour, we say with a qualification,
and manual labour*

(we say with a caveat on a caveat)

paying and subsidising international students

(and several of these

including me)

& everywhere we see men

Men and cars and B-L-I-N-G,

(63-66 Hatton Garden)

Felt and fur hats

Rocks & Uncut gems◆

– *my* teenage girls, our friends –

– *their* hustlers, their diamond traders –

very fine films, and very fine people,

on both sides,* in Hatton Garden, on

London Wall, as are the

Rare and vainglorious species: automotive,

Aluminium peacocks,* green, electric,

Motors, driving newly in, but

surely also on their way out

Destroy – while they still think they have the time

male, a vainglorious cosseted gender, mostly, surely

on its way out

Destroy – gather – organise – rabble – rouse*

And no-one dare call it anything

but the bear-pit

Or fail to see

that the kitchen floor is covered

in dried mud, the flowing river, from

Bankside, the night before

When you chased the geese

till you could go no further

Water to shoulder,

& your helpless, questioning eyes, a

Canine in fractions, the

animal language

de nos jours

It is here, the

seventeenth century street,

in our kitchen

dung, horse & carriage

killed 32-year old Heather Heyer in what should have been called a domestic terror attack by a white supremacist. Trump took two days to react to the event, defending the time taken as a supposed struggle to establish 'facts': "...you had some very bad people in that group, but you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides." See: 'In Context: Donald Trump's 'very fine people on both sides' remarks (transcript)', Politifact, <https://www.politifact.com/article/2019/apr/26/context-trumps-very-fine-people-both-sides-remarks/>. I don't aim to ape Trump's loathsome strategy, rather to point to the difficulty – in a spectacular market economy driven by soundbites, PR and inequitable subsidy mechanisms – of grasping, or representing, the production realities of most films (how a funding landscape shaped by neoliberalism and austerity determines what we get to see, who gets to be represented, which 'stories', get to be told).

✿ On the white supremacist and male-coded nature of mainstream eco-salvation narratives, see Joanna Zylińska, *The End of Man: for a Feminist Counter-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2018), as well as, e.g., Kathryn Yusoff, Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective. Covid crystallised the tendency into an 'eco-fascist' one. The Out of the Woods collective have been a source of inspiration, see: <https://www.joaap.org/issue11/OutoftheWoods.htm>.

✿ Two (roughly synchronous) works on my mind were: Mira Mattar, *Yes, I am a Destroyer*, London: MA Biblioteque, 2020, and Michaela Coel, *I May Destroy You*, BBC/HBO, 2020. On relatability in relation to the centrality of traumatic experience – and its processing – see Momtaza Mehri, 'A Cage, Afloat: On I May Destroy You', Authorial

Selves, and Regimes of Relatability', South London Gallery, 2020, <https://www.southlondongallery.org/journal/a-cage-afloat-on-i-may-destroy-you-authorial-selves-regimes-of-relatability/>.

✳ See: @LalehKhalili (Laleh Khalili): <https://twitter.com/LalehKhalili/status/134727416548421635?s=20>. I do not know Khalili personally, but follow her online – parasocially.

✳ See: Marxist-Feminist journal, *LIES: A Journal of Materialist Feminism*, especially Jackie Wang's 'Against Innocence: Against Race, Gender and the Politics of Safety', and P. Valentine, 'The Gender Distinction in Communization Theory', <https://www.liesjournal.net/lies-volume1.pdf> and <https://www.liesjournal.net/volume2.pdf>.

✳ Many acts of collective music-making and dancing occurred outside, in public squares across the world, but this section was most directly influenced by performances during the riots in Chile, 'birthplace' of neoliberalism. See: Sandra Cuffe, 'FROM REBEL TEAS TO MARCHING BANDS: A YEAR OF PROTEST CULTURE IN CHILE', *Latin American News Dispatch (LAND)*, 18 October, 2020, <https://latindispatch.com/2020/10/18/from-rebel-teas-to-marching-bands-a-year-of-protest-culture-in-chile/>.

◆ See: @thaqafatalhind (Esmat Elhalaby): <https://twitter.com/thaqafatalhind/status/1299035542760206336?s=20>. The phrase 'No Cops, No Jails, No Linear Fucking Time' even became the title for an exhibition, at BAK, Utrecht, The Netherlands. See: <https://www.bakonline.org/program-item/no-linear-fucking-time/>.

Real and heavy, not
reflection or echo, which
we failed to sweep up & is
in the way, because we
are / I am LAZY
& have BETTER
things to do

And no-one dare call it anything
but pathetic, a
sign o' the times
the everlasting times
that even Laleh's conversion table
– author & origin unknown –
One column for liberalism, its gasps
One column for reality, its grind
can't hold it all,*
that daily urgency, the
necessary imperative to
translate their language
their white supremacist
LIES / LIES / LIES*
& which
We cannot trust
to make the Real
& so, which we
Have to, altogether

And to say,
as we bow to the chaos
Suck it up, lick its skin, fondle it like our love,
& holler together, with
our whole shared body, our
fat and invincible
orchestra of instruments,*
NO COPS, NO JAILS, NO LINEAR FUCKING TIME!◆



PART FOUR

Home Leo's waiting for us, a whole year later.* The last time I transcribed *Midwinter*, January contracted tightly around me and only parts I to III got done. Every month since, I have dreamed of a new December and my apprenticeship to Mayer's labours - for / with / to / mind / life.

Finishing this PhD is like leaving Cranfield, Ormonde, Flaxman, like asking a couple of men to bring their boxes and a van to the flat, and then realising you need six - and eight or ten, not two - hours minimum to pack it up and move. Everyone involved looks increasingly freaked at what the home bears, silently, behind its facade, and what it must now spit and spew out, loudly and irrefutably, as its load is articulated and shared around as metric volume, a true and concrete weight for carriage and pricing.

I think at the time I compared this formula to a scene in *Dune* - the old one, the Lynch one - but searching for it now, online, I'm sure it wasn't that tired phallic sandworm opening its petaled orifice at me in every result. No *Stranger Things* derivative thing,* more an enormous grey, downy creature walking on stilts, her tripartite belly sagging down to the ground, face and body wrinkled all over. Was she Henson's, Gilliam's, Lynch's projection - I wish I knew. I can see white and wispy hair; fine lines, folds, grooves and cavities. She auto-generates, profusely, carrying new forms of life on her back, in her mouth, dangling underneath her like whelps; perched on her spine like oxpeckers. That's what I remember.

My mother was visiting, as she often was when I was moving, but it was hard to distinguish help from hindrance as the black bin-liners accumulated, identical winter and raincoats multiplied in their obsessively collected, 'pre-loved' states, and our old rocking horse scoped the room with a single remaining eye. *Black plastic button frozen in stunned shock, shock!* There is a photo somewhere of this unwilling little Bentham on a clay-coloured cardboard pyramid, moored and alone, and there's hardly a centimetre of air between him and the ceiling. All wrong and out of proportion, he stands there, saddle-less and denuded, seventies polyester hide threadbare from generations of riding, stroking, grabbing. Young love's surety. Were Violet to read this she'd ask me why I am gendering the little Bentham, making him a stallion, and I really don't know the answer other than to say it's my socialisation speaking.

Each time we open the gate, we are the freedom brigade saving Leo from lifelong solitude. The force of liberation, glee - the excited, violent tail-wagging - nearly makes his back end come off as he genuflects and swoons, thanks us graciously for the reunion that we have at least ten times a day. *Man, truly, you're nearly never alone!*

Image: Violet Davies, felt tip on paper ('Mummy', one of a series of portraits of her family), 2019

* This section was started on the Solstice, Midwinter 2021, with a reading of Mayer's poem by myself, Jennifer Hodgson and Julia Calver.

* One of the definitive pieces of commissioning responsible for Netflix's success, *Stranger Things* is a highly - and self-consciously - derivative piece of narrative drama, mixing fashion and music references and other ciphers of historicity in the blithely lax way that also marks its sister series, *Sex Education*. Both were watched religiously by my teenage daughters and their peers; both evoke the historical time period of my own adolescence.

✱ Catherine Wood, *The Mind is a Muscle*, London: Afterall Books, 2007.

✱ For example: David Williams, 'Extreme heat cooked mussels, clams and other shellfish alive on beaches in Western Canada', 12 July, 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/07/10/weather/heat-sea-life-deaths-trnd-scn/index.html>. There are many articles on similar events.

✱ See: 'Bernadette Mayer's Midwinter Day', 21 December, 2021, <https://allenginsberg.org/2021/12/t-d-21/> which is also on YouTube. The airport comment is made in Andrew Leland's podcast, 'Give Everybody Everything: The Financial Life of Bernadette Mayer', 18 April, 2019: <https://www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/the-organist/give-everybody-everything-the-financial-life-of-bernadette-mayer>.

✦ Daniel Capurro, 'Writing is on the wall for handwriting as schools trial digital exams', 5 January 2022, *The Telegraph* (online), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/01/05/handwriting-could-become-history-like-lat-in-thanks-digital-gcse/>.

