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One thing mistaken for another

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EDITORS

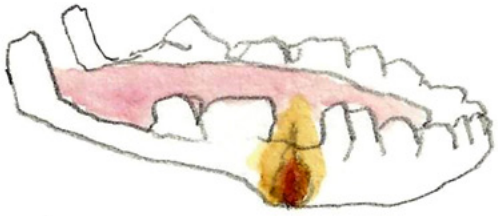
Gwen Burlington
Eoghan McIntyre

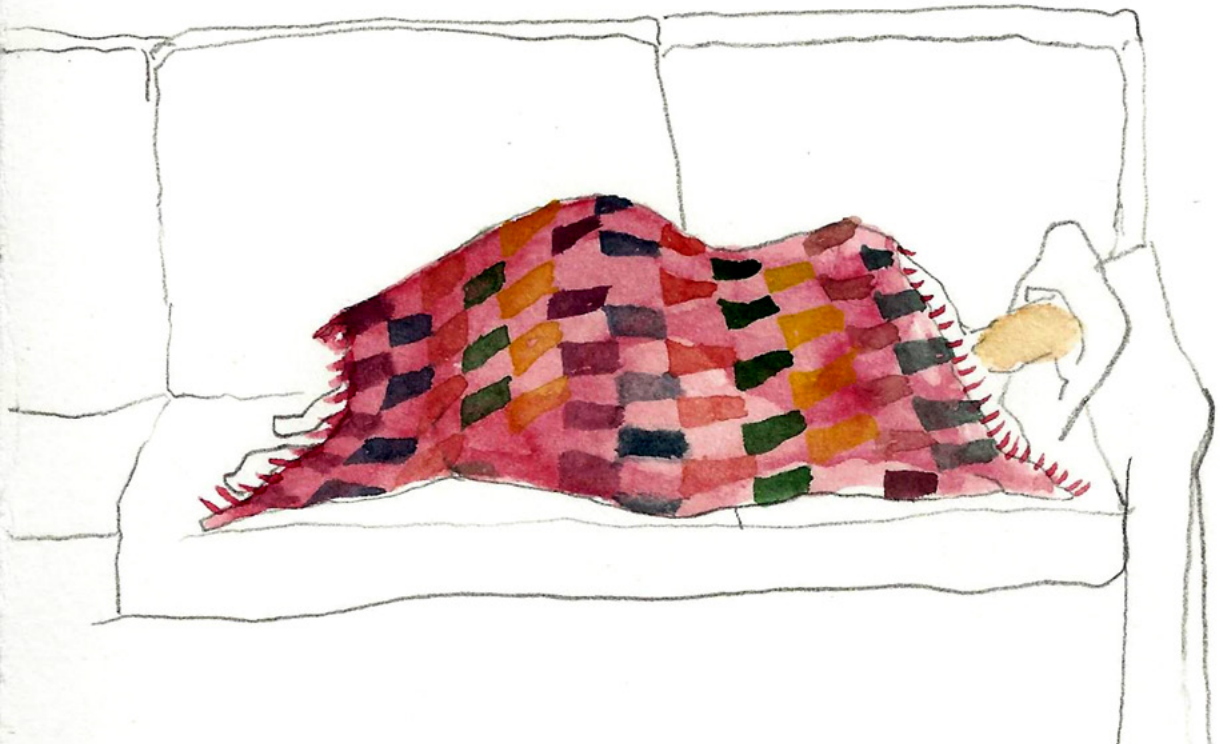
PROOFREADER

Jen Wade

PUBLICATION DESIGN

Paul Mulgrew





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Writers

Megan Hadfield

Megan Hadfield is a visual artist and writer based in Amsterdam. Her practice utilises experimental text and installation to reflect on the role of linguistics in shaping everyday spaces and experiences. Her writing oscillates between fiction and reality, as literary characters traverse both found and imagined places. Hadfield's writing and audio works have been featured in Sonic Acts Biennial as part of Brackish Collective, Muine Bheag Arts, Ecoes, and Daisyworld Magazine. Hadfield's practice is currently supported by the Mondriaan Fonds.

