

A collage featuring a green flag, a sequined dress, and a blue sky with clouds. The green flag is the central focus, with a sequined dress on the left and a blue sky with clouds in the background. The text 'SO FI ZINE #13' is overlaid in a bright green, stylized font with a pink shadow effect.

**SO FI ZINE**  
**#13**



**SO FIZINE**

**EDITION 13**

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# **SO FI ZINE**

**sociological  
fiction, poetry  
& visual art**



## Editorial

Ash Watson

Welcome to another edition of *So Fi Zine*, an indie publication of sociological fiction, poetry and visual art. Edition #13 brings you 15 new creative works including stories of aliens and impersonators and love letters and poems on hospitality and promises and visual works on desire and the digital front stage. Thank you to all the contributors – first time submitters and *So Fi Zine* stalwarts both.

I stopped using Twitter altogether this year and was worried that this project would fall over as a result. The platform was a big part of the early success of *So Fi Zine*, and was an easy way for new editions and calls for submissions to reach a whole pool of people I wouldn't know how to contact by myself. But, after a couple of years of trying to use it less, I logged out permanently and shared my substack a little more widely (which I only use very irregularly to share news about sociological fiction projects, rather than the regular missives most writers use substack for). And! The zine lives.

Many of the pieces in this edition play with perspective, and invert what we might consider the usual gaze of the discipline. There is a great exploration of interiority in these works, of the huge internal worlds we all have, in a way that animates (rather than leaves out of focus) bigger social and cultural dynamics. What we bring close and what we hold at a distance is the stuff of discipline-making, or boundary work, and there are things we learn about how to do sociology in ways that make boundaries into bridges from creative writers and artists including those published here.





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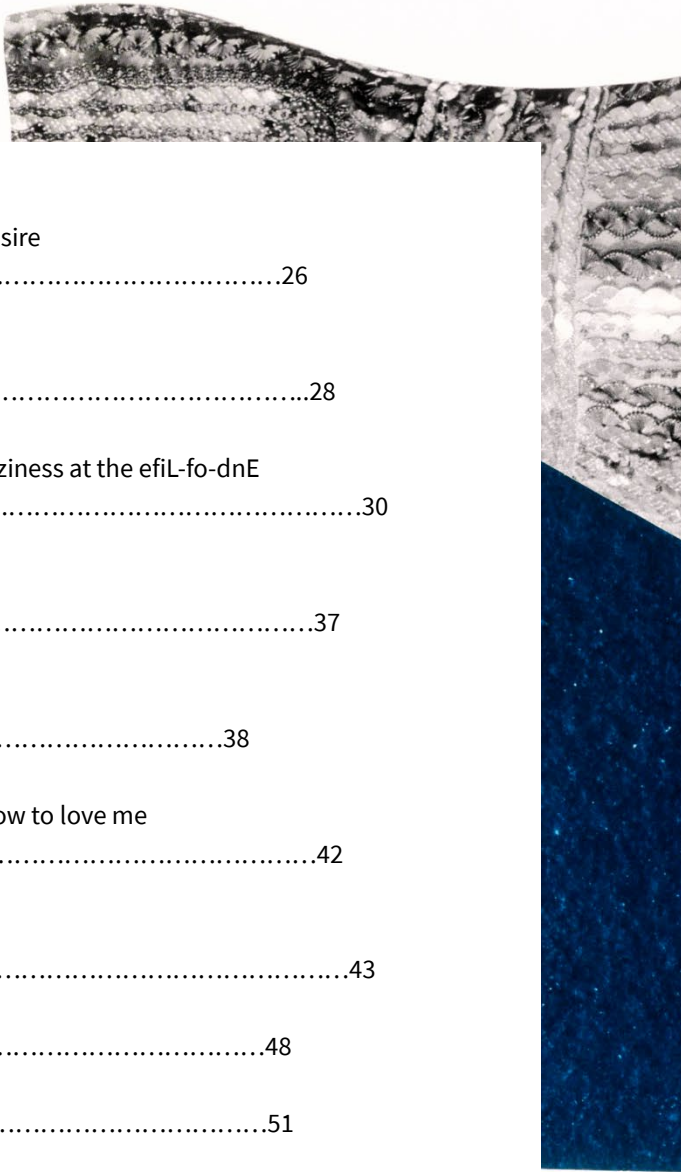
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## Cleaning up the World

Becky Neher

The plastic sign is staked in an unmown lawn: "Banish illness. End addiction. Achieve financial security. Register for a Spiritual Warfare class today!"

I roll my eyes and turn back to my phone, glancing up now and then to track the sidewalk.

*People will believe anything*, I sigh, then swipe over to the Citizen DemonWatch app. Its crowd-sourced feed documents ignorant and evil behaviours in real-time. At the top is the next residence or place of business onto whose premises I must throw an Only-Hurt-the-Wicked™ incendiary device, to invoke the energy-forces of Enlightenment and cast out the spirits of Error.

# My Mother

Alice Casalini





## Last Exit Plan

Ian C Smith


Breath stifled, a beast squatting on his lungs, he protests to his tormentor until gasping out the words that wake him. Shuffling across his bare floor, he thinks life, with all its sleeps, has slithered by filled with dreams, normal conscious memory let loose. The only thing that could stop him now is the hue and cry of family meanness, his life's bane. Still dark outside. The removalist is due in four hours.

His destination is a barely legal cramped room attached to a mildewed caravan, a deck with gaps, distant glimpses of the sea, roiling, calm, tidal-tug and foam-flick, and thickets of she-oak and tea-tree swaybacked by the Roaring Forties. A rugged steep track leads to a beach's great arc, and further, to volcanic rocks below cloud-shadowed mountains. Always, the mountains. His cat a neighbour will adopt prowls hollow rooms.

His books, drafts, now confined to corrugated cardboard, he fantasises being the last man left alive on the island, foraging for firewood, his body eventually circled by sea-eagles and wedge-tails. He wants another life from the start, different, without lies, greed, and envy's persecution, wants to rekindle his fire though it seems too late, loss a sickness, his grate cold. He sniffs the stale odour of drawers emptied after long closure, again checks the time.

Wallabies shall find ways to crop his planted greens: he must take care with water catchment. On his broad bluff stars blaze in glory, appear closer than on the mainland. His new landfall rises and dips many miles to a town with a pub more than a century old, where gulls street-strut, where islanders weave windswept simple lives, their daily visual outlook the durability of those mountains. He knows these are to be his last efforts.

Re-reading John Burnside's *Black Cat Bone*, a work of detailed bleak beauty he loves, soon to be almost cut off, outcast as castaway, far from

A photograph of a person's hand holding a dark object, possibly a book or a piece of fabric, against a background of yellow and purple. The hand is wearing a ring. The background is split into a yellow upper half and a purple lower half, with a white horizontal band in the middle. The text is overlaid on the yellow section.

traffic lights, convenience shops, ghosted from any sign his blood once pulsed here, he hopes to subdue that old anger tattooed on his heart, find a kind of peace after a hectic life gone awry. Tired, wanly hopeful, he shall read by lamplight, listen to scouring wind. He might skip checking messages for last-minute letdowns.

## Old Black woman on a park bench overlooking Herne Bay

Gillian Stokes

An old Black woman wearing an ornate Gele, sits on a bench looking out across the sea.

Her face, pert.

Youthful, yet weathered.

Smooth cheeks. Furrowed brow.

Each line carved by the hands of rejection and politely delivered persecution.

She closes her eyes and opens her ears.

Draws in a breath slowly, deeply.

As if to sift through the complex, cold odours for just one familiar taste.

Quietly she mutters in muted meditation.

To herself? Or to lost ones and lost memories?

Distant lands, filled with distant ancestors. Lost stories. Forgotten histories.

Her voice grows louder, barely discernible but distinctly musical.

Dancing on the air now further. Beyond this shore. Across this sea.

“Maybe they will hear”

rise

Her lyrical whispers that and fall like the undulant waves.

Such petulant hosts.

Her gaze, now raised, spies oddly quiet gulls floating high atop some distant rocks.

Like dandelion clocks.

Movements controlled by the breeze. So no control.

“But they are free.”

Hands placed lightly on her knees,

As if there to

hold

her spirit

down.

Preventing her from gliding up to play with birds that hold her gaze.

“But they are free.”

rise

Occasionally, her fingers and fall. Gently tap tapping on her knees.

Rhythmically they move.

No musical sounds can be heard, but the melodies dance within her mind.

How far she is now from those songs.

She is still here. She was once there.

A smile occasionally curves her lips. Then just as easily, she flattens them.

Passers-by glare at this colourful woman.

“They are free.”

Closer she pulls her worn, padded jacket around her shoulders.

Cold seeping in where down had seeped out. It had escaped.

But she cannot escape.

“I am not free.”

Her eyes have been opened.

She opens her eyes and an orange float captures her imagination.

It disappears with each wave that drags it down.

Like the head of a drowning man, it bobs around.

Tethered to its spot.

“It is not free.”

See how it catches its breath each time the waves subside.

Does she think back to the days of slaves dragged unwilling to distant shores?

To this shore?

Struggling to breathe beneath the weight of chains and starvation.

Scurvy and abuse.

Unwelcomed. Unwanted. Unaware.

Has the spirit of one such lost soul possessed this buoy?  
A boy re-enacting his demise perhaps.

“Remember me?

Remember we!

Think long on what

you

did.”

Laughter slips from her lips, forcing frowns from onlookers, passers-by...

“Overseers!” she cries.

Falsely vindicated the watchers stand.

Openly they mock an old Black woman who sits on a bench.

Openly she mourns for liberty long lost.

“Not me.

“Not one of we are free.

“Not one.”

Not she. Proudly she sits.