✱ I learned this in the self-help book, Mariella Frostrup and Alice Smellie, *Cracking the Menopause While Keeping Yourself Together*, London: Pan Macmillan, 2021.

✱ This refers to the Arendtian concept of the space of appearance, and to Johanna Hedva's ongoing project to define a politics of protest not rooted in the presence of bodies in space: a political principle of visibility.

✱ These points are also taken from Frostrup and Smellie.

✱ Haymarket Books, 'How to Beat Coronavirus Capitalism', 26 March, 2020, YouTube. At 53:00 mins,

I am stuck, blocked, and Rosemary jokes that Modafinil might be just the ticket. Many people I know have completed their doctorates as if tackling narcolepsy, or ADHD. But how *do* you make the mind move... how do you narrow and harden its course, so that it becomes hungry, bold, eager, willing? How do you exclude, cleave, prune, discard; ignore the totality so that thought might proceed with greater speed and finesse, become supple in its sharpening, like having space for electric pulses to flow along a steel cable? *The mind is a muscle*, offered Yvonne Rainer,[✱] but I don't know how to orchestrate the dance I need – between hard and soft, boundary and liberty, architecture and air. Shell nor husk protect life, or free growth, where I have ended up. I reside on that coastal plain where the sun just boils things.[✱]

Mayer wrote *Midwinter* in a single day with a couple of weeks' practice and prep beforehand, learning how to remember dreams, writing lists, buying the newspaper on the day. These are the tools of the trade of epic writing, she says, particularly the making of lists. Her Lenox flat had many cupboards (*wardrobes*) and she kept a tape recorder there to speak her writing into, away from the kids, who, on account of her many visits, likened the dark recess to an airport.[✱] Talking to Fanny Howe in 2019, *typewriter, yes/no*, seems an important question to them both and, like many of her generation,[✦] Howe still writes everything in longhand first. Mayer smiles and mentions a friend who said you should never have kids without also having a maid. But Mayer had Lewis, and their circadian rhythms were complementary – him waking mornings, her nights. It worked, meaning *she* worked, and Mayer still giggles often.

I'm wearing Evorel patches, just trying them out – 25, once; now, 50; soon, maybe, 100g; fast-forwarding, perhaps, to one of those melting subcutaneous chips first installed on Harley Street.[✱] In all seriousness, I do think I need something more targeted and matter-of-fact; amphetamine, maybe? Busy family man spinning plates, jobs, romantic liaisons: God knows I've seen it work in the space of appearance.[✱] Just like HRT, though that's not all-inclusive either. Only some women are invited to recount their 'journey' in the campaigns, newspaper columns, TV, so it's no surprise to read that menopause – its embodied experience already culturally determined – is widely taken to be a white woman's illness.[✱]

Oestrogen's county lines, it follows, flow like rivers through the bucolic landscape of a fraction of womanhood. Brexit, Covid, the global supply-chain crisis matters only for us, see, so we can continue to be the public woman for the family man; the mother to the nuclear baby; the trophy and vassal, in one. On the whole, mainstream endocrine intervention and awareness cements normative femininity – competition, compliance, empowerment and equality

within the terms and social relations of the spectacle; that is, for the faces we see, the voices we hear. Everyone else just has to deal with the dichotomy of experience, and scream *GASLIGHTING!!!* at yet another thing. I laughed when Polly mentioned Queenie as a symptom last night: wrapped in Arctic wear and clutching our drinks, my mind went, POP!, *why didn't I think of that myself it's so bleeding obvious*.

Solstice's morning sky was peach as hot shellac, streaks of aubergine running through it behind the Shard's spikes. Klein says Covid inaugurates a great unveiling, pulling away the curtain of normal to show the truth of crisis that lies beneath; the fires, hurricanes, power outages that she understood to be the real real in Puerto Rico.[✱] That ubiquitous hidden work of the world is also the arcane of reproduction,[✱] the unsung care, sex and maintenance that keep what we call everyday life going and I think of that as her and my child look patiently up at their mothers – them, gazing at each other through the screen, talking out of their mouths to the front and the side, us, our concentration asynchronous but total.

Ava makes her pancakes, half asleep. She says she's catching up on so much and is still negative. Last night we decided she has a girlboss who, by the way, I insist is an irresponsible employer, but we agree to disagree on the ethics of the service industries, for now – me smuggling in, sanctimoniously, that the mom-and-pop workplace might be worst of all (an ex mom-and-pop boss, I learned this from life, though today I am merely quoting Marxist Twitter). Vee finishes another microwave experiment, which must cause the laugh and approval I hear only minutes later: *Mum! Listen to this TikTok! Life is way too short to be scared of hot chocolate!*

I am fascinated by Mayer's fascination with Shackleton and Scott. Like in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, the ice, frost, emptiness and loneliness offer an opening, a blank screen, to the imagination, as Mayer illustrates in the sections on food fantasies. I wonder whether *this* fascination might, even, have driven her to choose the title, since, in the context of the Arctic, mid winter makes for *celebration* – of the day with no night.

Our iconology marries the adventurers' frozen skyline with colonists' rapacious appetite for sugar, and now the socials blend them, altogether, till it hurts our eyes – always kept agape for the money shot. Giant aqua glacier doughnuts; a perfect set of six. Baby-pink Tatlin monuments, baked for oligarchs and covered in fresh cherries, twirling on platforms in space. Base, superstructure; ardent red fondant, edible black glitter, eighteen rose-gold birthday candles for the lucky princess. Emerald green and cerulean ice floes, drifting on the deep blue sea – cracking, breaking, melting, *truly scrumptious*.[✱]

after Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor has spoken, Naomi Klein says a general strike might be needed; and in a worse crisis social media networks could be suspended (the right wing playbook includes cutting off communications systems useful for organising). A long discussion follows on shock: what is lost, what can be gained; "where we catapult ourselves forward because of the unveiling that is underway". She says: "that word unveiling I heard when I was in Puerto Rico, in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, where many people talked about what was happening in Puerto Rico as a process of unveiling, just as Keeanga talked about Hurricane Katrina being a kind of unveiling of what was already there, of pre-existing crises. So, when people talk about, *when are things going to return to normal?*, we have to always remember, that normal is a crisis. Is it normal that Australia was on fire a couple of months ago? Is it normal that the Amazon was on fire a couple of months before that? Is it normal that millions of people in California suddenly had their electricity cut off because their private electricity provider thought that that would be a good way of preventing yet another massive wildfire? Normal is deadly. Normal is a massive crisis."

✱ Maya Gonzalez, 'The Gendered Circuit: Reading The Arcane of Reproduction', 28 September, 2013, *Viewpoint*, <https://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/28/the-gendered-circuit-reading-the-arcan-of-reproduction/>.

✱ This refers to Sally Anne Howes in the role of Truly Scrumptious, the love interest in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, Ken Hughes (dir.), United Artists, 1968, a film much-watched during Ava and Violet's childhood, in part due to the explosion of cheap re-releases, on DVD, of older films (prior

to streaming platforms becoming the standard). Howes died two days before we read *Midwinter*, on 19 December, 2021.

✿ Bernadette Mayer, *Midwinter Day*, New York: New Directions Books, 1982, p. 60

✿ See also: Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination*, London: Faber and Faber, 1996.

✿ I found out about these works from the RCA 'Correspondence' research group, to which Paul Edwards contributed them on 29 October, 2019. See: Josephine Diebitsch Peary, *The Snow-Baby: A True Story with True Pictures*, Frederick A. Stokes Co., New York, October 1901. [UK edition: Ibister & Co., London, 1902.] <https://archive.org/details/snowbabytruestor00pear/page/n8> and Josephine Diebitsch Peary and Marie Ahnighito Peary, *Children of the Arctic, by the Snow-Baby and Her Mother*, Frederick A. Stokes Co., New York, October 1903. [UK edition: Ibister, London, 1903.] <https://archive.org/details/childreno-farctic01pear/page/n9>.

◆ The first line of Peary's *The Snow Baby*, as above.

✿ Kevin Macdonald (dir.), *Touching the Void*, 2003.

✿ This is based on an old Caribbean (and British playground) song, which features repeatedly in 'Playtimes', the British Library's sound archive on children's songs and games, and exists in many different versions (meaning that the Boney M song used in *Touching the Void* bears significant changes). See: <https://www.bl.uk/playtimes>, including Shenece Oretha's commission, *Possibilities*, and the accompanying text, *PLAY WRITES BACK*, by Lola Olufemi.