Marian Balfe

Marian Balfe is a visual artist and writer from the midlands of Ireland. Her practice is expansive and she uses many methodologies including painting, writing, graphic design and sculpture to reflect on place, gender and motherhood. Recent exhibitions have included WEAREFETISHISTS, Garter Lane Waterford, Muine Bheag Arts, Carlow and An Animate Land, Roscommon Arts Centre. Marian is supported by the Arts Council of Ireland and practices from her mother's house, Longford and Pallas Studios, Dublin.

Lucie McLaughlin

Lucie McLaughlin is a Belfast-born artist, writer and researcher. She is beginning an AHRC-funded PhD project with Kingston School of Art and the Centre for Contemporary Art Derry~Londonderry in the Autumn of 2024, where she was previously a Research Associate. Her book, Suppose A Collapse, was released in 2021 by JOAN, a publishing project for interdisciplinary artists' writing. She is a recipient of the Yellow Paper Prize for New Writing, 2022. Her work has recently been published by Paper Visual Art Journal, The Yellow Paper, and Catalyst Arts Belfast among others.

Sara O'Brien

Sara O'Brien is a writer based between Dublin and Glasgow. Her writing has been published by Critical Bastards Magazine, Paper Visual Art, The Drouth, MAP Magazine, The Yellow Paper Press and Glasgow Review of Books, amongst other places. She has also produced texts to accompany exhibitions at CCA Glasgow, David Dale Gallery, Wasps' The Briggait Galleries, An Gailearaí and The New Glasgow Society.

Writers

Day Magee

Day Magee is an artist, performer, and writer based in Dublin. Treating life itself as the principal creative material, their transdisciplinary practice explores queerness, illness, religiosity, and how the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves are and might yet be lived.

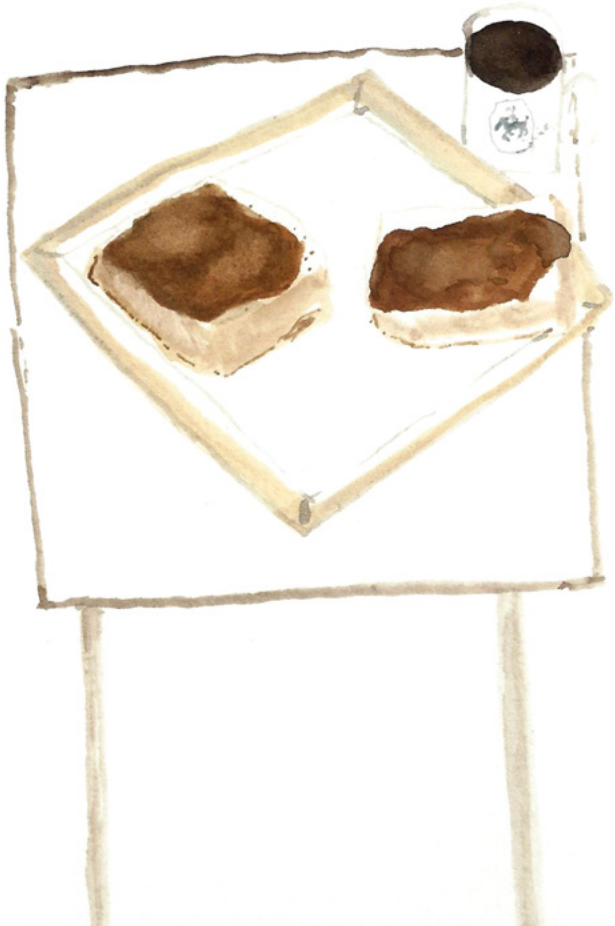
Jennie Taylor

Jennie Taylor is an art writer living and working in Dublin, Ireland.

Artist

Mollie Douthit

Mollie Douthit (b.1986) is a Cork-based oil painter. Originally from North Dakota, Douthit now resides in West Cork. Major achievements include the 2013 RHA Hennessy Craig award, a solo exhibition at the North Dakota Museum of Art, twice awarded the Elizabeth Greenshields Grant, Arts Council Bursaries, and the acquisition of three works by the Arts Council, she recently held a solo exhibition at the Butler Gallery, Kilkenny. Douthit starts every day with a run, followed by coffee. She is a fan of all things domestic and finds thrills in mending clothes, baking bread, and reading. With a home-based studio, daily moments, objects, and places inspire her personal narrative paintings.