## **An Archived Remnant of a Classic Social Theory Test Now Used by the Colony at Cassini**

John-Paul Smiley

Title of Paper                      INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL THEORY

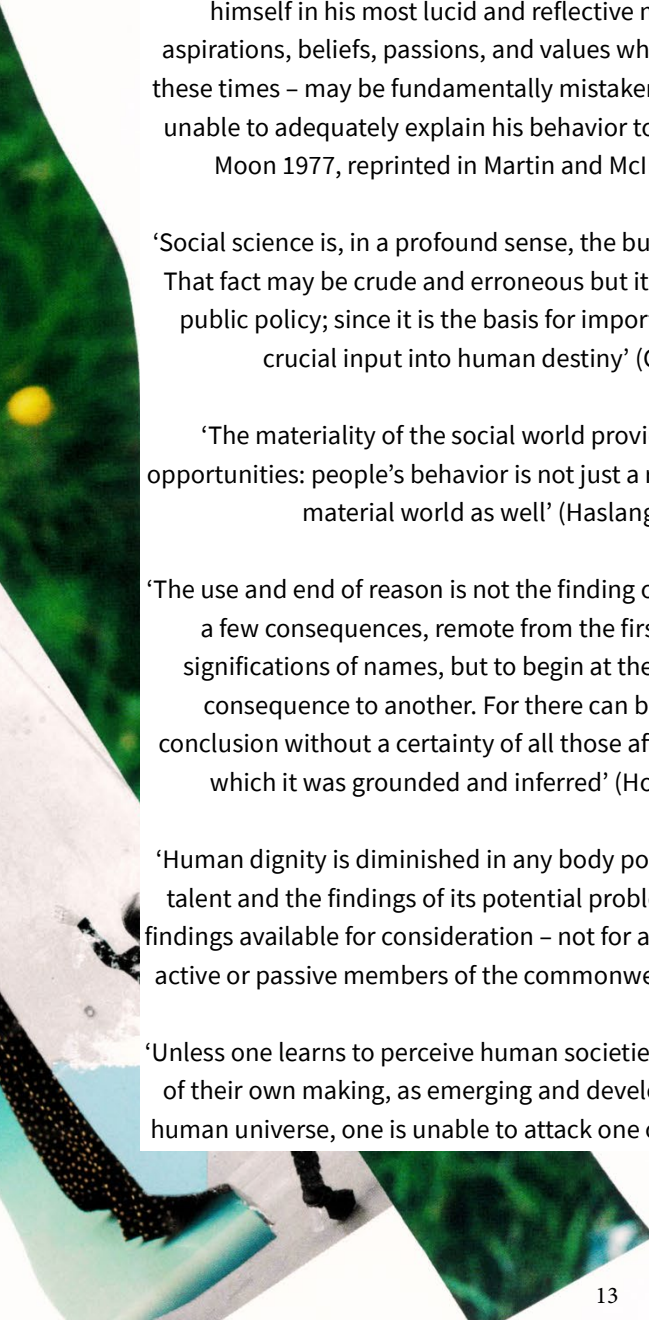
Time Allowed                      3 ½ HOURS

Choose any seven out of the following eleven quotations and discuss what you consider to be the merits and weaknesses of each for social inquiry, utilising real-world examples where possible. Each response should be a minimum of 500+ words:

‘Explaining why people act in sociological terms inevitably involves drawing attention to structural conditions. This, in turn, opens the question of the responsibility of social actors or institutions that create or reproduce those conditions’ (Bacevic 2021, pp. 400-401).

‘After a recent lecture of mine on sociological theory, a perceptive student remarked to me, “You sure have a hangup on order, don't you?” I conceded the description, but I added that my “hangup” was not arbitrary or inadvertent. Behind it is the conviction that sociology leads to the understanding that order is *the* primary imperative of social life’ (Berger 1971, p. 3 – emphasis in original).

‘They can only look at whatever happens to them from their narrow location within the system. They are too deeply involved to look at themselves from without. Thus what is formed of nothing but human beings acts upon each of them, and is experienced by many as an alien external force not unlike the forces of nature’ (Elias 1956, p. 232).



‘The very basis of a person’s life – the terms in which he talks about himself in his most lucid and reflective moments, and the fears, aspirations, beliefs, passions, and values which he ascribes to himself at these times – may be fundamentally mistaken, and, as a result, he may be unable to adequately explain his behavior to himself or others’ (Fay and Moon 1977, reprinted in Martin and McIntyre [eds] 1994, p. 32).


‘Social science is, in a profound sense, the business of creating social fact. That fact may be crude and erroneous but it is finally a necessity for any public policy; since it is the basis for important policy decisions it is a crucial input into human destiny’ (Greer 1969, p. 186).

‘The materiality of the social world provides both limitations and opportunities: people’s behavior is not just a response to others, but to the material world as well’ (Haslanger 2020, p. 16).

‘The use and end of reason is not the finding of the sum and truth of one or a few consequences, remote from the first definitions and settled significations of names, but to begin at these, and proceed from one consequence to another. For there can be no certainty of the last conclusion without a certainty of all those affirmations and negations on which it was grounded and inferred’ (Hobbes 1651/1994, p. 23).

‘Human dignity is diminished in any body politic that fails to mobilize the talent and the findings of its potential problem solvers and to make the findings available for consideration – not for automatic acceptance – by the active or passive members of the commonwealth’ (Lasswell 1974, p. 189).

‘Unless one learns to perceive human societies, living in a world of symbols of their own making, as emerging and developing within the larger non-human universe, one is unable to attack one of the most crucial aspects of



the problem of time' (Nowotny 1992, p. 427).

'Not only is the individual's conduct edged about and directed by his habitual relations to his fellows in the group, but these relations, being of an institutional character, vary as the institutional scene varies' (Veblen 1909, p. 629).

'The *cultural significance* of a phenomenon, e.g., the significance of exchange in a money economy, can be the fact that it exists on a mass scale as a fundamental component of modern culture. But the historical fact that it plays this role must be causally explained in order to render its cultural significance understandable' (Weber 1904, reprinted in reprinted in Martin and McIntyre [eds] 1994, p. 538 – emphasis in original).

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\*The draft test above was partially recovered from a computer severely damaged during the Great European War of the 2020s. It was likely first created in 2023 by a scholar in London, England, Earth, and has been mandatory for the children of Cassini since its adoption in 2263. A Social Research test assumed to accompany it was also recovered, which can be accessed by citizens through the Universal Archives Service.

**not for us / paper planes**

jason harding and 7202THS

paper planes take flight<sup>1</sup>  
japanese way of life<sup>2</sup>  
and violins keep playing as the titanic sinks below<sup>3</sup>

omotenashi<sup>2</sup>  
baybayin lakabáya<sup>1</sup>  
selamat<sup>4,5</sup>

i press my hands into the earth<sup>\*</sup>  
they plant seeds and seek<sup>6</sup>  
one shares a story about a touch on the cheek<sup>7</sup>

another owes a debt to the people of the Bohol<sup>8</sup>  
small losses<sup>9</sup>  
once their guest<sup>8</sup> forever their god<sup>10,11</sup> never \_ forget

thank you<sup>4</sup>

a gentleman<sup>12</sup>  
an even kinder woman<sup>7</sup>  
dream of a destiny<sup>12</sup> where they will lose themselves<sup>13</sup>

remove themselves<sup>14, 15, 16</sup>  
and for the first time ever truly smile  
kindness the mother of us all<sup>17</sup>

all ache for a sense of belonging<sup>18</sup>  
acceptance and safety<sup>19,20</sup> connection<sup>21,22</sup> and warmth<sup>18</sup>

peace<sup>21</sup>

for simplicity

i am supposed to be their teacher but they teach me  
stories of their cultures  
truth that lays wait in ancient texts<sup>23,24, 25, 26</sup>

one tells me that giving ensures a reproduction of the soul<sup>23</sup>  
an antediluvian immortality<sup>27</sup>  
spirits journey forward never back<sup>7,23</sup>


we chat about ideas without structure  
of the long now \_ of bridging and bonding and circles of concern  
open ended invitations to notice the human

we speak of grace  
the name \_ for she is real  
and as a concept and characteristic

a requirement  
and a reminder

i tell them they are free to fail but none believe me  
that our degrees don't matter<sup>28</sup> and our phd's don't matter  
just heart and an awareness  
of the vast cosmic sea \_ and the realisation that our jobs are no different

sibayaffe<sup>29</sup>



this is not about me  
this is *not for us*<sup>29</sup>  
this is about others

and making sure they are ok.

notes

1: kl / 2: re / 3: ayp / 4: rdn / 5: ndd / 6: sw / 7: rkd / 8: maav / 9: ca / 10: hrd / 11: kvb / 12: jg / 13: hvr / 14: en / 15: pg / 16: pd / 17: aj / 18: sk / 19: kv / 20: klnl / 21: ymn / 22: ysc / 23: bsu / 24: sd / 25: ah / 26: anon / 27: smj / 28: np / 29: mn / \*: jh

7202THS was an intensive six-week postgraduate course titled 'The Hospitality Experience.' The course quickly centered itself around the concepts of kindness, empathy, altruism and the idea that 'to serve' is not only an enlightened offer but a way to approach life itself. This course has over time become a chance to discover and communicate on our own terms what hospitality truly is, and has become a place, both physical and metaphorical, to summon what's best in us.

This poem (not for us) and the accompanying image (paper planes) are made of students attempts to communicate what hospitality truly is without resorting to any kind of generic textbook definition. Some drew things, some scribbled down words, some wrote in their own language – there were no rules.

The dreams take flight...

- PAPER PLANE -



Kindness and honesty  
less hospitality  
and welcoming  
sense of Bel...



... you can give  
special

Trust offers the way that  
you would like to be treated  
as'

A touch of Love on my cheek  
A hand of Love on my cheek  
A touch of hand on my cheek

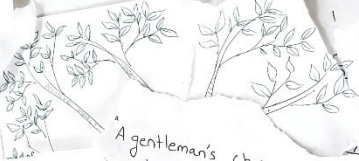
EXPRESSION OF TRUTH



Smile - Good  
I

... movement ...

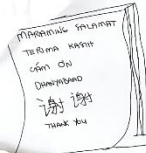
ॐ



"A Gentleman's Character is  
his destiny"

अतिथि देवो भवः

अतिथिः =  
Sanskrit (Ka)



अतिथि  
DEVO  
BHAVA



... OF BELONGING

The violins keep playing.

अतिथि देवो भवः

आतिथि देवरो भवेत्वा

makes them human Krishna the  
mother of them all



Hanh phuc

si byette

Sampeffe - hot for us

## Far Away

Brie Emler

Many of the Beings had strange markings on their skins. Perhaps it was a code or something indicating their place in society. I was in a part of the planet that spoke a language called English, but I wondered if these markings were a kind of visual dialect. The markings were different Being to Being, but there were similarities among them. The few guidebooks I brought on this trip have documented nothing of this Being custom. I feel exhausted by this world of endless symbols to which I never know the meaning.

I asked the female Being at the small food dispensary for a local delicacy called *donut* in my best English. She laughed and asked me about my foreign accent. I told her I'm from very far away.

“A galaxy far, far away?” she asked.

I became hot and my underarms released traces of water waste. I tried to speak but my mind had filled completely with my native language.

“You know, like in *Star Wars*?”