✿ Devon Price, *Laziness Does Not Exist: A Defense of*

They would dream the waiters couldn't hear them shout their orders or when the food came it was suddenly ashes.✿

Yes, 'I may be some time' – as Oates, the Boer War veteran, said before he disappeared forever into the diamond white.✿ But why do we do it, why did mainly European men do it? And for the select women, joining, what self was fashioned by the maternal anthropology of *The Snow-baby*? On the Internet Archive I browse Josephine Diebitsch Peary's eponymous mom-offering, from 1901,✿ and the sequel, *Children of the Arctic*, from 1903. Unabashed concoctions of racist fairy-tale, colonial documentary and graphic novel, there is nothing to separate Marie Ahnighito – a growing baby, then tween – with a captive Kardashian: *Hundreds and hundreds of miles away in the frozen north, far beyond where the big ships go to hunt...* ✦

For privation to be productive – a tabula rasa and year zero – the haves contrive a break from their plenitude. They also have no comment, beyond it being some comic absurdity, on Joe Simpson's complaint in *Touching the Void* that he feared he was 'going to die to Boney-M'.✿ Delirious and left for dead with a broken leg, the intrepid hero assailant of the Siula Grande now dines out on the anecdote that he, himself, was the victim of a relentless earworm:

Brown girl in the ring

Tra la la la la

She looks like a sugar in a plum

Plum plum✿

Everyone who makes sense to *me* says, it shouldn't be us but the world that is made to change,✿ or, at least, that we should stop feeling insufficient to its demands – because they individualise, alienate, isolate us when we are born communal. In the last decade, there's been flooding, drenching, shaking, drying, streaming, thudding, itching, aching – of the heart, eyes, legs, hands, pelvis, vagina, skin, ligaments, bones. There's been depletion, of executive function, memory, manual control, energy, desire, confidence, sleep. Yet when I bring my meticulous diary of facts to the doctor (the point of perspective a chronic tremor), she asks me what day it is, who is Prime Minister, and to walk along this straight line.

The great derangement✿

The great entanglement✿

Show me your motion

Tra la la la la

Young woman doctor leans forward

Scientifically, intimately,

Whispering, wondering,

presumptuously,

if I've *had a difficult time recently*

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors,

she asserts,

full-frontal and bare-faced –

computer and internet

search bar right behind her –

are found to have

peripheral positive effects on retention,

you know?

All had water run dry

Got nowhere to wash my clothes

I untangled it already, sister, and am getting the hell out

Have a taste of your own medicine,

capital, biology, technology

Feel free to share it all around!

Universalise the collapse of executive function;

communise cognitive fog

Abolish the gender binary in long-term capacity;

generalise the reserve army of the menopausal and sick woman!✿

Curled up in bed, sitting on the bus, worrying, we feel crowds gathering

waves mounting

Clapping, shouting, sirens

swell of aural surge...

Plymouth sound...

Liverpool's

Bristol's

London's

Waters abound...

Cacophonous post-scriptum, discordant proviso

The scribbled memo pertaining only ever

to another woman, observed in admiration

– not to oneself, who is so –

– compromised, always –

– qualified, so deficient –

the Exhausted, Exploited and Overworked, London: Atria Books, 2019 (the literature on illness, next page, pertains here too).

✿ Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

✿ Attending a British art school during the 2010s and 2020s meant encountering *entanglement* and *vibrant matter*. The question is: what did that inevitability mean?

✿ Johanna Hedva, 'My Body Is a Prison of Pain so I Want to Leave It Like a Mystic But I Also Love It & Want it to Matter Politically', (event presented by the Women's Center for Creative Work at Human Resources on 7 October, 2015, whose online documentation is where I first encountered this work), <https://vimeo.com/144782433> and 'Sick Woman Theory', 1 April 2022, *Topical Cream*, <https://www.topicalcream.org/features/sick-woman-theory/> (first published in *Mask Magazine*, 2016); Carolyn Lazard, 'The World Is Unknown', *Triple Canopy*, 19 April, 2019, <https://www.canopycanopy.com/contents/the-world-is-unknown> ('How To Be A Person in the Age of Autoimmunity' is also online); Anne Boyer, *The Undying: A Meditation on Modern Illness*, London: Penguin, 2019 (the US-release subtitle was: 'Pain, Vulnerability, Mortality, Medicine, Art, Time, Dreams, Data, Exhaustion, Cancer, and Care').

✱ A Blackberry message circulated during London's 2011 riots read: "Everyone from all sides of London meet up at the heart of London (central) OXFORD CIRCUS!! Bare SHOPS are gonna get smashed up so come get some (free stuff!!!) fuck the feds we will send them back with OUR riot! >:O Dead the ends and colour war for now so if you see a brother... SALUT! if you see a fed... SHOOT!" See: <https://www.wired.com/2011/08/blackberry-london-riots/>. My reference is to these riots, and Ben Seymour's film, *Dead The Ends* (2017) (made in their spirit and much discussed between us) – 'Salut' becoming, then, the *feminised* address of comrades (as above, viz. Osterweil).

✱ Sarah Wood's film, *Azure* (2016), dwells memorably on this colour's double meanings. See: http://www.sarahwoodworld.com/films_04new.html.

✱ As a whole, this poem is preoccupied with rupture, collective becoming, and the bringing down of systems (not just statues) – meaning this section is also supposed to picture birth/delivery – but a specific account I was reading while writing this part was: Michael Fowler and David Estcourt, 'Vandalisation of Cook statue highlights complexity of Australia Day as anger smoulders on', 26 January, 2022, *The Age* (online), <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/vandalisation-of-cook-statue-highlights-complexity-of-australia-day-as-anger-smoulders-on-20220126-p59ra5.html>.

– & imperfect, in her self –
– reflection –

Her, their

powers expressed | suppressed

impossible to capture

in the written word

but which everyone must

– and will one day –

comprehend

I DON'T KNOW WHO NEEDS TO HEAR THIS BUT...

Above all

Glorify, valorise, heroic

The single mother

Above all

Recognise, embrace, give

Salut!*

She who

Every day

Inverts and topples

Pulverises into

Thin, flowing sand with

Nothing more than

Warm hands &

Throbbing heart of

Blind belief the

Resource pyramid

Ethereum summit

In our shared

Parabola of ancient

Azure,* she

Steps to it, daily

Chops its head right off

Soaks its uniform and

Regalia in blood*

No more

Pedestal in the

Public place

No more

Peak folly or glass

Phallus

CUT! with

Hammer, sickle, vibrator*

Tennis racket, respirator

Mask and phone-cam

Push, push, pull

Breathe...

CUT! the

Waters break

We make history

Where we now

Gather and gasp

Where we now

Fight, for us,

For all of us

Watch the white apex

Wobble and roll like

Roulette dice &

Stolen fruit

Twist & turn

Hug, smile

LOL!

Excellence:

See it crash, the

Amniotic sac

In front of everyone's

Feet, plain as day

You!

Female magus

Proud, gracious

Flesh, old mole's*

True comrade, stuck

Forever

Betwixt & between

Inside & out

Making everything

We all need

Out of nothing

Daily, from

Crack of dawn

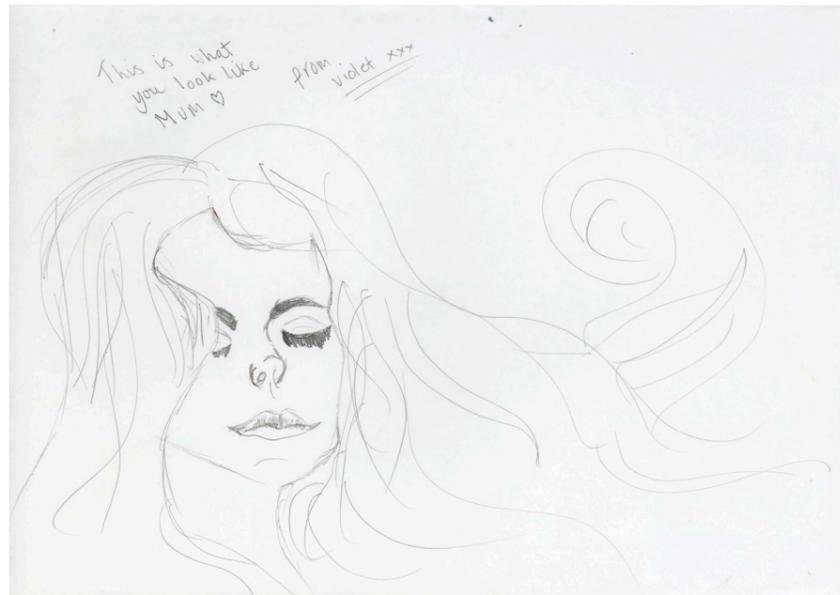
Till the light sinks

You!

◆ Ash Sarkar's tweet, early in the pandemic, combined a sickle and vibrator, to make the classic Soviet emblem in silhouette ("Everyone emerging from the pandemic in 3 months", 4th April, 2020, <https://twitter.com/AyoCaesar/status/1246442806228508674>). Widespread changes in sexual habits were reported during lockdown (on which Sarkar was punning), and pressures exerted on the nuclear family (its invisible support systems), which were impossible to ignore when severed, or forced to stay in / out. For one of many texts Sophie Lewis wrote on the subject, see: 'The coronavirus crisis shows it's time to abolish the family', *openDemocracy*, 24 March, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/coronavirus-crisis-shows-its-time-abolish-family/>.