Few experiences are more unsettling than meeting an acquaintance and, filled with terror, struggling to remember their name – perhaps only eclipsed by the horror of addressing them by the wrong one. The opposite occurrence – being mistaken for someone else – is often marked by alienation and is rarely enjoyable. However, in fiction, these everyday lapses in recognition are depicted far more thrillingly, transforming a simple social faux pas into an event rich with potential, danger, and even the opportunity to step into another's shoes.

In Hitchcock's classic thriller *North by Northwest*, Roger Thornhill, a dour advertising executive, is mistaken for George Kaplan, a secret agent who, it transpires, doesn't exist (*spoiler alert*). This innocent misidentification spirals into an adventure where Thornhill/Kaplan must navigate a world of espionage, intrigue, and peril.

For most people, mistaken identity won't lead to being attacked by a biplane in a cornfield. Rather, these mundane moments of social interaction reveal how fluid the concept of identity can be. Such errors in recognition can be accidental

invitations to explore the boundaries of who we are and who we might become.

This ninth issue looks at the fallibility of language, mistakes in recognition, and an abundance of accidents across life, work, and art.

Folk horror protagonists are notably error-prone, and Megan Hadfield's "Signwriting and Other Occult Practices" explores this interplay of intention and failure in the genre, with reference to the 1974 television play *Penda's Fen*. Through closely examining and augmenting the world of the show, Hadfield details a narrative of a sign painter whose spelling mistakes illuminate the connection between language, ritual, and the occult.

In "Performing Real Life," Day Magee examines notions of sin and relates them to their performance practice and evangelical upbringing. Magee explores how bodies subconsciously enact narratives and ideologies beyond our conscious intentions, challenging the idea of agency.

Marian Balfe's "Mulletmother" is based on Balfe's mother's hairdresser gradually cutting her mother a mullet on the sly. The narrative delves into

the historical and contemporary intentions and aspirations behind the haircut, and examines the consequences when a hairdresser deviates from the plan.

In 1923, a journalist from *The Irish Times* wrote of Mainie Jellett's *Decoration,* "They may, to the man who understands the most up-to-date modern art, mean something; but to me they presented an insoluble puzzle." This significant work is examined and fictionalised by Jennie Taylor.

An artwork is also at the centre of Lucie McLaughlin's "Less Reflective Than Coal." She responds to Regina de Miguel's film *Nekya. Una película río*, mirroring its complexity and exploring silence as a form of misunderstanding. McLaughlin focuses on the materiality of language and the contradictions in attentiveness to life's details in post-conflict Northern Ireland, paralleling themes of political violence in de Miguel's exploration of the Spanish Civil War.

The French author Antonin Artaud once wrote, "I believe in a language of intuition, which is midway between thought and gesture." Such a language may have been the only one he could have communicated in during his 1937 visit

to the Aran Islands. Sara O'Brien's "Stranger, Outwith An Edge" draws from her research on Artaud and his time living on a small, majority Irish-speaking island. Reflecting on Artaud's ideas, O'Brien's text probes the boundaries of language, exploring the precise moment when it fails.

This issue features newly commissioned artwork by Mollie Douthit. Her delicate and spontaneous paintings and watercolours are infused with humour, capturing the sensory and nostalgic essence of spaces and objects.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

Mulletmother

Marian Balfe

My mother's hairdresser has been cutting her hair into a mullet for the last few months. His name is Ron. He is quiet, discreet, and married to Carmel. Mam has never asked for a mullet, it has just kind of happened.

Before Ron, there was Kay, Pam or 'Pamela', and Martina (Kay's assistant). Marcie replaced Martina but then Marcie fell off a ladder and never returned to work. Kay never replaced Marcie and subsequently retired. Mam went round on them all after Kay retired; Veronica, Colette, Marie Brady (the odd time), Ronan, and now, Ron.