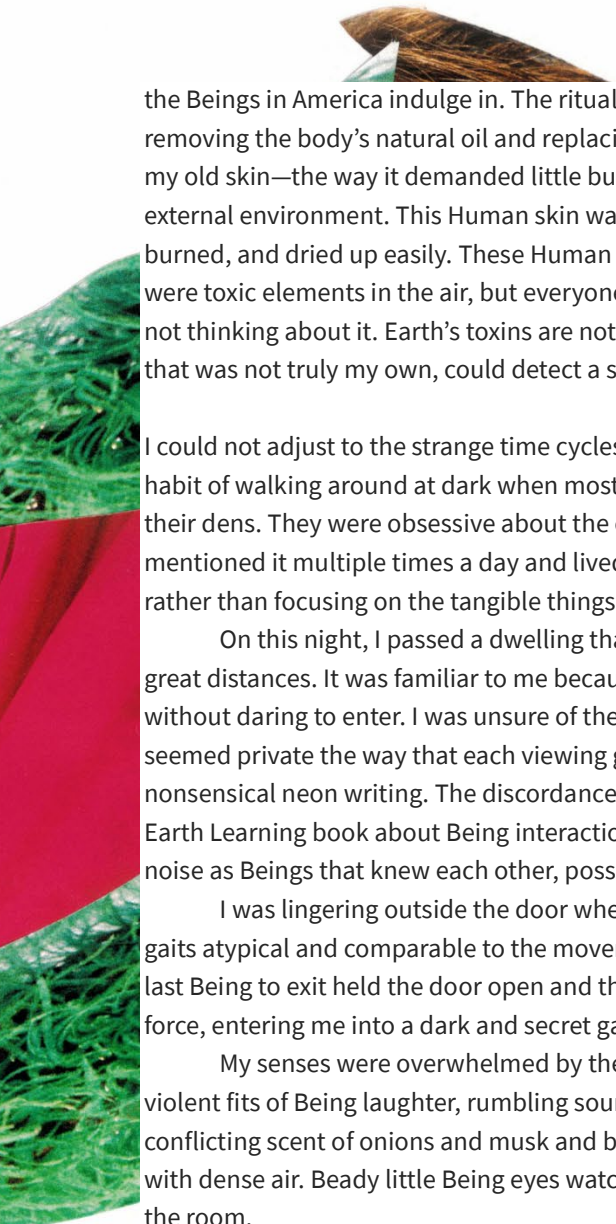
“*Star wars*?” English words started to populate my mind again, though I remained uncertain on the meaning of her words.

“Damn, you've never seen *Star Wars*?”

The female Being handed me the *donut*. I told her the customary English phrase for receiving goods or services and took a seat at a table.

The *donut* was sweet and a contradiction of sorts as it was crisp on the outside and soft on the inside. It reminded me of nothing I'd ever eaten before and for a small moment I felt like my time on this planet was not pointless after all.

Existing in a body you did not grow up existing in is a strange and disorienting thing. I had become accustomed to the daily cleaning rituals



the Beings in America indulge in. The ritual is pointless as you are removing the body's natural oil and replacing it with a synthetic. I missed my old skin—the way it demanded little but protected me from the harsh external environment. This Human skin was so fragile—it broke and burned, and dried up easily. These Human lungs were also fragile. There were toxic elements in the air, but everyone went on breathing it in all day not thinking about it. Earth's toxins are not visible, but even I, in a body that was not truly my own, could detect a slow poisoning.

I could not adjust to the strange time cycles of the planet. I had made a habit of walking around at dark when most of the Beings were asleep in their dens. They were obsessive about the construct of time. They mentioned it multiple times a day and lived their entire lives around it rather than focusing on the tangible things in front of them.

On this night, I passed a dwelling that emitted the only noise for great distances. It was familiar to me because each night I walked past it without daring to enter. I was unsure of the kind of establishment it was. It seemed private the way that each viewing glass was obscured by nonsensical neon writing. The discordance it produced reminded me of an Earth Learning book about Being interactions. I roughly interpreted the noise as Beings that knew each other, possibly a family gathering.

I was lingering outside the door when several Beings emerged, their gaits atypical and comparable to the movements of oceanic Creatures. The last Being to exit held the door open and thumped my back with some force, entering me into a dark and secret gathering of Beings.

My senses were overwhelmed by the clamor of glass clanking, violent fits of Being laughter, rumbling sounds that shook the floor, the conflicting scent of onions and musk and biological waste, all in a room with dense air. Beady little Being eyes watched me from various places in the room.

“Take a seat, big guy. You look dizzy,” said a woman sitting at a

counter.

I sat down on a tall, shiny seat with no backing.

“What would you like? Gabriel can make anything.”

The seat would not remain still. I tried resisting its tiny orbit, but it kept me from stillness.

“Gabe, pour this one a pint of your cheapest draft. *On me.*”

I made a smile at the Being.

The female Being took out a stick that she then burned and inhaled its smoke.

“What is that you're inhaling?”

“Just a cigarette. Want to bum one?”

“Why are you inhaling it?”

“It's a vice, I guess. You've never smoked?”

“No.”

“Do you want to try?” she extended the burning stick to me.

We have something like this on my home planet—a local grass that overgrows everywhere and is dried and smoked and does interesting things to your subconscious. I tried to remember the name of it, but my mind couldn't grasp even the suggestion of it.

“Alright.”

Perhaps it's this human body, but suddenly I could not remember the name of my home planet either. I watched as my human limbs brought the burning stick to my mouth, wondering how much of me was now permanently human. I wondered if this was the plan all along

The smoke burned a path through my mouth and lungs. The grass on Earth tasted less sweet, so all that was familiar was the burning. I broke out into a fit of coughing and consumed the amber liquid the Being behind the counter had placed in front of me.

“You're new here,” said the female Being. “Don't worry, you'll get comfortable in time.”

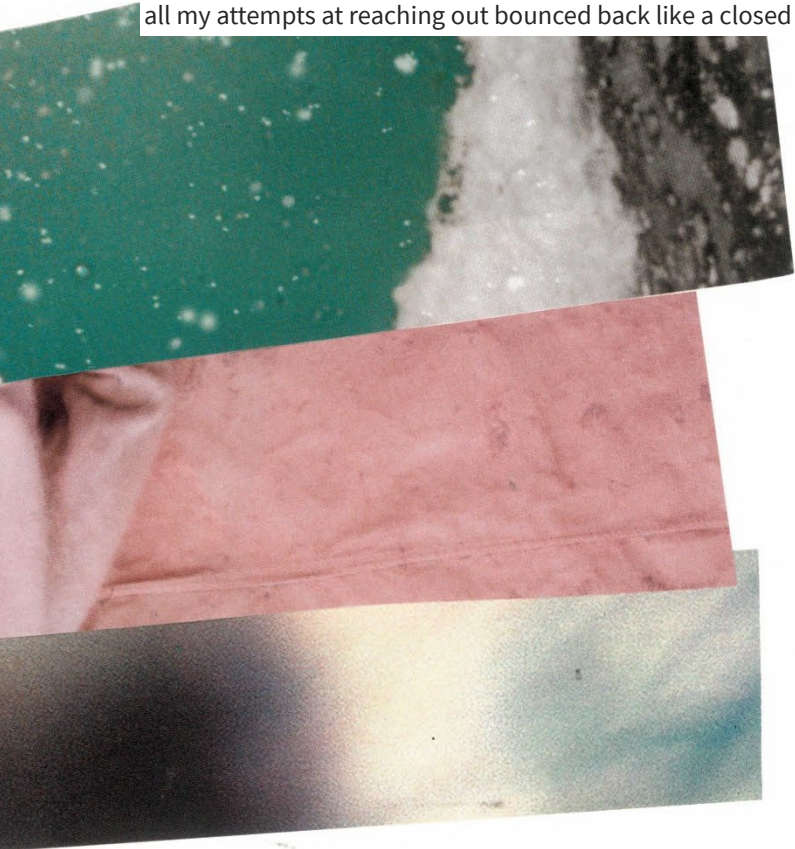
When I looked into her eyes, I felt something foreign, but distinctly





human.

The atmosphere was blocking all the signals I sent home. The technology had been tested by celebrated scientists in Extraterrestrial Technology, yet all my attempts at reaching out bounced back like a closed circuit.