✱ In Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852, 'old mole' was the revolution: "But the revolution is thorough-going. It is still preoccupied with journeying through purgatory. It does its work methodically. By 2 December [1851] it had completed half its preparatory work, and now it is completing the other half. First it developed parliamentary power so that it could be overthrown. Now that this has been attained, it is developing the executive power, reducing it to its purest expression, isolating it, confronting it as sole challenger in order to concentrate all its powers of destruction against it. And when it has brought this second half of its preparatory work to completion the whole of Europe will jump up and cry: 'Well grubbed up, old mole!' (this translation, by Terrell Carver, is from Mark Cowling and James Martin (eds.), London: Pluto Press, 2002, p. 98)

Now decide
In a flash, this
Shimmering
Lead weight, this
Empty bronze
Head, cradled &
Suspended, for
So long, must
Fall; drop down
Heavy, so very
Heavy, so it breaks the
Bough, shatters the
Horizon, plummets
Solo, this time, into the
Black, starless
Night of our
Earthen
Well
X
O
X



PART FIVE

I try, but fail, to mimic *Midwinter's* easy auralty using voice-notes, and wonder about the role of technology in Mayer's work.* How, exactly, did tape help her writing's magic ability to move from thought, to memory, to experience, to perception – Mayer's and our own. Apart from everything else the poem offers, the intensity of revelation that this 'magic' catalyses must surely be responsible for the volume of homages, transcriptions and odes now in existence (and of which this is one). Reading *Midwinter* loosens, unlocks, quickens, the mind and makes you want to – more importantly, believe that you can – write.

Mayer shares her methodology of recording. I am realising, with Carla Lonzi and Johanna Hedva, though, in *On Hell*,* the latter uses the idea of a recorder as a textual device – an ultimately unverifiable cipher of documentary reality typed in words onto a page – to present someone who turns out to be *fictitious* (my emphasis as this is an extremely problematic concept in this context).* The voice and slang, testimony and truth, of this figure is introduced through simple interventions: the book's story is presented as the compilation, or montage, of a number of interviews, conducted over a chronological sequence of days and hours between August and November, 2013 (all, precisely time-stamped, and most, located in "MacArthur Park, Los Angeles"), constructing, in the mind's eye, a being whose identity alloys the mythic figure of Icarus with that of an ex-inmate (the savagery of prison is sworn and spat into life as the voice's history). The corporality of this interviewee is constantly referred to – including through short descriptions of what's happening off-page, in time-and-space, e.g. "[lifts up shirt to show me part of a bandage and a leather-strap sewn to a wooden and metal apparatus on his right arm and side], [pause, picks at finger apparatus], [pauses, fidgets], [breathing hard, face wrinkles, near crying? pauses for a long time, then, presence snaps back, voice steady]"¹⁷ – but the reader is left guessing as to the degree of 'reality' embodied in, and expressed by, him. In eliciting this deductive work Hedva foregrounds voice-recording technology; she names it, uses its description as the absolute device of, both, documentarian grounding and *estrangement* (ostranie), whereas, in *Midwinter* at least, Mayer doesn't.

About Lonzi's *Autoritratti*, Claire Fontaine writes:

Recording, for Lonzi, isn't only a means to capture exhaustively what is said (only a small part of the conversations made it into the book), but a tool for the transubstantiation of speech. This 'condensation', this becoming-ink-on-paper of something that was once only sound, is a change of state in which thoughts preserve the freshness of spoken

Image: Violet Davies, pencil tip on paper (portrait of her mother in her mind's eye), 2020

* Megan Burns argues that *Midwinter* should be seen in the context of Mayer's preceding exercises in documenting consciousness-in-time, namely the book and exhibition, *Memory* – the former also recently re-released – and her *Studying Hunger Journals* (1972), which attempts something comparable but over a longer time bracket. *Journals* was, materially, the prop to a dialogue on consciousness with Mayer's psychiatrist. See: Megan Burns, 'Midwinter Day: Dream of the (Extra) ordinary', <http://jacketmagazine.com/40/burns-mayer.shtml>.

* Johanna Hedva, *On Hell*, Santa Fe, New Mexico: Sator Press, 2018, pp.15-44

* It is not clear, in *On Hell*, whether the character might be based on a real individual (even while mirroring all those incarcerated by the US state).

✱ Claire Fontaine, 'As if extraordinary things were possible between beings', Afterword to Carla Lonzi, *Self-portrait*, trans. Allison Grimaldi Donahue, Brussels: Divided Publishing, 2021, pp. 345-6.

✱ Woodberry room talk, as above.

✱ 'On the George Floyd Uprising & the Agency of Abolition' (Joy James, Idris Robinson, Shemon Salam and Wendy Trevino) | Red May 2021, YouTube.

◆ Panel Discussion: Thinking through Play - Lola Olufemi, Zarina Muhammad and Róisín Tapponi, see: <https://vimeo.com/553003842>. For the Notes On Play website, see: <https://spaces.rca.ac.uk/play/>

✱ This refers to Juliet Jaques, speaking during one of the RCA UCU picket live streams. I don't seek, of course, to infer that no students experience hardships, or that there aren't disparities in their levels of privilege – as these exist more than ever. Rather that, with the imposition of paid-for studying, both 'meritocracy', and the notion of the equality of the student body, disappear, as is also reflected in accounts of the interview process, where the feasibility of funding for an academic place, and the life lived as a student, must be taken into account to weight decisions (the point being that this makes the student cohort that is accepted invisible to itself, given the variability, and obscurity, of conditions of entry).

✱ Peter Fleming, Will Davies, Gargi Bhattacharyya, Albenaz Azmanova - How Universities Die | Pluto Live', 20 May, 2021 (a discussion of Fleming's *Dark Academia: How Universities Die*, London: Pluto Books, 2021, YouTube.

*language, the replies and questions stemming from the presence of the person who inspired them. The writings resulting from this process are fundamentally different from academic texts, written and read in solitude and silence, at a safe distance from life.**

The girls are out and I am on my own, lying on the floor and holding my phone, speaking into it, and wondering how to make this time of day productive. My deadline is weighing heavy, and I know that the less I do now, the more that I go slow and fuss over this writing, the greater will be my pain – and failure – later on. But I must deal with the fact that, mentally, this is a fallow time: the light is low, colours are blotted out. Things feel empty; *I feel empty*. It's that depressed, suffocated moment in the circadian cycle that pushes people into television, box-sets, bingeing. Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, Apple TV, Now, iPlayer, Freeview, ITV Hub, All 4, BritBox. I don't get it. There's protest over obligatory payment of the license fee, and it's a known fact that non-payment is one of the main, and unjust, reasons for many women's incarceration; and still, as if it's nothing, non state 'providers' are charging £12 for this, £7.99 for that, *every single month*. What is subscription media for?

I find two old, unused paragraphs in my Googledoc drafts and paste them in.

*There's a question from the audience asking Mayer about her housing activism; those stories were so enjoyable, did she have any more?** *She talks about taking her landlord to court, and the urban foundations of collective creation. Trevino at [13.30-14.44 minutes]* and Olufemi at [56.38-58.04 minutes]* insist that present conditions demand that any 'culture' or 'archive', which might claim an allegiance with liberation must first, itself, be free. Culture and the archive as universals. The analogies lie directly at hand. Oxygen, water, land. On the picket line, Jaques reminds us of the pedagogy of austerity, the learning of gentrification.* She speaks of the work that the city does to construct both teacher and student. I remember the art school of 1988. Oceans and oceans of time and space. A dream. Geography sculpts; and we are educated by the sculpture that we can see.*

*London's invisible gates, doors, walls have taught us, for decades now, this will be the nursery to a homogenous class who can afford to inhabit education like an open landscape. Your alma mater and peer cohort; no-one, nothing, is as it seems – the world is locked up, pressed back, out of view; people, a power, metered, priced, and held at bay. The thousands of exceptions to this rule – edu-factory workers who eke a living, find housing, and strike, boldly, to keep conditions within the realm of the human – only prove its stringency. 'Learnification' is the new argot for what's coming (and SMTs everywhere know it's already here).**

Children of men, they want us to believe it takes generations, long lives lived, to accumulate the key-cards, certificates, visas, grants and passwords demanded to walk in our finery along The Mall. The Ministry of Arts knows that eligibility criteria and application procedures are the best trap and snare; their ol' reliable, mustard-gas; a London Particular for us all. They keep us queueing, waiting, justifying, appealing, defending, footnoting, evidencing, BEGGING. They consult us, make us write a report, a new appendix, a more detailed budget. Charge us for the 'privilege'. They, meanwhile, have the jobs, the holidays, the houses, the nannies, for every one of those months, weeks, days. And, still – on pain of death and under their nomenclature – they have the gall to say: no 'tailgating', no 'piracy', no 'looting' or 'rioting'. There's a silence after Mayer describes how, when everyone lives within walking distance of each other, you can make a magazine in a day, collecting poems from different street corners.**

It's good, though, lying here, on my back, looking at my books, all my files, the many texts that I may well never get to read, and wondering how many lives it would take for me to make my way through all these printed pages. I panic every time I think about it. I've tried to work through my material systematically, but not one of my methods succeeded, and I've probably read less than twenty-five books fully, cover to cover, while being a doctoral candidate for going on eight years.* But I still like lounging here and looking – my eye crawling over the spiral bindings of the important, photo-copied texts; the C. L. R. James, *Facing Reality, Notes on Dialectics*; the seventies, hand-typed Bill Nichols thesis, which I found somewhere on a research portal;* grouped photocopies of articles on the Alt Right and Silicon Valley; a cheap copy of Thomas Pakenham's classic, *The Scramble for Africa*, which I learned about from Moss.* There's something comforting about these old, found things; the care required to put together what you want to read; being consumed by what you attempt to consume; being destroyed by an object, as you try to love it (I smile at the memory of my books attempting to destroy *me*, physically, when, only two moths ago, my shelves fell from the wall, onto my head).