When Mam first started going to Ron, he enquired as to whether she was new to town. Had she arrived during lockdown, he wondered. She thought this was hilarious. She was seventy-two years old and had lived here all her life. This first time, Ron cut her fringe but missed an entire clump beside one ear. In front of her ear. On a subsequent visit, he dyed her hair but missed a large area. We all wondered (Mam included) at

such obvious oversights, but she kept going back. There was also talk of getting her hair dyed in two stages – one today and the remainder next week. Because of Covid, Mam supposed. She seemed resigned to the process. I wondered about mismatched shades, could Ron be trusted to mix the same colour two weeks in a row? I felt it was a risk.

In the reputed glory days of French hairdressing (circa 1760), Legros de Rumigny, a former cook, began to style under his first name only – a convention that maintains its appeal among hairdressers to the present day.[1] Legros established himself as the favoured coiffeur of the French Court and it was a great coup for a lady to gush familiarly about her dear Legros.

Mam gets her hair done on Fridays at 3pm. I am living at home, in her house, with my daughter and partner. We have not always lived here. A new baby and the pandemic have skewed our decision making and so we are here now; in Mam's house. My twenty-eight-year-old brother is also here. I am distracted; sticking feeding tubes to my breasts with 3M tape, and I do not notice the mullet's beginnings.

Mam is fiercely protective of her ears. She is deaf in one and guards the other one, the good one, with the maternal instinct of a magpie. In addition to her deafness, she is a cold creature, permanently perished. She favours closed windows, fires in July and non-airconditioned cars. In winter she talks of east winds like mortal enemies. She is seldom seen outdoors – in any season – without a hat. Her headwear collection is both dynamic and expansive, ranging from patterned headscarves to LFC beanies and multiway roll-up berets. She adopts a tiered rotary system for the assimilation of new hats into her life. A new hat will debut at Sunday mass, the subsequently relegated Sunday mass hat will be worn to daily mass and the in turn relegated daily mass hat will be worn to the shed. Many hats have been rotated through this system. The single requirement being that Mam's ears are covered at all times. And so, a mullet is a strange choice – it is not the most obvious hairstyle for her.

In fifteenth-century Europe pearls signified chastity, as did the binding of the hair: often ears were chastely covered by a cap, a braid, or netting, because of the belief that Mary conceived Christ through her ear.[2] Medieval and Renaissance

Annunciation paintings are both abundant and definitive in lending credence to this belief. The flight path of the Holy Spirit is not towards Mary's womb but to her ear. She inclines her ear and is apparently impregnated through the auditory canal. My mother is Christian but does not buy into this belief. She tuts as I tell her and moves her left hand towards her good ear. The hair around her ear has been cut recently.

The mullet situation becomes pertinent in spring. My sister is getting married and the mullet must go. Ron tells my Mam jokes, awful jokes she recounts to us with girlish giddiness. She tells him we think she has a mullet now. He smiles, nonplussed, and continues to perfect the mullet weekly. He trims the sides leaving length at the back. He enquires as to whether the kids still think she has a mullet. His tonsorial intentions remain unclear.

Late at night, I cannot sleep. I Google mullets. My mother sleeps soundly in the adjacent bedroom, her good ear resting on candy-striped brushed cotton. I deep dive into the etymology of the mullet. In 1994 The Beastie Boys released the rap "Mullet Head" and are largely credited with

coining the term mullet. Sean Carasov "The Captain", a tour manager for The Beastie Boys writes;

The Mullet is as American as pick-ups with rifle racks, tractor pulls, Wal-Mart, wet t-shirt contests, slapping your girl upside the head with a frying pan and living in the woods… it's time the Mullet became the official cut of the US Armed Forces.[3]

Unwilling to align my mother with wet t-shirt contests, the US Armed Forces, and the general sentiments of the since-deceased 4chan contributor Captain, I look to the Greeks for loftier mullet references. I discover the mullet's provenance is rich. The first literary description of the cut is presented in Homer's *The Iliad*. The Abantes were a fierce warlike people who fought on the Greek side of the Trojan War. When the war concluded they wandered, itinerants for a period, but were careful to maintain a specific hairstyle; forelocks cropped but "on the hinder part, locks profuse" down broad shoulders. The style, for their part, was practical; the length at the back kept necks warm and dry, whilst headgear, specifically metal helmets, were better fitted to a short front and sides.[4]

The length at the back was also perceived as a marker of valour—Plutarch wrote that the Abantes would never turn their back on their enemies, favouring close hand-to-hand combat.[5] Mam is not engaged in many physical pursuits. She plays social Bridge. They sit at square tables and play face-to-face.