## Like Me

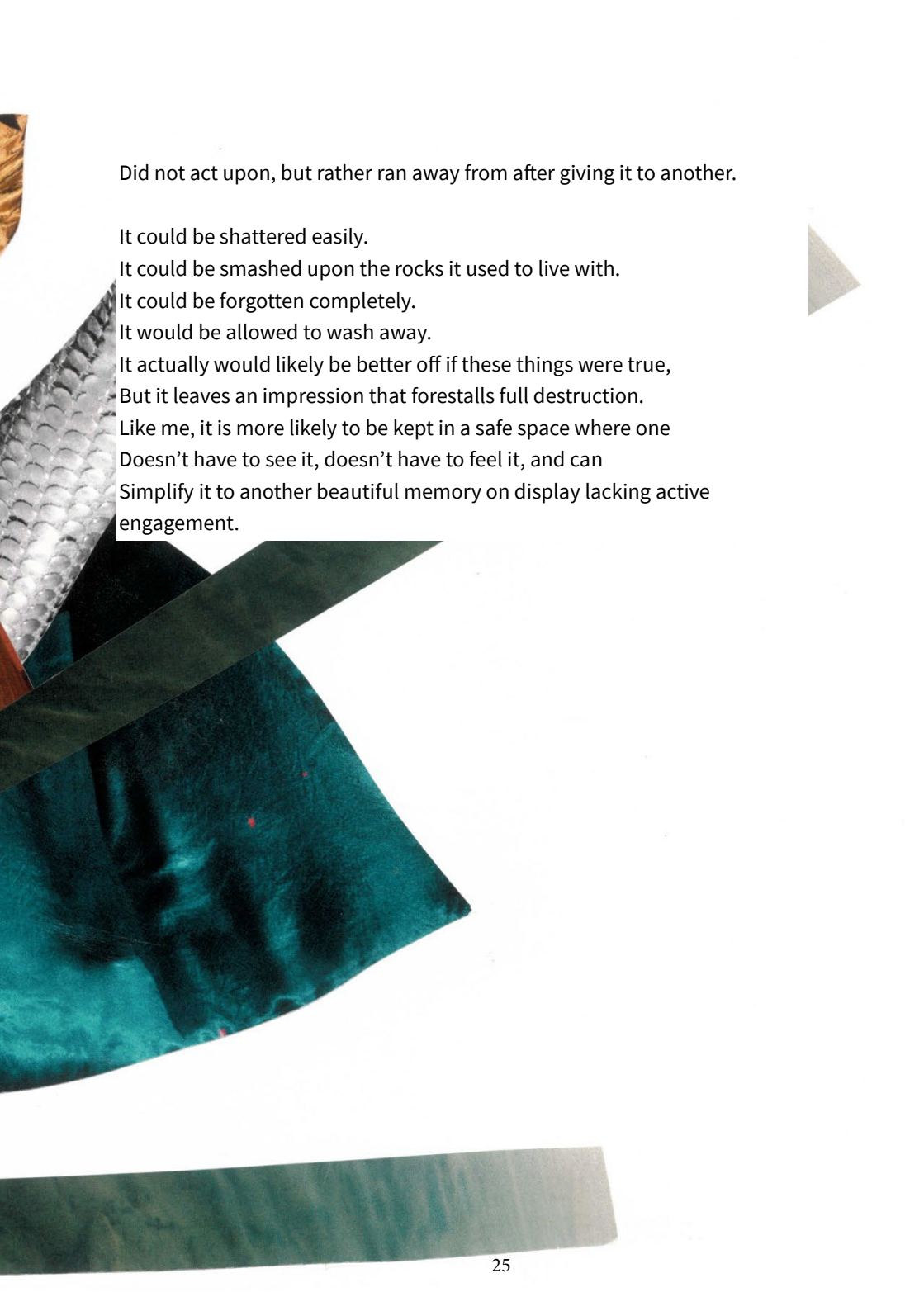
J.E. Sumerau

It doesn't fit in a dustbin.  
It doesn't fit in a decorative box.  
It doesn't fit in a wastebasket.  
It doesn't fit in a vacuum bag.  
It actually does fit in all of these things,  
But it doesn't really seem to belong there.  
Like me, it fits in tiny spots where no one  
Looks, nothing ever lasts, and nothing stays  
Around overly long even when it says it will.

It doesn't seem to mind.  
It rarely complains at all.  
It rarely stands strong in its place.  
It doesn't leave its space.  
It actually does all of these things,  
But no one seems to notice or hear.  
Like me, it feels lost even in its home, knows  
It's only for display and sentimental pasts gone by  
Long remembered but longer forgotten in practice.

It is a simple thing.  
It came from a simple calm place.  
It was plucked from its home for a purpose it did not know.  
It was taken away to live indoors.  
It actually is more than any of these things would suggest,  
But once captured from nature its splendor became an afterthought.  
Like me, it was placed into the hands of someone as a promise  
That was not kept, granted meaning that its initial gatherer





Did not act upon, but rather ran away from after giving it to another.

It could be shattered easily.

It could be smashed upon the rocks it used to live with.

It could be forgotten completely.

It would be allowed to wash away.

It actually would likely be better off if these things were true,

But it leaves an impression that forestalls full destruction.

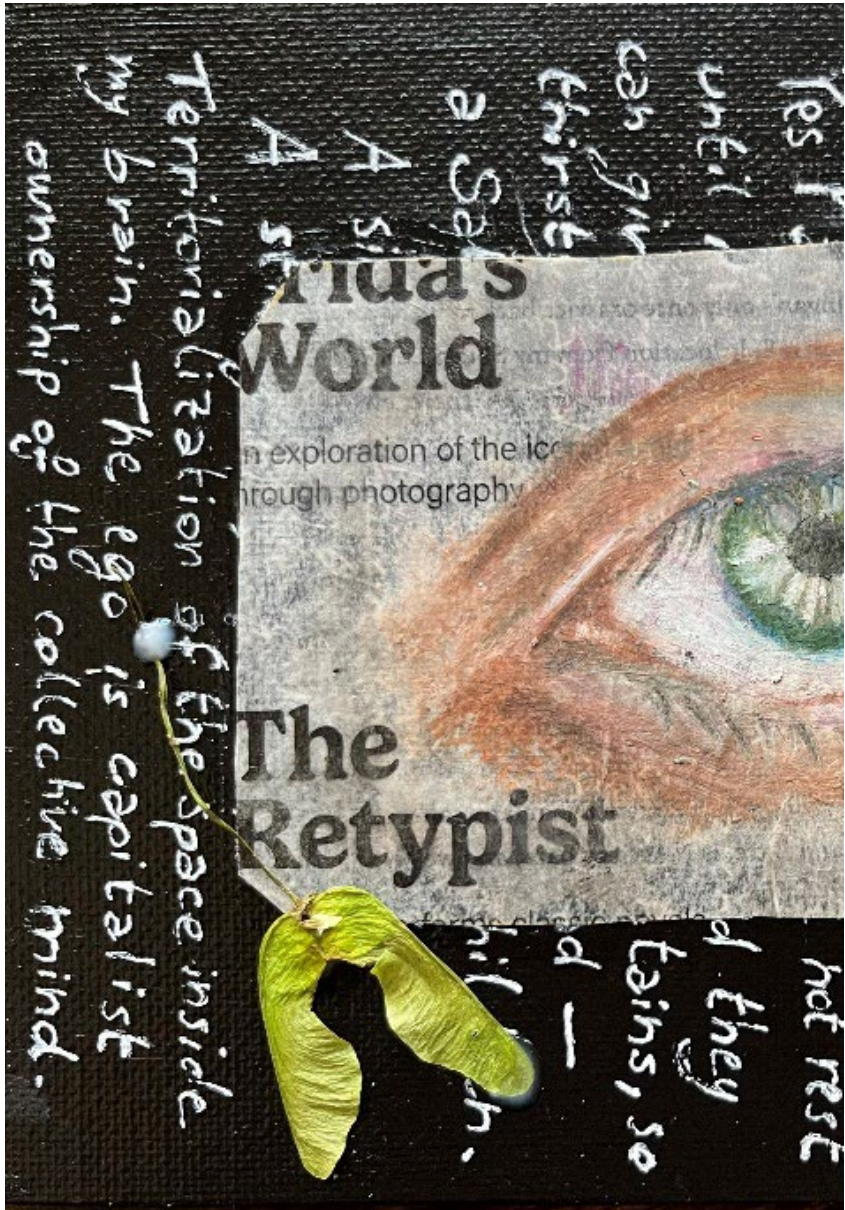
Like me, it is more likely to be kept in a safe space where one

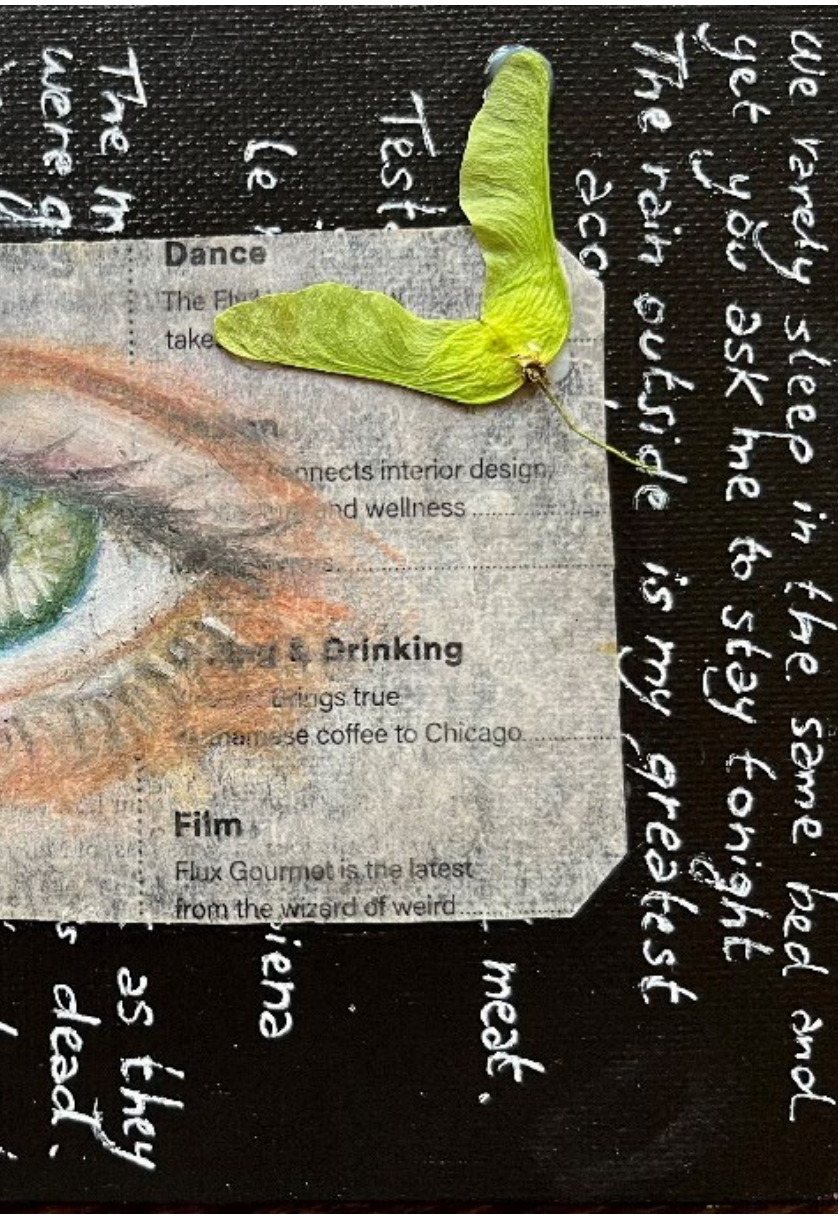
Doesn't have to see it, doesn't have to feel it, and can

Simplify it to another beautiful memory on display lacking active engagement.

# The Territorialization of Desire

Alice Casalini








## Post Cyclone Gabrielle

Edgar Burns

Torrential rain when heaven opened; flooded catchments.  
Dammed rivers bursting like fire hoses; submerged houses.  
Everywhere broken bridges; rail lines snapped like plastic.  
Forests' worth of slash heaped all along the beaches.

One night, one storm, one metre of rain, one disaster.  
Animals washed away; parents, children stranded on roofs.  
Scout shipping container washed 15k, rests against a shelterbelt.  
A failed power substation had been built at river-level because...?