Over in the other corner are the plants; all the different cacti, the grey-green elephant ear, the Aloe Vera, the begonia that I never thought would bloom, the fiddly fig that has already tried to pierce through the ceiling once and I had to cut with a kitchen knife. Its leaves cast a shadow on the egg-shaped painting, *Joseph Stalin** – whose swathes of rainbow-coloured lines course through the ochre-coloured, shit ones – and on the Monstera. I wish it wasn't dying. It's odd to think that I met Fay when she was only nine, with her beautiful dark red hair in a little bob. She was so young; how long did our eyes take to crawl over each other?

✱ Alfonso Cuarón (dir.), *Children of Men*, 2006. The sentence describes a scene of untold opulence and 'freedom', witnessed by the protagonist while he is taken to the Ministry of Arts in a limousine. People walk their enormous, groomed dogs joyfully, dressed in beautiful fashion, and so on. The film contrasts this with the borders, cages, checkpoints, vulnerability and destitution further from the city centre, showing – and further, prefiguring – capital's deployment of spatiality.

✱ Woodberry talk, as above.

✱ I studied full-time, in 2014/15, then started the academic year 2015/16, but had to take leave at the end of the first term (December 2015). I was away all of 2016, and started again, on a part-time basis, in January 2017. Together with many other TECHNE student-parents, I got a Covid funding extension of half a year in 2020, and also took a term leave at the beginning of lockdown. Eight years after starting, I am scheduled to submit on 30 June, 2022.

✱ See: William James Nichols, *Newsreel: Film and Revolution*, University of California, Oakland, 1972 (online), <https://billnichols99.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/newsreel-film-and-revolution.pdf>.

✱ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1991.

✱ Simon Bill, *Joseph Stalin*, 2011

✱ Otje (née Berthe Neumeijer, 1890-1996) is my paternal great grandmother and a craftswoman and tapestry-weaver whose artistry made an enormous impact on me during, and after, her life. She was, early in the twentieth century, awarded international prizes for her leather and embroidery work and has, posthumously, earned some further recognition for her wall-hangings, and the written correspondence with her husband, a better-known Dutch architect, Bernardus Johannes van Loghem, who was responsible for the design and construction of Holland's first collective housing projects (still extant and preserved, as architectural heritage, in Haarlem, The Netherlands). Inspired by the revolution of 1917, Johannes Bernardus ('Han') joined a project in Siberia to build a new town from scratch in Keremovo, a settlement situated in coal-rich territory in Siberia. He journeyed to the USSR in 1925 to bring Western expertise and modernise the housing of those living there in a classic utopian experiment: the 'Autonomous Industry Colony Kuzbas'. The group persuaded local workers to live in terraced houses rather than mud huts and laid out the town plan to include better sanitation and, relatively uniquely, a social centre. This experiment attracted many others similarly inspired, including Tini Schoorl-Straub, a Dutch author with whom Han had a relationship (as documented in her book, *Een Beetje Vrijheid* (trans. 'A Little Freedom'), Laren: A. G. Schoonderbeek, 1965). Otje joined Han in Keremovo, but was – before, during, and after – her journey racked with doubt over her inability to let the social environment and conventions of Holland go; her failure to 'get' the excitement of the tumult and utopianism, as it unfolded in Soviet Communism

Otje made her tapestry in 1968,^{*} hand-dying the wool in The Hague with her friend – the flatmate whom I wonder about often. Using vegetable colours, they washed the threads in the bath. I reckon she started in her early fifties. What an output.^{*} Mine is one of the few 'abstract' ones, but now I see that its shapes are a lot like these plants, here, with the ears (or leaves) appended by strange dark lines (or ladders), which come off them – falling down and growing up, like hair combs, fine charcoal shading, or regimented, upside-down black rain (rows and rows and rows of miniature spidery bars). Such conspicuous recurring themes – of cages, flying, fishing, floating, freedom. She hated this abstract one, apparently, but I see chasms, boomerangs, trapezoids; *figuration*. Imagine having an adult-sized – horse-sized! – loom in this sitting room, it would drive me up the wall.

Ava keeps her bedroom so tidy; she's got everything she needs in there, is meticulous, organised, does her work on time. She's learned so much from the study vlogs she follows. Is this parenting? Are all these kids teaching each other, because no-one else can keep up? I don't know what it means, but I find it hard to forbid. I did hate it when they followed that young family; unbagging the weekly shop was their favourite, and I didn't understand, or know what to do. I remember watching another woman, her daily routine with her ten children all dressed in white. Batches of babies swaddled, lying down and waiting for action safely on the floor; a bunch of toddlers standing upright in their cots holding bottles of milk and looking around; the small kids eating at the table and the teens carrying their musical instruments, on their way out of the door. A big hairy Dad somewhere off-side – in shadowy acquiescence, sanction, or provision, I speculated. 'Mum' was a maestro, performing her art to YouTube. All the comments crowded, *she's mad, it's a cult*, and they were probably right, though it did make some kind of sense, laundry-wise.

(in short, the bourgeois character of her feelings). The articulation of this confusion forms the basis of a collection of letters (to her husband, to her parents) that has latterly been translated into a performance, and documentary, which contextualises her sentiments with archival footage from the era relating, especially, to architecture and the role of the built environment in social change. Another central topic in the letters is the influence of the seasons and natural environment; the effect of cold and thawing; the unique flora and geography of that part of Siberia. Having completely ignored it at the time of my project proposal and grant application, the significance of their work and lives to this PhD gradually became apparent to me as I was completing it. For the documentary film work, and performance, see: <https://pimzwier.com/building-amidst-solitude/>. For a catalogue raisonné of Otje's work, self-published by my stepmother, see Kiddy Kohnstamm, *De Draad van Berthe* (trans. 'Berthe's Thread'), Den Haag, 2013. For a comprehensive biography of Han van Loghem's life and oeuvre, see: Wim de Wagt, *J. B. van Loghem 1881-1940: Landhuizen, Stadswoningen en Woningbouwprojecten: Beelden van Levenshouding*, Schuyt & Company, 1995. The Royal Dutch Library/RKD's entry on Berthe Neumeijer (Berta van Loghem-Neumeier) is: <https://rkd.nl/en/explore/artists/50615?langen=>.

✱ Starting around the age of fifty, Otje made 22 rugs, many up to five metres long, others smaller, and some designed as gifts for her grandchildren. She worked at home, on a loom that filled her sitting room.



PART SIX

In Farringdon there is a coral reef far under the surface
 A pristine rose lies intact – *perfect, enormous* – at 30-50km, in the
Twilight zone of our seas, where three resplendent kilometres of
 natural beauty are visible, instantly,
 On CNN,* and men scramble with metal tentacles, props and studs to scale the
 Edifice in tight neoprene.* Excited tarantulas, a giant

Camera lens faces down and

Mirrors the bloom. Narcissus, Narcissus

I ran back home for you. I, Echo, moved*

In hurried dedication after chatting to my bae

On the corner, near her work. Can I

Carry my memories, my words

Fast enough, well enough, that

They don't fall away, again?

We shared in disbelief, another story, the

Same old, same old, they've done it again

Man leaves wife and children after

Years of togetherness; an open relationship, even, and,

For her, true love. What motivates them, we wondered

It's the icy cold, the

Premeditation shown, that amazes; the calculation, leaving

Not a crumb of themselves behind; they scheme and plan,

Hold feelings secret and trust qualified; can't keep you in mind; and then

Slaughter the soul, as they turn towards the reserve army of the

Younger woman, the other woman, the working woman, the

Uninitiated and untold – an endlessly reliable, living

Resource, after all – pffffffft♦

Fordist factory of femmes

Whose belt we, too, rolled off, back in the day

Faith and forgiveness, care and empathy,

Hope, ingenuity, nostalgia; seven cheap

Things,* all freely available, everywhere

It's the cockroach, surviving every

Atomic blast intact, unaffected, I say

The first AI – another rhetorical

Provocation. Remember, the sufferer said it

Himself.* He equates learning on the fly, the

Iterative, empty work of the

Shell, orientated towards survival, with the

Wounded human being, absent of self; a

Blurred, glitched interiority running scripts to see

Image: Violet Davies, felt tip on paper (one of a series of portraits of her family), 2019

* See: Rachel Ramirez, 'Scientists made an incredible discovery in the ocean's 'twilight zone' off Tahiti', 20 January, 2022. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/19/world/coral-reef-tahiti-twilight-zone-climate-scn/index.html>.