*

Daddy hated me with a fringe.

As Mam speaks, steam from the saucepan envelops her face. The veg is boiled.

Because my face is so small a fringe just takes it over. There's not much face left if I have a fringe.

But you've always had a fringe.

I think it's nice, I say those exact words aloud.

We all sit down at the kitchen table under the fluorescent strip light. I return to the subject of hair. My brother and husband make funeral faces. My daughter growls.

Do you think he'd like the mullet? Your Dad? I ask.

Mam forcibly mashes peas into mashed potatoes

and ignores me. She has neither confirmed nor denied the existence of her mullet since its inception. My brother (her closest aide and confidante) has tactfully broached the subject, but Mam's responses have been vague. We all remain uncertain as to whether this is the hairstyle she genuinely wants. My daughter resumes growling as she pinches her peas, and my husband graciously changes the subject.

*

Ron's Unisex Hair Salon is between a lingerie shop and a shisha lounge. The exterior has been freshly painted a charcoal grey. There's a parking space right outside, but under pressure from the driver behind Mam gives up on parallel parking and moves to one further up. Sweat collects on her upper lip. My daughter sits in the back eating an off-brand mini-Magnum, unaware she is being driven to her first haircut.

Ron greets us at the front of the salon. Surrounded by pitch pine, he wears neither leopard print nor leather and is not the person I envisioned. He wears a grey fleece and dark denim jeans. Mam introduces us. Ron shakes my hand and says nice to meet you. Mam and I speak

in riddles. We spell out what we want, quickly and fluently. We enjoy spelling fast.

C-U-T- F-R-I-N-G-E.

Ron is confused. He thinks my mother has chaperoned me here for a fringe cut. It's an obvious mistake. I am pointing at my fringe. I motion to my daughter, Sally, and she realises instantly and launches into a tirade of *haircuts for big people, I not big*, etc.

Ron is already treading back to the inner sanctum of the salon. An internal bamboo-patterned window provides privacy but throws little light into the narrow back room. *Sally not want to*. Ron is calm. He tells me to sit her on my knees. He offers her a black towel and she flings it back at him. Ron passes no heed and gives me the towel, directing me to drape it over my shoulders. I am confused. He acquires a comb and scissors from an infrared incubator box. He combs my hair and pretends to cut my hair. The scissors snip and Ron moves deftly. Sally thinks he is cutting my hair.

He giggles, whispering *I nearly cut your hair there*. I think of Mam's mullet. His arms loop around my head and he begins to comb Sally's hair.

It's a complicated Macarena involving a comb and scissors. He loves her blonde highlights. Her stringy fringe is clumped together from a generous blessing of Holy Water (for the drive into town). He tugs the comb through the spiritual cleanser. Sally and I look at each other, Ron and his scissors in our peripheral vision. I am unsure, and so is she. Irrespective of our doubt, Ron cuts her fringe, with my head in the way. He takes three or four cuts at most. She has discarded the ice cream. He thinks it's a bit short. It is the shape of a fringe I have asked many a hairdresser for but never got.

When it's over, we offer Sally the remnants of the Magnum.

No, she shrieks.

It's probably a bit hairy says Ron.

Mam marvels at the fringe. She praises Ron's work, he deflects the attention towards Sally.

She says *what them heads doing there?*

Mannequin heads are clamped to shelves at the back of the salon. The heads have spikey buns and skinny brows. A bottle of WD40 stands amongst

them. I note the absence of a mullet head mannequin. Ron has magazines. I don't bother checking the dates, I know they're ancient; Dale Winton is on the cover of one. Ron won't let Mam pay for the fringe cut. She tells me she'll get him again.

It's how I remember to hang the toilet roll correctly. Fringes are ok, mullets are not.

*

Mam is outside in the car, home from getting her hair done. Her phone is on loudspeaker. She talks to her friend Joan. Joan has gotten a bob, but not with Ron. The merits of the bob are discussed – it's handier and now Joan can blowdry her hair herself. The conversation moves on. Mam stalls, delays coming in. They talk about expensive cat food. Joan's husband keeps buying it.