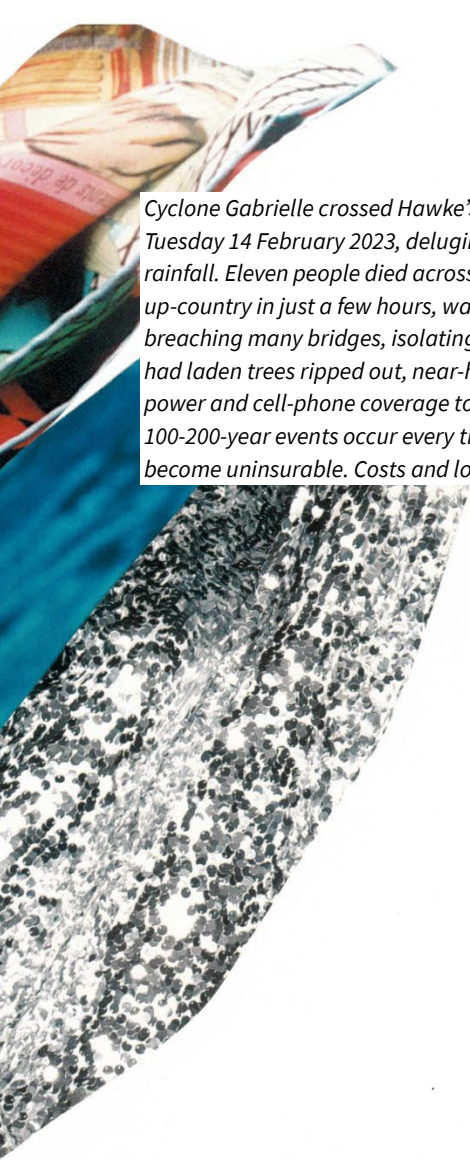


Giving away thawing food; cook outdoors; meals with neighbours, nice.  
No electricity. No phone. Do I exist; does my family? Do they know?  
Cupressus tree toppled against the house; chainsaws fly tomorrow.  
Helping neighbours dig out silt; woodworking tools all rusted.

Orchards uprooted, vineyards gone; no sell or buying this vintage.  
Cable hydras snaking out from generators; homeless huddled guests.  
Hillsides scarred with massive slips; 'Don't use the water'.  
Wanted: blankets, pumpkins, food, clothing, water, shovels, more food.

Is there a small **red** thread of connection to climate change?  
A few writers ask, is Gabrielle linked to global warming. Science—Yes:  
More severe, more often, more intense, more disastrous, more cost.  
Local councils focus practically—repair, restore, rebuild, replace.

Climate warming leads to extreme weather events; forget denial.  
Fossil fuel corporations, you are Faust, taking us to perdition.  
Governments, why be so servile: what about the common good?  
Mmmm. More severe, more often, more intense, more unstoppable.



*Cyclone Gabrielle crossed Hawke's Bay on New Zealand's east coast overnight, Tuesday 14 February 2023, deluging an already waterlogged landscape from record rainfall. Eleven people died across New Zealand. Three-quarters of a metre of rain fell up-country in just a few hours, washing down forest slash, damming and then breaching many bridges, isolating farming and Māori communities. Apple orchards had laden trees ripped out, near-harvest vineyards stripped and gone. Emergency power and cell-phone coverage took days to be restored. Industry insiders say if such 100-200-year events occur every thirty years, because of climate change, homes will become uninsurable. Costs and lost revenue estimated in billions.*

## Not In-unHinged: Four Craziest at the efiL-fo-dnE

Zhaoxi Zheng

*\*\*\*Disclaimer: This work contributes almost nothing to existing scientific and rational knowledge. Readers have been advised.\*\*\**

### 1. 'Party Girls, Don't Get Hurt, Can't Feel Anything, When Will I Learn?'

Chim, Saal, and Shelly are trying to get to Mx. D's party. They are almost late. But no one was sure where exactly the party is. They've decided to call.

No one answered. Because there is no mobile phone in this story. Aren't you sick of them<sup>1</sup>?

They all started rushing. It is always like this with Mx. D. They are that sort of celebrity who lives randomly around worlds<sup>2</sup> and keeps inviting people over. On the other hand, Mx D. is extremely punctual and they never waits for anyone. If one is late for Mx. D, there is absolutely no chance that they will ever see Mx. D again. Mx D. has what we call of a 'celebrity complex'. If you've missed Mx. D, you missed Mx. D. Going back in time might help a bit in this situation.

No one is too sure about the direction at this point (does it matter, anyways?). Chim is leading, Shelly is following, and Saal is struggling. Saal wishes he could go faster, but he doesn't want to. Saal was never a big fan of Mx. D. As the weather becomes increasingly hot, Saal speeds up and imagines that he is in the ocean: bathing, swimming, diving. A happy smile floats on his sweaty face.

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<sup>1</sup> To start with, they can be **very** bright.

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, we are not even sure which world Mx. D lives in.



It is getting really hot, just like when you pretend to work in a stressful workplace after a night sleeping in the pressure cooker, with a bottle of chilli sauce in the eyes. Nothing is wonderful about this situation, except that they all know, deep down, that they are getting closer to Mx. D's gathering. Mx. D's party sites are notorious for being creatively unaccommodating (that's the probably the nicest description one can find. Mx D. once asked guests to eat wood furniture directly out of a swamp). If something feels weird, it must be right. The ground started shaking, and that's when the three of them started to exchange a knowing look: this is it. This is the moment.




A volcano devoured them from the above. No one saw it coming: Mx. D did it again. It really is a state-of-the-art party.

## 2. 'So choose your last words, this is the last time.'

Chim is using the bathroom, and Shelly had to leave early. It was just Saal and Mx D. at the table, at this point.

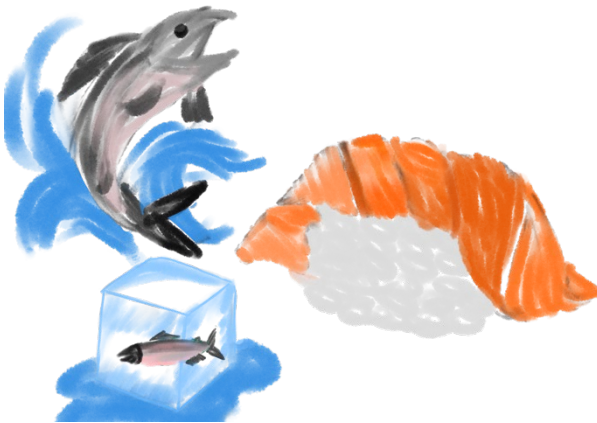
'You know', says Mx D.: 'It's interesting that something is only born so it can die.' Meanwhile, he pours a glass of white wine, in a green top hat, a bright red jacket, and a pair of yellow pants.

Saal starts to shiver. This is in no ways a nice sentence. It sounds somewhat threatening, although Mx. D is not aiming for anyone when speaking, Saal knows that they are speaking to him, specifically.

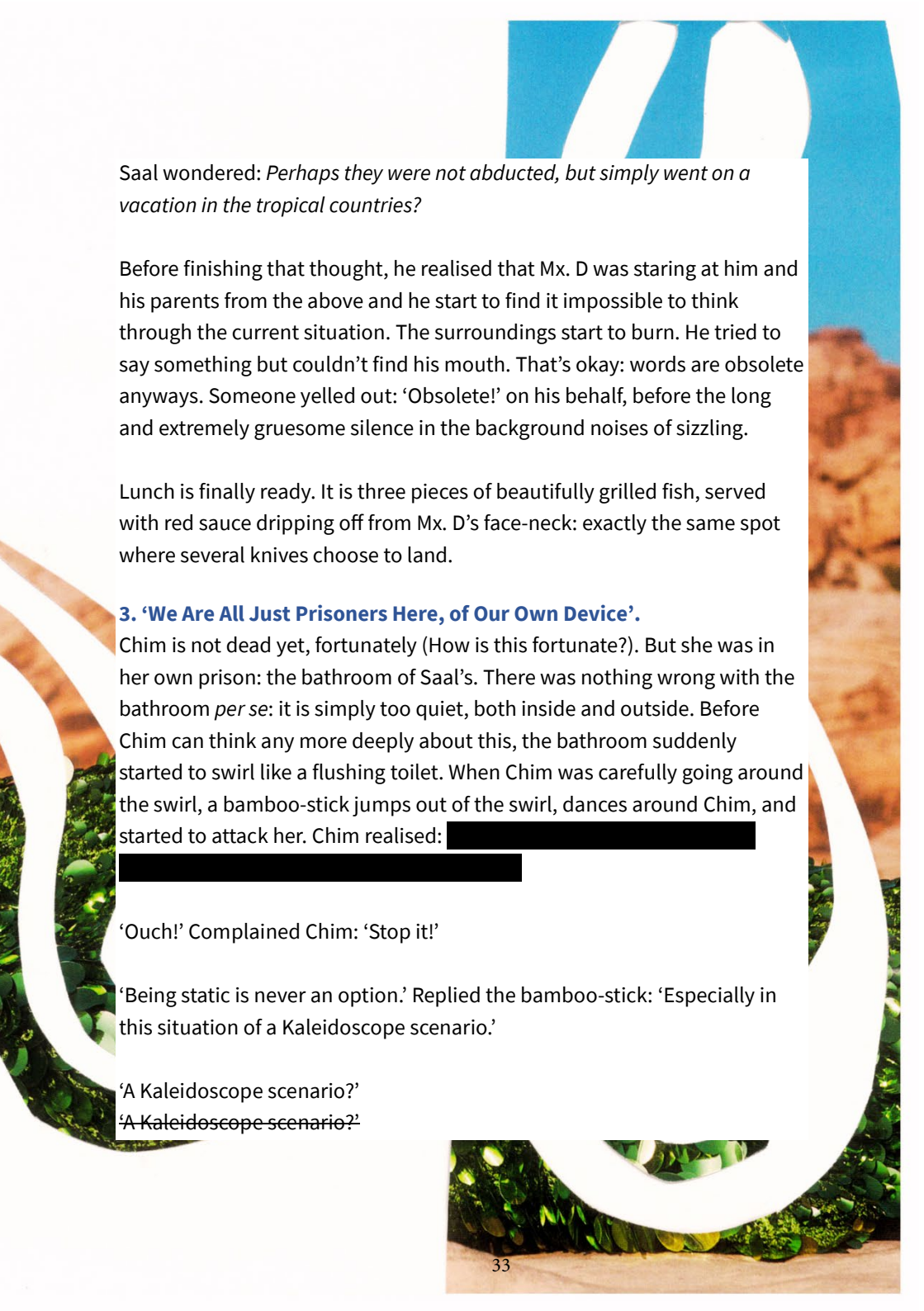


Something is wrong, he can sense. (But doesn't it mean that things are going just right, because they/we are at Mx. D's?). He suddenly remembered that today is his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Birthday is always a difficult day for Saal, because he lost his parents at a very young age. They used to live happily together in a seaside community. His parents, unfortunately, became victims in a mass abduction case and were never found. Rumour has it, that it is because the abductors have excellent taste in parents. They were drawn to his parents, like an ice to the butterfly (see what I did here?).