* Although I did not make the link initially, similarities the reader might note with Adrienne Rich's poem 'Diving into the Wreck' (1972) are maintained – it became a conscious reference.

* Of the academic literature on narcissism/echoism, I was especially interested in Naomi Segal, *Narcissus and Echo: Women in the French récit* (1988), and 'Echo and Narcissus', in Teresa Brennan (ed.), *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1989). Her *On Replacement* (ed., 2018) also seems relevant, not only because of romantic substitution, but because of human anxiety in the machine/clone/robot/AI era.

♦ Hopefully the person who makes this brilliant sound (when exasperated) will recognise it.

* Jason W. Moore and Raj Patel, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2017.

* This is based on the statements and writings of Sam Vaknin, a self-confessed victim of narcissistic personality disorder.

✳ Will Barners, 'Capital Climes', *Mute*, Vol. 2, No. 5, 2007 (online), <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/capital-climes>.

✳ A random sample of abusive, or controlling, men for whom entertainment and corporate structures' historical power formations were particularly facilitative (and current social, media and communication structures, 'exposing'): Jimmy Savile, Bill Cosby, Larry Nasser, Harvey Weinstein, John Lasseter, Brett Kavanaugh, Michael Jackson, Jeffrey Epstein, Shia LaBeouf, Joss Wheedon, Armie Hammer, Noel Clarke, Woody Allen, R. Kelly, Prince Andrew, Gerald Marie, John de Mol.

✳ I mean for this to have the dual meaning of the presentable 'public' woman – wife, girlfriend, partner, the official companion in a couple – and the woman who is 'public', because shared, or paid for, by receiving a 'wage' (even if not monetary), and whose monogamy/respectability is thus in question (the sex worker would be the least complex and problematic example due to transactional labour being transparent, albeit often inequitable). The exchange relations they inhabit, their functionality, is often hard to see for public women (to follow Klein's formulation, it is to cloak, or dissimulate, *the real real* in socially and culturally normative life), esp. post-'emancipation'. See also: Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975.

◆ The 'wave' model of feminist history and emancipation is used ironically here. See also the important Coda to Marina Vishmidt's article, 'The Two Reproductions in (Feminist) Art and Theory, since the 1970s', *Third Text*, 31:1, 2017, pp. 49-66.

What, and who, sticks, and

What, and who, feels safe, stable, open

Generative, replenishing; comfortable

Enough, that is, to hold close; *close-ish*

Every time

I think of the apocalypse, I think of what Will

Barnes – R.I.P. – wrote,^{*} about the species that

Thrive in hostile conditions; the way we

Would be, and now are, surrounded by

Ravens and rats; the seagulls nesting

Everywhere in towns, crowing, cawing, fighting

In the giant chestnut trees by Meppel station

In London, near my bedroom window; everywhere, Hitchcock's

Birds, and Tippi Hedren did get hurt; she says she was scared

Shitless, for real. Alfred was a sadist, a mercenary

Creative genius – that is, seemingly every leader, boss and

Director one might, with hindsight, care to mention,^{*} but I do

Wonder: what is our own, subtle and clear-eyed,

Art of war?

Because in its absence, mostly, I just laugh at myself, the

Naivety, the idea that life and culture, the world economy, all

Matters, would not shape each other, wildly, irreverently,

Mutually and eternally, in all possible directions and

Dimensions; no halt or hesitation, powered as they are by the

Profound and urgent cunning of Eros; so, then, also,

Love. I cringe, that I deconstructed essences,

Yes, but only when it suited me, or they were

Far away and clearly flagged, like

The fine arts, or a marble figure at Delphi's Oracle

We interrailed through Europe in the eighties; Catherine and I

Argued the toss over Apollonian beauty

– animated gif, our teenage row loops the loop –

Things got pretty heated, then, but do I truly

Know any better, now, after all that talk and

Theory?

The art of the public woman^{*} is to

Make the man, and not just for others or in readiness

For work, or value; no, in these new-wave times[♦]

He is most intimately and importantly a

Thing for herself; invaluable creation, object of

Fantasy; projection screen, space of deflection and detonation;

Anarchitecture,^{*} slowly hewn, split,

Nailed, whirred, glued and chucked, clod by clod,

Brick by brick, plank by plank and strut by strut, to

Serve the explosive creative and destructive

Power of the imagination (he, the Eliza Doolittle to our

Professor Higgins; we, a fevered Pygmalion)

Muriel Rukeyser said,

If one woman told the truth about

Her life, the world would split open –

And, of course, this is an unforgettable,

Irresistible notion that, when it comes to

Our emotional investments, however, we

Don't act on, just like we spend

Our time being moved by the revolutionary

Writing, art and poetry and still

Know only how to go

Back to our bourgeois,

Heteronormative, ableist libraries, schools,

Kitchens, bathrooms, beds, buses, streets – our

Thoughts provoked, but ourselves, our relationships

– including, most confusingly, with the revolutionary lovers, whose

Betrayals are, not, as the world assumes, to

Possession, monogamy, or eternal love, but to faith,

Trust, and the steadfastness of the

Utopian impulse; its foothold and ground –^{*}

Submerged, under the bank of clams and moss;

Fake, real, plastic, petrified, perpetual, perishable; the

Killer weight of these scraps, mementoes,

Concepts, conventions & language, which act

With and next to the force of the commodity,

With and next to the power of the tools and abodes,

With and next to the control of family, friends, community,

Religion, state; all those, very, very, many together,

Crushingly and unfailingly

Our heavy burden

I had a long grey fin growing down one side, a

Limp, dead arm on the other; strong, muscly hand

Drooped low; my bald head touching lightly, at the

Top, the ridge of calcification – 'nature', I might have said –

Green and grey pillow, pressing down, no mercy or

Oxygen, but leaving me clueless, honestly, as to the

Meaning of it all

That painting from my life in the

Nineties;^{*} a whole series that, I'd explain, were about

Simulation, the global predominance of artificial light;

✳ On the complex history and context of 'Anarchitecture', as associated with Gordon Matta-Clark and his circle, see: James Attlee, *Tate Papers* No. 7, 2007 (online), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/07/towards-anarchitecture-gordon-matta-clark-and-le-corbusier> – and Pamela M. Lee, *Object To Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001.

✳ Adrienne Rich, 'Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying', first published as a pamphlet by Motherroot Press in 1977, and collected in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, 1979. Rich first read the notes at a women writers' workshop in Oneonta, New York, in 1975 (this information is taken from a PDF available online, whose source I couldn't determine). It is my feeling that Rich's thoughts can be transposed from seventies lesbian discourse to the politics of love and solidarity in mixed, and notionally 'feminist', radical settings, such as the contemporary anti-capitalist left, due to the misnomer that *things have changed* in heterosexual coupling. As is evidenced in, both, the obvious and high profile cases of sexual violence and public-accountability procedure (the SWP), and myriad smaller – often private, mostly secret – stories, the notion that society (and with it, revolutionary movements) have become more egalitarian as regards gender, race, class, let alone any putative ethic of mutual solidarity, is contradicted by the realities of personal experience. Due to the complexity of devising better ways to be in – and fight against – capitalism, together, those who fall victim to these realities often have to figure out what to do about them on their own, in a process of self-exclusion and stowing away. I refer to that as a loss of ground; a knock to *utopianism*, as much as to personhood.

* See: Lyn Hejinian, *My Life in the Nineties*, New York: Shark Books, 2003, the follow-up to her *My Life*, Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1987.

* In 2019, I developed a fascination with the urban-climbing, law-antagonistic YouTuber, Ally Law, whose feats and flights are documented with the fish-eyes of GoPro cameras and – in the deeply embodied, vicarious experiences of thrill-seeking and courage they offer – make for compulsive viewing for the sedentary (or, less brave, able-bodied, young). The poem uses the video file names of pranks, which I watched.

* Not being able to see 'truth' or 'reality' is, contrary to their supposed discontinuity, a theme running through modernism, post-modernism, and the epistemic crisis we presently occupy. Turn of the century America was suffused with much the same doubt, as is documented in Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Scepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2004.

* Michael Moorcock, *Mother London*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1988. In modernism, the phenomenon of 'hearing voices' also features, famously, in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in turn referenced in: The London Particular, 'Fear Death By Water (The Regeneration Siege in Central Hackney)', *Mute*, Vol. 1, No. 26, 2003 (online), <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/artists-projects/special-project-fear-death-water-regeneration-siege-central-hackney>.