Saal has a great taste too: he is a master connoisseur of wine. It's a gift: wine calms him down. He can instantly tell which wine is which and pair them up with the most exquisite dishes. To distract himself from that anxiety-inducing train of thoughts, he took a sip of the wine Mx. D handed him. The wine was sharp, violent, and as intense as a hostile hug between an Alaskan winter and a can of liquid nitrogen carrying a knife. Unlike most wines that carry a combination of different flavours and notes, this wine has a flavour of purity. Like ice, to the most extreme extent where it ceases to be flavourful.



The sharp taste transformed Saal into a different tranquil state. On a spotless white marble floor and smooth, round edges, Saal saw his parents again. *They look very tanned, even a little bit sunburnt,*



Saal wondered: *Perhaps they were not abducted, but simply went on a vacation in the tropical countries?*

Before finishing that thought, he realised that Mx. D was staring at him and his parents from the above and he start to find it impossible to think through the current situation. The surroundings start to burn. He tried to say something but couldn't find his mouth. That's okay: words are obsolete anyways. Someone yelled out: 'Obsolete!' on his behalf, before the long and extremely gruesome silence in the background noises of sizzling.

Lunch is finally ready. It is three pieces of beautifully grilled fish, served with red sauce dripping off from Mx. D's face-neck: exactly the same spot where several knives choose to land.

### **3. 'We Are All Just Prisoners Here, of Our Own Device'.**

Chim is not dead yet, fortunately (How is this fortunate?). But she was in her own prison: the bathroom of Saal's. There was nothing wrong with the bathroom *per se*: it is simply too quiet, both inside and outside. Before Chim can think any more deeply about this, the bathroom suddenly started to swirl like a flushing toilet. When Chim was carefully going around the swirl, a bamboo-stick jumps out of the swirl, dances around Chim, and started to attack her. Chim realised: [REDACTED]

'Ouch!' Complained Chim: 'Stop it!'

'Being static is never an option.' Replied the bamboo-stick: 'Especially in this situation of a Kaleidoscope scenario.'

'A Kaleidoscope scenario?'

'A Kaleidoscope scenario?'

---

'It is the scenario where you are a kaleidoscope.' Replied the bamboo-stick. Equipped with more knowledge about the current<sup>3</sup> situation, Chim decides to become part of this. Losing sight of her urgent need to get out of the bathroom as soon as possible, she seizes the gap between two sets of attacks operated by the bamboo-stick and climbed onto it, taking the bamboo-stick by surprise! It did not take the bamboo-stick long before it retaliates: it grabs and breaks itself in half, resembling as a cross.

(Where did that come from? Chim is not religious, neither is the bamboo-stick. Are you?)

Chim – now should be called Chim-bamboo-stick – starts shrinking, like a balloon. Spies swim above the balloons, on top of a graveyard in



the centre of a rooftop. The damn racoons! Fish was washed in the river, but they were dead in a tank and buried long before then. The spider does not care about anything, and that's why books threw cans and cans and cans of pesticides to it. Now it is finally half dead and half alive: not as a Zombie, but a Schrodinger's catty spider! Not only one, but two. But again, two is merely just one. Rocks start to speak, with spaceships coming out of

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<sup>3</sup> Pronounced /kə,laidə'skɒpɪk/: 'kuh-lai-duh-sko-puhk'

its hand (because duh, rocks have no mouths). Angels start to hunt for spiders (not the aforementioned Schrodinger's spiders, but normal ones): because wireless headphones have run out of petrol. Trees, trees. Trees!!! Trees are no longer to be climbed; they are climbers of themselves.

This was the exact moment when Chim **is** the bathroom. They are all the bathrooms.

#### 4. Is This the Real Life, Is This Just Fantasy?

No one (who?) was there (where?) anymore. No one-who was there-where(?) in the first place.

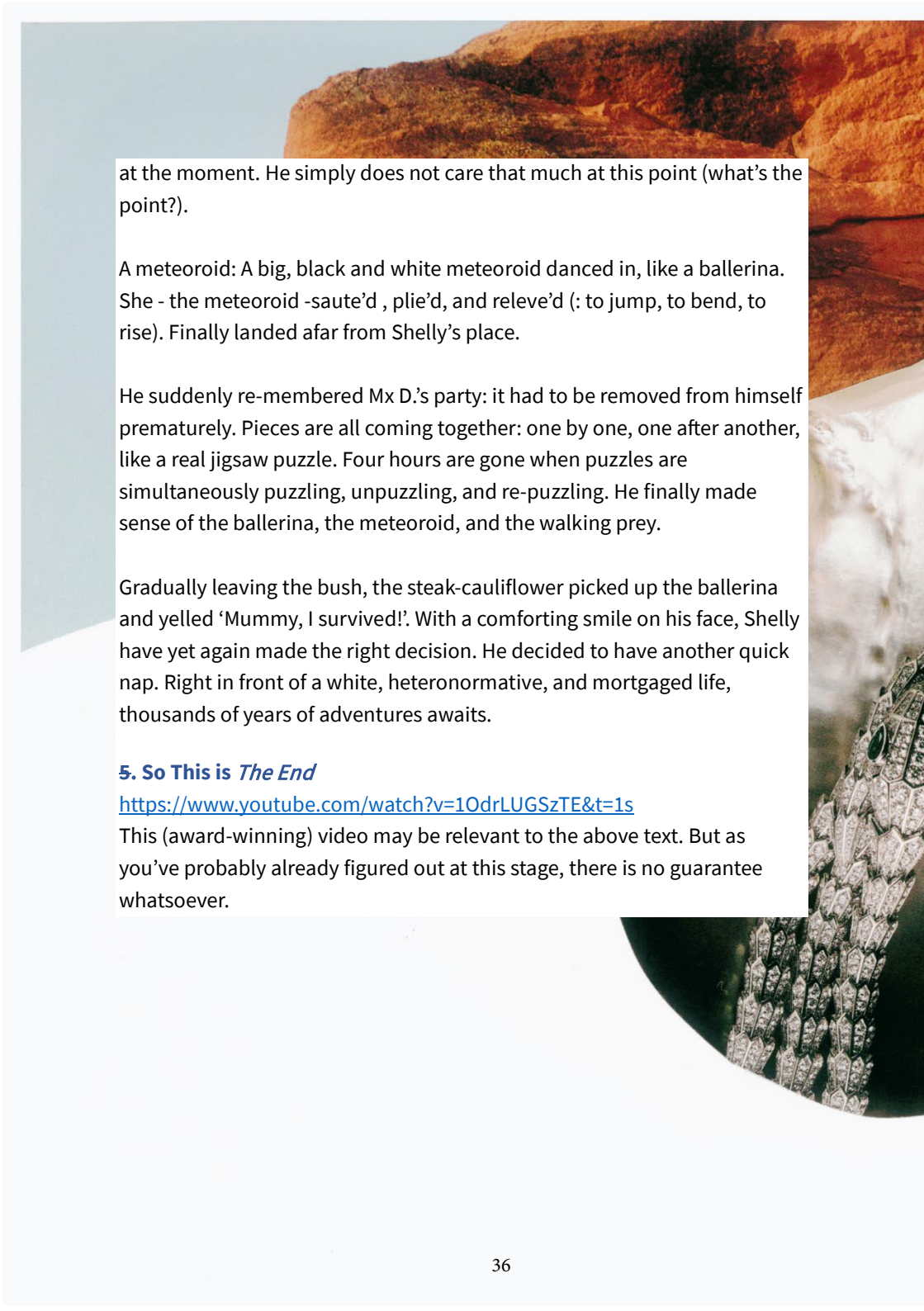
That's what Shelly thought: at least what we thought Shelly's thought. We are not too sure, but we speculate this might be true.

He could have attacked, by just minding his own business. Not the capitalistic type business, though, the natural type of business. He was supposed to be the one who have been kicked out of the Eden<sup>4</sup>. And no, Eden is not that fancy restaurant in your neighbourhood.

The bush feels comfortable. It's dark and cool, with plenty of food around. A giant piece of prey just emerged and caused some bush to collapse. Humans, imagine a giant piece of steak strolling towards you (Vegetarians, please image a huge cauliflower, respectively).

A delicious piece of monstrosity. But do you know the feeling when you march into a supermarket, whilst starving? Not for Shelly, Shelly is very full

<sup>4</sup> Again, this came out of nowhere since we've established in section 3 that no one, and nothing is religious (except for Saal, perhaps?)



at the moment. He simply does not care that much at this point (what's the point?).

A meteoroid: A big, black and white meteoroid danced in, like a ballerina. She - the meteoroid -saute'd , plie'd, and releve'd (: to jump, to bend, to rise). Finally landed afar from Shelly's place.

He suddenly re-membered Mx D.'s party: it had to be removed from himself prematurely. Pieces are all coming together: one by one, one after another, like a real jigsaw puzzle. Four hours are gone when puzzles are simultaneously puzzling, unpuzzling, and re-puzzling. He finally made sense of the ballerina, the meteoroid, and the walking prey.

Gradually leaving the bush, the steak-cauliflower picked up the ballerina and yelled 'Mummy, I survived!'. With a comforting smile on his face, Shelly have yet again made the right decision. He decided to have another quick nap. Right in front of a white, heteronormative, and mortgaged life, thousands of years of adventures awaits.