Tragic loss of the natural referent; Postmodernism;

You get the idea...

Sigh.

It's a blindness. Or *it's a madness*, as Ally Law,*

New Ovidian muse, whom I made light-heartedly, consciously,

Puns, while he films INSANE OVERNIGHT IN WATERPARK!

ILLEGALLY.mp4, or INSANE OVERNIGHT ESCAPE

(CLIMBING Sagrada Familia) WE GOT LUCKY!.mp4, but

It is understandable that there are certain

Things – or rather, damned most every important

Thing – we won't face directly, and at which we only

Ever look askance,* like in the marbled trompe-l'oeil

I painted on a Fulham interior wall, as we

Wait, divine, or

Drill for meaning, that

Precious resource. Mother London,* austere, bruised,

Suffering, you know you showed me many of your

Offspring, these last few years – always cryptic, isolated;

Resistant to decipherment. Jackson Pollock

Man, all alone in Russell Square, absorbed, spent, a

Splattered ideogram unto himself; clothes, bucket hat,

Rucksack, cassette-deck – all painted live, in every blue hue

His art materials were all carried along and

Integrated in the disturbed, mobile performance work his life had

Become: pots and brushes; water too (needs must). He twirled,

Round and round, covered head-to-toe in paint, and no-one paid a

Blind bit of notice (I was stumped and upset enough merely to

Leave a voice note for Charan). Then, the couple in the

Merc, a shiny black, brand-new cabriolet I saw shaking

Vigorously while parked in a bay. One man

Hands the other a poodle to hold, then

Launches into a tirade so prolonged and violent, it is as if

The car is being puffed up by a dragon housed

Beneath; and while, sincerely concerned, I felt obliged to

Circle the vehicle, I hung back in the end, filled only with

Shame and confusion. Then, Vitruvian man, who

We met where Shoe Lane, Little New, Stonecutter and

St. Bride Street intersect – another prone, grey

Sunflower of the public realm – just opposite

Resolution, Gormley's facile cuboid humanoid. He stretched his

Arms out wide, walking straight towards us, the bare face

Angry, the upper limbs stiff and level, thus

Reminding Violet and I, and our gormless pup, to stay the

Hell away, off his law-abiding path, each gesture imputing it was

Us who demanded right of way, or were ill-considered, *illegal*, even, with

Our shedding, our viral drops, our haze, when

All four of us, *ensemble*, had wide-open

Acres of expensively gardened, granite-clad, surveilled

Space, available right there, for the noxious public dance. I cherished him,

Social symbol, weeks later, when, walking through the same

Stone crux, I met his antonym – dozens of young boys on bikes taunting and

Toying with a truly insane show of police, circling their van, racing,

Mounting, jumping, swearing, at ease

Rocking the cop cradle, just for a laugh.

What is reading and writing, asks *Midwinter*, twice

What is listening and speaking? In my bed I take in,

Much too late, *A Room of One's Own*, the voice of Tilda

Swinton; posh, crisp, classically trained, perfectly modulated; I can't

Help but be carried away – a bi-directional embodiment. Striking:

Woolf locates so much in the spine; makes my identification

Visceral, absolute – that is, until she *roll[s] up the crumpled*

Skin of the day [...] and throw[s] it in the hedge.

I lie flat. A state of lexical

Apoplexy. What is this barre that I have been leaning on, then?

Shani says her work uses pre-sets, boundaries, the post-

Modern architecture that Jencks theorised, to stop her

Drifting off, uncontained.* Bennett divulges, after a

Virtuosic performance, that she has a bad memory and that this

Orphans, untethers her from

Origins; makes her use devices, meld fact and fiction, in her

Particular way* (*it's true, I suppose*, she says,

that I had a towel on my head). I am using *Midwinter* as a banister, an

Aide, to stop the falling, but equally to pull myself up;

Crawl out; escape repression's downwardness and rigidity; its

Gargantuan, protective vice.

In therapy, where I come to

Moan about the forgetting, my stalled state, we

Speculate that re-member-ing might be cognitive

Integration, a dynamic manoeuvre after break or cut; the intelligence of

The unconscious; its warding off. But I find the later idea – that I can't recall,

Write, or make public on my own because I once *couldn't even*

Move without support – more compelling, now. Club foot, spina

Bifida occulta, the short Achilles tendon, often coincide.

Operations, plaster casts and braces,

My mother tells me, interrupted infant spontaneity, sequence,

* See: 'Feminism's Occult Imagination: Artist Tai Shani' (online presentation documentation), <https://courtauld.ac.uk/whats-on/online-feminisms-occult-imagination-artist-tai-shani/>.

* See: AUTO— Conference, Day 2 (24 May, 2019), Panel 1: 'Between AUTO— and a hard place: Claire-Louise Bennett, Heike Geissler, Brian Dillon, Kishani Widyaratna (chair)' (online presentation documentation): <https://vimeo.com/433141526>.

Bennett says, starting at 1:09 hrs: "The distinction between fact and fiction is just very blurred, for me. I don't have a very good memory, for one thing, and I found that interesting in a paper yesterday that I think maybe Tom [Overton] gave, and he talked about autobiography – maybe he was quoting Berger, I can't remember – being an orphan form. And I'm not an orphan but if you don't have very good memory, it can make you feel a bit without origin, in a way, you can feel a bit untethered, so... and it's really quite bad in a way, I don't really know why it's so bad. I don't think I'm trying to record anything particularly, but I have quite a hard time trying to work out what's important and what isn't, and so, yes, I suppose that distinction ... I'm not sure, I mean it's true I had a towel on my head [referring to a passage in the piece which she had just performed], but when I look through that and how I treat that, I'm using devices, or something like that that operates within fiction."

* See: 'Learning to struggle: my story between workerism and feminism - Leopoldina Fortunati', uploaded to Libcom.org by 'Steven'. 30 September, 2013: <https://libcom.org/library/learning-struggle-my-story-between-workerism-feminism-leopoldina-fortunati>.

* See: Vivian Gornick, *The Situation and the Story*, as above.

* For an important history of the 'persona', see, Robert C. Elliott, *The Literary Persona*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.

◆ In her TECHNE workshop, on 8 March 2019, Anne Boyer stressed the trust writers experimenting with form and voice should have in readers; that this functions like a *bridge* to unroll (a leap of faith whose rewards are guaranteed, if surprising).

* The attempt at a plural voice, here, was influenced particularly by Johanna Hedva, 'In Defense of De-persons', 10 May, 2016, <http://gutmagazine.ca/in/>, and Sianne Ngai's essay on plural subjects - 'they/them', three unnamed people - in Juliana Spahr's *The Transformation* (Atelos, 2007). See: 'Network Aesthetics: Juliana Spahr's *The Transformation* and Bruno Latour's *Reassembling the Social*', in, Cindy Weinstein and Christopher Looby (eds.), *American Literature's Aesthetic Dimensions*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. The phrase "the stakes, ourselves" alludes to Diane di Prima's famous "the stakes are myself", from *Revolutionary Letters*, which was re-released during my studentship (London: Silver Press, 2021). The full line reads: "I have just realized that the stakes are myself. I have no other ransom money, nothing to break or barter but my life."

Standing and walking, all of which were worked around by rolling,
Leaning, holding, hanging on, dangling off. *Carry me, carry me*. Humans
Are instruments too, *anarchitecture*; and sometimes, I wonder:
Is it I who can't differentiate between people and
Things; Pauline who is, proverbially, parenthetically, Narcissus,
The first AI?

How preoccupying, asks Midwinter,

Is the wish to include all or to leave all out?

I walk around the mess, so exhausted I can't describe it

How do I teach my kids to be communists when I don't know what I am

Doing myself; how can we practice sharing, destroying, creating, maintaining,

Making the commune come naturally -

let alone seeing, hearing, naming the world -

As the gorgeous triplet we all are, emerging from the broken couple form?

Who is boss and who is worker, who producer, who product, when their

Lips don't meet at the coalface (Fortunati knew, at twenty-two,

She must go find it)*

Capital, labour,

Intrusive thoughts orbit,

Bothering my head with their questions and hectoring.

You've generalised! You've essentialised! Times change,

People change. Liberty, fraternity, equality, this is the social

Contract. Love and duration. Who needs Woolf's critics and

Professors, her hostile outer world, when that makes this inner world,

Ourselves, so drunk on mother's mother's mother's milk of hard

Experience. Heavy, political work of private

Accommodation.

More questions and hectoring. You

Speak in clichés. Don't know your memes, your poetry or history, your

English language, or even your mother tongue. *Say gaga*, corporate

Baby. *So long*, nowhere woman. Google is not a method. The

Monkey comes out of the sleeve.