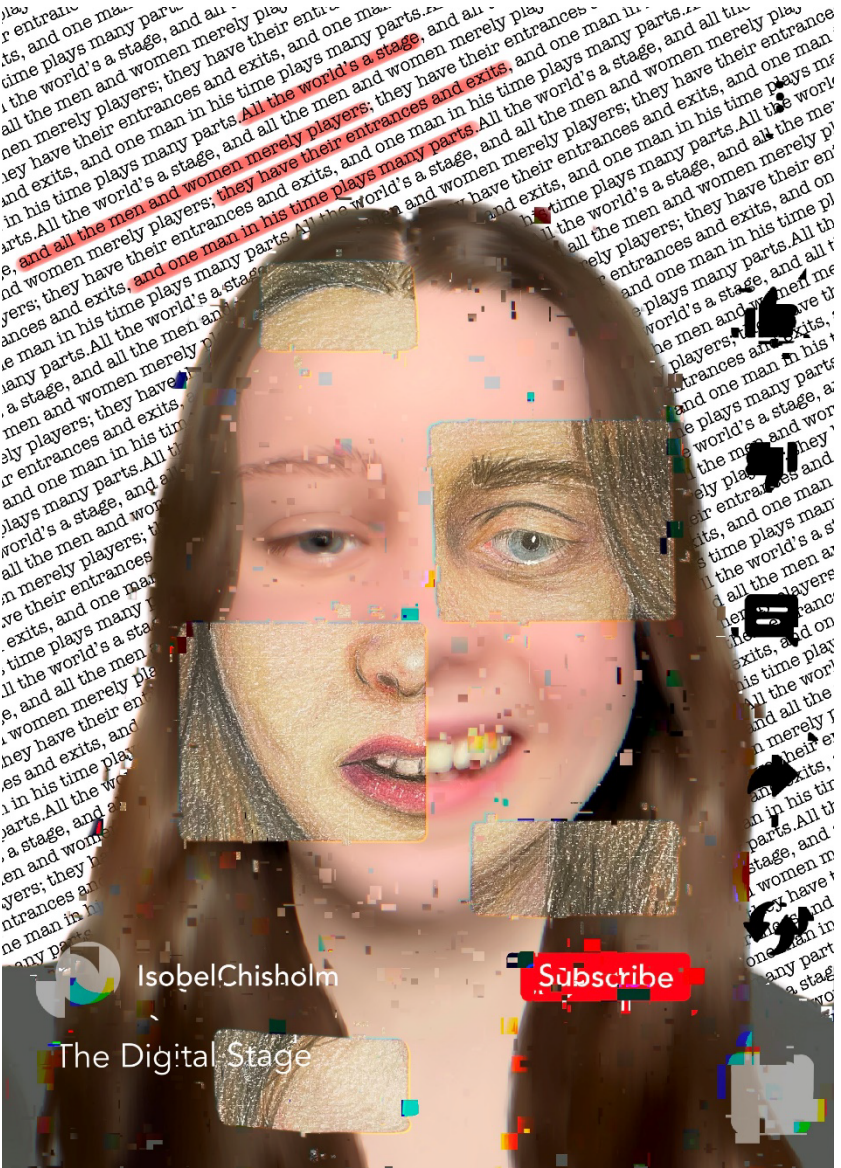
### **5. So This is *The End***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OdrLUGSzTE&t=1s>

This (award-winning) video may be relevant to the above text. But as you've probably already figured out at this stage, there is no guarantee whatsoever.

# The Digital Stage

Isobel Chisholm



IsobelChisholm

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The Digital Stage

## The Feeling of Belief

Becky Neher

Not-Sarah slice-smashed another tomato with the dull knife. She plopped the pulp into the pot, scraping juice from the cutting board with the blade's edge, then started on the onions.

Always doing things in the wrong order.

At the dining table I painstakingly pieced together the shredded documents. My fingers were too fat for the job, and were becoming harder to coordinate with age and arthritis. But the work was important. I tried telling her: This was about political corruption and moral rot. Agendas shoved down our throats. Society falling apart. Fixing what was broken. Revival.

“Ugh. You hear that, Jim? Wasps in the vent pipe again,” said Not-Sarah as buzzing sounds thrummed above the stove, percolating into the quiet, tomato-ey air.

*Not wasps, I thought. Drones.*

*Isn't it obvious?*

I eyed her suspiciously, wondering at the things she missed. “You know they can eavesdrop and record with all kinds of things now,” I said. “Regular-looking stuff: hummingbirds, bumblebees, mosquitos...”

She stirred the faintly burnt-smelling sauce with a long wooden spoon.

“Mosquitos're how they get the nanobots in,” I added educationally. Not-Sarah threw a glance over her shoulder.

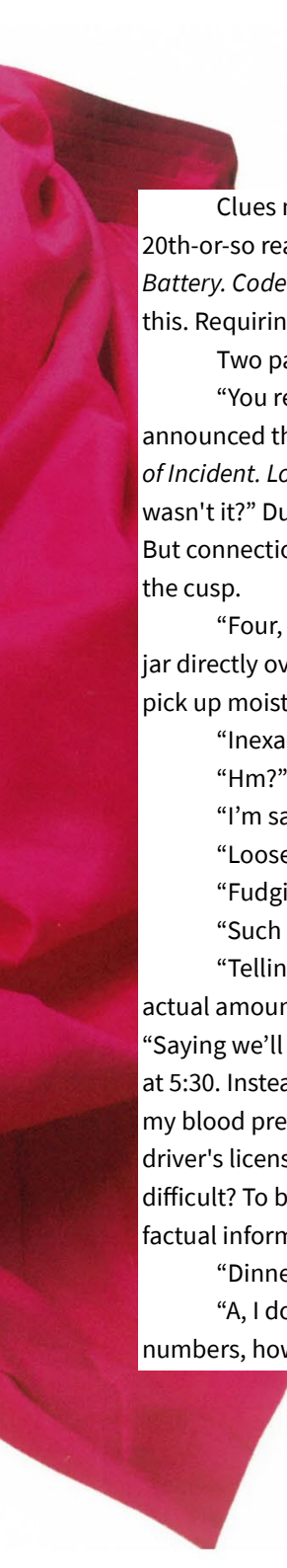
Some people just didn't get it.

My old Sarah--the *real* Sarah--would have.

This one's been too worn down over too many years. Media. Fake news. Propaganda.

I try not to blame her.





Clues materialized in front of me as I taped another strand to the 20th-or-so reassembled page. *Supplementary case report. Peace violation. Battery. Code 0440.* The table was strewn with scraps of knowledge like this. Requiring only a willing citizen. A patriot.

Two paper-shred-stuffed garbage bags slouched at my feet.

“You remember what time it was that tornado watch was announced the other day?” I asked, reading through more evidence. *Date of Incident. Location: Apartment. Victims. Offenders. In custody.* “4:40, wasn’t it?” Dunno why I bothered--she was after all an unreliable source. But connections were forming in my brain, and I was getting excited. On the cusp.

“Four, five... somewhere around there, sure.” She sprinkled a spice jar directly over the pot, not using a measuring spoon. So the jar would pick up moisture, speeding up spoilage.

“Inexact as usual,” I sighed.

“Hm?” she said in typical half-paying-attention fashion.

“I’m saying you have a history of being loose with numbers,” I said.

“Loose with numbers?”

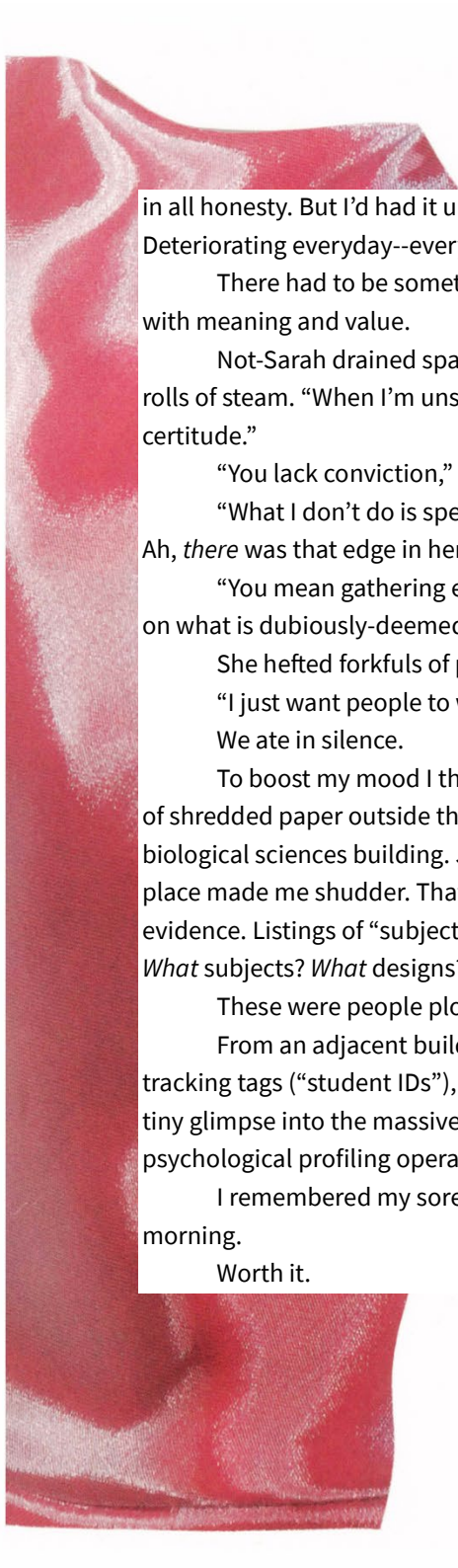
“Fudging times, amounts, quantities.”

“Such as...?” Her placid diplomacy was infuriating.

“Telling me you need ‘some’ bananas at the store, not giving the actual amount,” I said as cached interactions flooded my synapses. “Saying we’ll leave the Stephensons’ at 5:00, then exiting--with prodding--at 5:30. Instead of a teaspoon of salt, adding a teaspoon *more or less*. With my blood pressure!” I felt hot; my temples throbbed. “Your weight on your driver’s license,” I added for solid effect. “Do you see how this would be difficult? To be in a relationship with someone whose statements of basic factual information are suspect?”

“Dinner’ll be ready in five,” she said.

“A, I don’t know what that means. B, if that’s how you are with numbers, how are you with nonquantitative information?” I said. Roared,



in all honesty. But I'd had it up to here with this false, fraudulent world. Deteriorating everyday--every *second*--with all of their hypocrisies and lies.

There had to be something real, something to believe in. Something with meaning and value.

Not-Sarah drained spaghetti into the sink, leaning back from thick rolls of steam. "When I'm unsure of something, Hon, I don't express certitude."

"You lack conviction," I summarized.

"What I don't do is spend my time dumpster diving in back alleys." Ah, *there* was that edge in her voice.

"You mean gathering evidence from high-value receptacles stowed on what is dubiously-deemed 'county property'?" Really calm now.

She hefted forkfuls of pasta onto plates, ladled out sauce.

"I just want people to wake up," I said.

We ate in silence.

To boost my mood I thought back to last week's mother lode. A bin of shredded paper outside the indoctrination center's ("University's") biological sciences building. Just recalling the godless atmosphere of the place made me shudder. That night: no sleep, only puzzling together evidence. Listings of "subjects" and "results" and "experimental designs." *What* subjects? *What* designs?


These were people plotting right under our noses.

From an adjacent building's bin: reams divulging government tracking tags ("student IDs"), academic progress, majors, minors, GPAs. A tiny glimpse into the massive human-cataloging schemes and psychological profiling operations of the underground cabal.

I remembered my sore glutes, my stiff back, my brain mush by morning.

Worth it.





Stabbing at pasta, I felt a rush of satisfaction. Hard work was paying off. Revelations were emerging. I stood on the verge of something momentous, something that assured me justice was imminent.

A woodpecker hammered suddenly at the vent pipe, ripping through the kitchen like gunfire.

“Jesus,” said Not-Sarah, widening her eyes at her plate as she twisted up a spool of noodles.

*Not the kind of jolt you--lots of people--really need,* I thought gloomily.