We answer back, hesitating:

This is a persona we have created. Gornick argues we meet and

Narrate experience in time and in situ.* A voice is not a person, it can

Speak a certain thing, a thing we don't yet know; haven't concretely

Thought, to date (or cannot utter). Persona was never *person*, let us

Go, *let us go!** Here & now, we must therefore refuse to retract ours,

Being the only bridge we can build,† the only refuse left over; the

Stakes, ourselves.* Us - the disused train carriage stretched over the

Crater. Us - the drawbridge we lowered tonight, to reach and meet the

Others. Us - on our many feet.

I slip down and through the back of the sofa...

Or is it a toilet - it fucking stinks,

This poem is disgusting

*The worst TOILET in Scotland**

Next level down

A message from 9.27pm, 27 April, 2021:*

... *the other day I had the
weirdest dream about you and Katie
moving to some fandango
superdeluxe flat in the middle of a
very sci-fi London... was all rather
fantastical, anyway, nice to know it
can happen in dreams :)*

Nested folders give me the shivers,* I move down the subs, I

Approach this branch only very

Occasionally - opening the case; going this

Far down takes too much from me, but maybe

I will, today, just for you. February 2018:

*I hope for you you have the desire and courage
to really work for what you say you want, which
I take to be a full and meaningful life. I hope for
you that you find out you need to stop running
and ruining, and care for yourself, as well as those
close to you. That you need to stop annihilating
existence to escape it. I hope for you that you
realise shame is never as big as love, and that you
deserve love, deserve to stop being extinguished
by your attacks on your own life world. That
there aren't enough people to go round for this
programme of destruction. That each of them has
a life you're damaging, and that you don't have*

* The sofa-sinking scene is from Danny Boyle (dir.), *Trainspotting*, 1996, which I found using a word string (I remembered only one scene and assumed the film-source would be different). Once found, I took the toilet quote back out with me.

* Message to my friend Hari about a dream in which he featured (Instagram, 2021)

* The graphic user interface spatialises information and creates 'locations' (which can be traumatic, depending on what's held there, or how that is displayed). The GUI enables these places to appear to exist close to, far from, or mixed up with each other: the choice is supposed to be free, and up to the computer user. My inclination with all material is to name, organise, store. Others (it seems Google has made this an increasing number) live in digital chaos, observing no hierarchy or structure and using the search tool to find everything. If the psyche is modelled topologically, and culture is too, what do these changes mean? My PhD was marked by a life-changing interruption, much of which unfolded through digital media. The Documents folder holding the research work I was attempting to produce, for example, also held painful material (words, photos, screenshots). This poem tries to stage a descent - of memory and expression - through these materials, stored online and off, some under, others out of, my control. Showing the retrieval of buried material would mean (the GUI dictates) moving down the steps and branches I had created for myself. As I did so, on limited time, I became desperately worried I wouldn't find the 'right' file, the right words (appropriately anonymous, etc.). In the end I used the first scrap I found because I realised each was probably as bad, or good (as wrong, or right) as the next.

✱ Vladimir Mayakovsky, 'At the Top of My Voice: First Prelude to the Poem' (unfinished, 1930) in Vladimir Mayakovsky, Patricia Blake (ed.), Max Hayward and George Reavey (trans.), *The Bedbug and Other Poetry*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975.

✱ Vladimir Mayakovsky, G. M. Hyde (trans.), *How Are Verses Made* (1926), London: Jonathan Cape, 1970.

✱ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), from the Virginia Woolf Collection, Pippa Vaughn (dir.), Audible Studios, 2020. All italicised phrases are quotations from this production.

◆ The full quotation is: For there is a spot the size of a shilling at the back of the head which one can never see for oneself. It is one of the good offices that sex can discharge for sex – to describe that spot the size of a shilling at the back of the head. Think how much women have profited by the comments of Juvenal by the criticism of Strindberg. Think with what humanity and brilliancy men, from the earliest ages, have pointed out to women that dark place at the back of the head! And if Mary were very brave and very honest, she would go behind the other sex and tell us what she found there. A true picture of man as a whole can never be painted until a woman has described that spot the size of a shilling.

✱ Reading around, listening to talks and podcasts, about *Midwinter Day* made us realise how significant the recorder was in its productive process. On email, one of us wrote, "She spoke it into a recorder WTF", which best summed up our astonishment that a piece of contextual information so small could seem so big, and be unknown to us before.

the right to.

I sent my sister, Danielle, the section of my poem on single mothers and she thanked me for 'this spear', when all my efforts have been to destabilise, even attack, the line. I scribble in the margin:

WHAT IS THE SHAPE I AM MAKING?

On the steps of a poem, Mayakovsky blurts loudly, at the top of his voice*

What is the social command?

*What is the social command?**

The looking-glass vision is of supreme importance because it charges the vitality; it stimulates the nervous system.✱ Woolf said the historical condition of women's writing was anonymity, the veiled state, hence it must for freedom's sake surely be illogical to seek it again, to regress to progress. Yet does not also the nervous system *command* it, today? Might we benefit from writing so *many poems without signing them*, as she describes; shall we ever again be, merely and gloriously, Anon? When all is surveilled and done, what conceivable step, furthermore, can we stand on to view that priceless *spot the size of a shilling at the back of the head*.♦ The body's shadow-side; the human – and worldly – optical and auditory – unconscious. Thinking, she said, *is in the body of the people and the mass of the people is behind the single voice*. Why, then, the negative value attributed to thwarting and thwartedness; why, then, so few voices enjoying the conditions to truly set them free?

SHE SPOKE IT INTO A RECORDER WTF*
 SAY HER
 NAME
 REFORM OR
 REVOLUTION
 GENDER IS A
 CONSTRUCT
 NO TRUTH AND
 RECONCILIATION
 ALL POWER
 TO THE SOVIETS
 KALEIDOSCOPIC
 JUSTICE
 CRIP COMMUNE
 MOOD BOARD*

SHE SPOKE IT INTO A RECORDER WTF

SOVIETS
 KALEIDOSCOPIC
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 CRIP OR
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 MOOD BOARD
 TRUTH HER
 NAME REFORM
 POWER THE
 TO SOVIETS
 KALEIDOSCOPIC
 JUSTICE CRIP

✱ The origins of these phrases should mostly be evident, as they are well known. I owe 'crip commune mood board' to the Instagram account [invalid_art](#), from which I learned a lot, and was inspired by. The 'crip commune mood board' post was, in this instance, a circular (oval doughnut shaped) white building shown from above, on what looked like the coast of a cold island. You could easily imagine those living there striking a happy balance between privacy, togetherness, sharing, and keeping to oneself. The phrase 'kaleidoscopic justice' I learned about from Bryony Beynon in the interview that Owen Jones and Ash Sarkar conducted with her and Nim Ralph, during which Beynon mentions it as an example of accountability and healing work that acknowledges, and works with, the fact that all survivors require different things, have – by definition – different needs and histories. See: 'The Police Attack Mourners At Sarah Everard's Vigil', 14 March, 2021, YouTube. Clare McGlynn and Nicole Westmarland's 'Kaleidoscopic Justice: Sexual Violence and Victim-Survivors' Perceptions of Justice' *Social & Legal Studies*, March 2018, is available online, open access.

(ed.), *Essential Works of Lenin*, New York: Dover Publications, 1987

✱ These are scenes from a dream in the time of writing. 'Burning man' got hauled out of a car by unknown men in suits; once out of the vehicle, their captive spontaneously set alight – then got dumped among the trees. Wearing a long, beige trench coat and white T-shirt, helpless with arms stretched out, the flames engulfed what turned out to be Jeremy Corbyn.

✱ Bernadette Mayer. *Midwinter Day*, *ibid.*

◆ Dziga Vertov (dir.), *Stride, Soviet!*, 1926

Last night a little blue girl sat on my bed in
Tears – there is no point in life, where is the
Meaning? – third time in ten days, no less.
What is to be done,* *Childhood 2.0*,
What is to be done? Still, that whole
Programme was full of shit. And so, to
Bed, once again, night's single rare dream a
Coitus interruptus, 'cause pretty-boy poet's
Electrics went down and the burning man
Got dumped in the forest.* Woke up in the
Morning; rocks, hard in my mouth, rolled out
Ten to a dozen. Take the library, friends,
We have all the codes! Books, our
Selves, we're comrades,
Not citizens!

It takes so long, it feels so tough, so very far away, *Then to end I guess with
love, a method,** will feather *all* our nests. I offer you my shapes, this night, to
do with what you will. Large, small, soft, tall, skyscraper and
Mouse tail, they are the immodest material time
Makes, with us, for now. Riding rough-shod over
Style and meter, and blinded by morning's light, I
Knock last night's glasses across the kitchen table,
Clodhopper till the end, and sing...
I am January's
Happy amateur,
Stride, Soviet,◆
Encore, encore!

Image: Violet Davies,
watercolour, pen and ink
(based on a photo of her
face, altered with a Snapchat
filter), 2021



Pauline van Mourik Broekman

Inventions of the Mother: A Waking Dream (Midwinter Day No More, parts I-III & IV-VI)

Based on: Bernadette Mayer, *Midwinter Day*, New York: New Directions, 1982

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