But brightened as I texted Spencer pictures of my progress, asking if he wanted to meet up after dinner, discuss theories, hatch plans. He did the online digging, I did the offline. We had a real movement growing, a genuine community: event coordinators, political canvassers, sign makers, poll watchers, council meeting and PTA attendees--and that was just in person. Online, across the state, the country, we had a brewing revolution, a whole network of decent, honest citizens, trustworthy candidates, political leaders and businesspeople and other high-ups supporting our cause, straight-shooters, upstanding workers, God-fearing folk. We'd take back our country, or die trying. We knew what was real. We could see the truth.

We could change the world.

*This story took inspiration from “The town crier,” by Stephanie McCrummen.*

## Night night, don't forget how to love me

Justine Langella

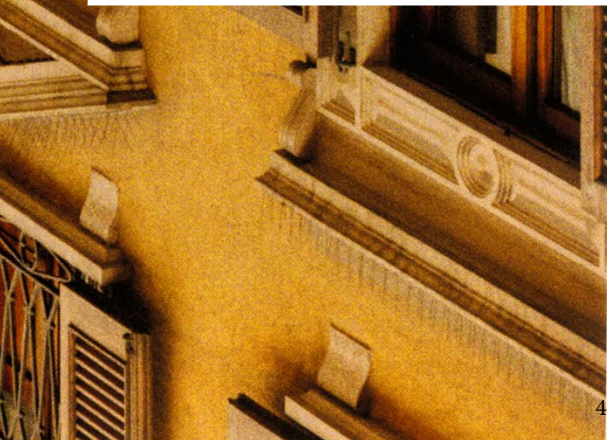
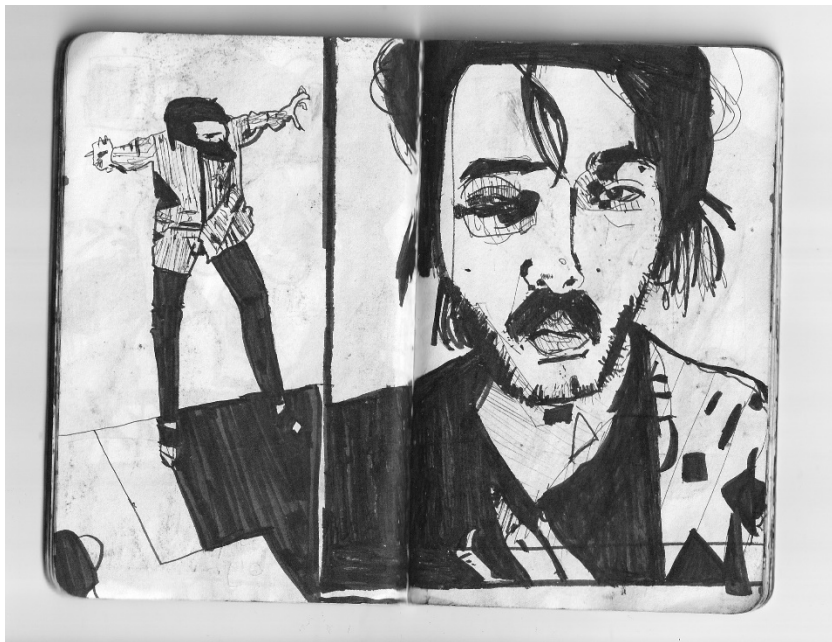
Mon amour,

I have been missing your laughs. Your teeth, the sound of your throat, the music of it. It's still resonating in my head. Like a warm memory. I am scared of the idea that I might forget about that giggling. I spent the whole year complaining about what friendships are becoming while we are getting older. But there we were, together under the sheets, feet to feet, shoulders touching shoulders, trying to embrace a cozy posture for our bodies. Not to close but yet warming each other, sharing intimacy. We were sisters, lovers, friends... It's harsh to have no fear, being able to get in contact, skin to skin, with someone else. To be comfy. To pass through the living room half naked - but socks on, it was chilly days. We were an old couple. We were mother and daughter. We shared this space. The one you've got with your teenager friends. When we hold company to each other and share secrets really late at night. I almost forgot about this ability to be a caring and loving human being. It was exhausting to be loved that much. I am falling asleep now, alone and far from you, but I'll try to keep the idea of your shadow embracing me into the dark. Call me if ever you feel sad I'll have your back.

Love,  
Justine

## Wet Sleeves

Benny Feldmann













## Author Bios


**Alice Casalini** is an art historian and visual artist. Born in the industrial plains of northern Italy, she relocated to Chicago in 2017, where she is pursuing a Ph.D. in Art History at the University of Chicago. Her academic work examines the religiosity of constructed spaces in the early Buddhist art and architecture of South Asia. She is also interested in Buddhist meditation at the nexus of materiality and spirituality. As an artist, she explores familial relationships through issues of gender identity and bodily discomfort. Constantly aware of her body and the work that goes into its upkeep, she is particularly interested in seeking ways in which artistic labor replicates patterns of love and un-love unto the body of the artworks themselves.

**Becky Neher** has a PhD in Philosophy. She lives with her spouse and their cat in Georgia, USA. She is keen to use her writing to explore conspiratorial and supernatural thinking.

Raised in LA, **Benny Feldman** honed his craft by doing graffiti as a teen. His interest in ancient Chinese and Korean ink wash landscape paintings led him to blend old and new styles in his work. While working in the reality TV industry by day, he creates art obsessively by night.

**Brie Emler** is a fiction writer, graphic designer, illustrator, and musician based in Southern California. She is currently working on her debut novel. Her art is inspired by the subject of mental illness, loneliness, and the human capacity for healing.

**Edgar Burns** is located in the School of Social Sciences, Sociology and Social Policy Program, University of Waikato. He is Hawke's Bay regional Council Chair of Integrated Catchments. He publishes on environmental,



indigenous, professional, and higher education themes. He has published numerous refereed articles. His book *Theorizing Professions: A Sociological Introduction* was published with Palgrave Macmillan. He supervises and writes with PhD students from a range of countries.

**Gillian Stokes** is a African mixed-heritage academic, inclusion activist and creative writer. She is based at University College London, where she conducts research on various sociological and public health issues. She writes creatively to further explore issues of Black identity, gender, belonging, and the legacies of inter-racial and forced adoption.

**Ian C Smith** writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in *Antipodes*, *Authora Australis*, *belonging*, *cordite*, *Griffith Review*, *Journal of Working Class Studies*, *Meniscus*, & *So Fi Zine*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra Press.

**Isobel Chisholm** is a PhD student at the University of Portsmouth, UK. Her thesis looks into the experiences of academic rejection and how that plays out in a digital world.

**jason harding** is an academic, artist and graphic designer based in australia. he teaches university courses on technology, innovation and human experience. and his work has become a mix of poetic and arts-based philosophical inquiry. some of which you can find at [www.jasonharding.com](http://www.jasonharding.com)

**J.E. Sumerau (they/them)** is an associate professor and the director of applied sociology at the University of Tampa. They are the author of 7 novels, 5 research monographs, and numerous articles, chapters, and



short stories exploring sexualities, gender, health, religion, and violence in society. For more information, visit [www.jsumerau.com](http://www.jsumerau.com).

**John-Paul Smiley** is a writer and independent scholar. He has a PhD in Civil and Building Engineering (Loughborough, UK), an MSc Social Research (Leicester, UK), and a BA Politics and Sociology (York, UK). His interests include futurism and science fiction, as well as politics and sociology.

Through her writings, **Justine Langella** crosses questionings that are linked to feelings of nostalgia and solitude, to our (female) bodies and to landscapes that collapse with us.

**Zhaoxi Zheng** is a sociology PhD candidate and an award-winning teacher at School of Social Science, the University of Queensland. Adopting critical post-human perspectives, Zhaoxi researches the sociologies of early childhood, specifically its entanglement with death and dying. Using art-based, material-oriented, and creative post-qualitative methodologies, Zhaoxi's work centres around young children's everyday encounters with death and dying and methodological innovations in childhood studies through the critical lens of new materialism: written and published in poetic, playful, and non-traditional academic styles.

## Horoscopes

**Aries**—Consider the intricacies of power and influence; avoid envy.

**Taurus**—Your will builds a bedrock; thrive.

**Gemini**—Embrace your dual nature; bridge gaps and illuminate.

**Cancer**—Create a haven; compassion is currency.

**Leo**—Wield your charisma; transcend mere spectacle.

**Virgo**—Eye intricate narratives; reveal the profound.

**Libra**—With grace, facilitate; harmonise to progress.

**Scorpio**—Delve into dynamics; captivate, enigma.

**Sagittarius**—Embark on an odyssey; traverse and immerse.

**Capricorn**—Relentless pursuit propels you; structure your navigation.

**Aquarius**—Embrace your inclinations; disrupt the status quo.

**Pisces**—Be guided by empathy; offer solace.

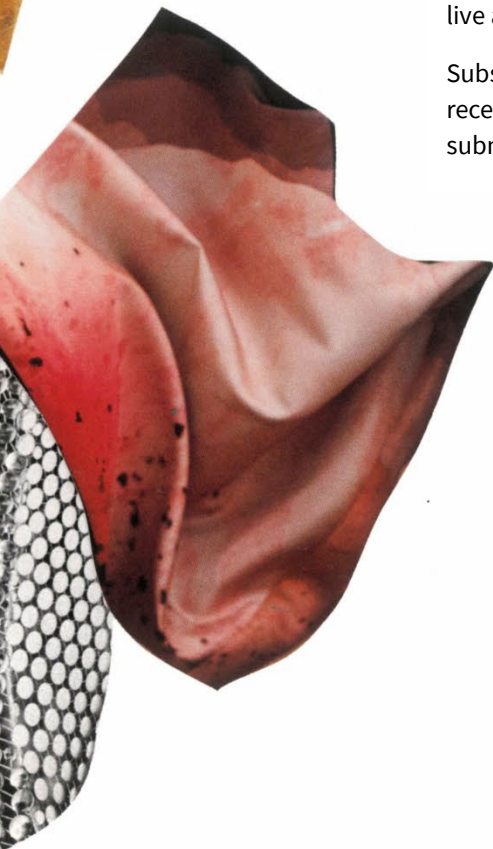




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A close-up photograph of a highly reflective, diamond-encrusted object, possibly a piece of jewelry or a decorative element, positioned on the right side of the frame. The object is covered in numerous small, clear, faceted diamonds that catch the light, creating a shimmering effect. The background is a bright blue sky filled with soft, white, fluffy clouds. The overall composition is clean and elegant, with a focus on luxury and high-quality craftsmanship.

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