Mam eventually comes in. My brother tells her that her hair is nice. I withhold comment, waiting for her to remove the mauve magnetic scarf around her neck. The waterfall of mousey brown hair to the back has been cut and I can see her neck. There are stray hairs and a cherry angioma on her pallid skin. She shivers and enquires

about the fire. The fire is lit, angry orange flames rage behind a little window in the black stove. I compliment her haircut and feel vaguely sad.

My sister's wedding day arrives. The mother-of-the bride outfit – an appropriate, but unusual, two-piece lemon tweed dress and jacket combo, is remarked upon as different, and very colourful. A flying saucer-style hat, estranged from space, is tacked at a tilt to my mother's small head. The hat is raspberry red and false flowers of the same colour extend from it. Similar pieces adorn the heads of other wedding guests. Polite millinery compliments are exchanged. The disappearance of Mam's mullet is not commented upon.

Afterword

North Korea banned the mullet in May 2021, describing it as a symbol of a capitalistic lifestyle. My mother's mullet was cut shortly after this.[6]

1. Copper-Hewitt Museum (ed) 1980, *A View from the Top: Hairdressers and History.* New York, The Museum.

2. Jolly, P. (2004) *Hair: Untangling a Social History, 'The Ideal Woman'*. Saratoga Springs, NY: Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College

3. Carasov, S. (1995) *The Captain's Beefs*, Grand Royal Issue II, The Beastie Boys.

4. Homer (1860) *The Iliad*. Translated by William Cowper, New York: D. Appleton & Co.

5. Plutarch (1873) *Plutarch's Lives*. Translated by John & William Langhorne, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers.

6. Wonju, Y. (2021) *N.K. paper warns against inflow of capitalistic culture into country.* Available at: https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20210513003400325?section=nk%2Fnk [Accessed 22 June 2024]

Stranger, Outwith An Edge

Sara O'Brien

On 14th August 1937, Antonin Artaud arrived at the port in Cobh, Co Cork. From there, the French writer and theatre-maker made his way to the Aran Islands. In this sparse, stone-filled terrain where a steep serrated coast meets the churning of a vast ocean stretch, he sought a place and a way of being he believed ancient and transcendent, uncontaminated by the perils and atrocities he had seen wrought by modernity in the wake of war. Those who encountered him on the island have since recalled a tall figure, cloaked in a black shawl, roaming and reclusive, who clutched a large piece of knotted wood that he did not want anyone to touch. He preferred solitude, they recall. *A poor hermit*—or something like that.

Artaud has come to be considered one of the key figures in 20th century avant-garde theatre and performance. Known for his arcane persuasions and engagements with ritual, mysticism and the practices of indigenous cultures, Artaud's

legacy is largely characterised by his radical reconceptualisation of the nature and purpose of theatre. Beginning with two *Manifestos of The Theatre of Cruelty,* first made public in the early 1930s, he advocated a mode of theatre devoid of traditional modes of representation, occupying instead the expressive spaces between gesture and thought. Upon his return to France in September 1937 and until his death in 1948, Artaud would spend much of his life in psychiatric care. However, his work and thinking did not cease and he would remain fastened to the revolutionary ideas that took seed in these early texts.

During his time in Ireland, amidst his search for what some might call magic, Artaud believed the stick he carried once belonged to St Patrick, and he had come to return it to its rightful home. The story on the island went, however, that Artaud was a spy, his hollow cane filled with maps somehow abetting ulterior motives and espionage. We often extrapolate, after all, beyond that which is readily available, especially when what presents itself is not so easy to apprehend. For there are points at which legibility is beyond our grasp. When regular frames of reference fail. When our capacities for comprehension falter.

Let's call such a point an *edge*—the edge of understanding, let's say, which can resemble the edge of what is knowable at all. A person from the past might be considered such an edge—far and getting further away, as the discernibility of their experience becomes increasingly reliant upon the movements and traces left behind. So, we seek signs and scour correspondence, as we try to decipher the remnants of what we can find. But, inevitably, something of that past and of that person's interiority remains (as it would too in the present), ultimately, unknown.

Another person is always in a way a threshold, situated beyond the boundaries of the self. An other as another place, draped in the gossamer of inscrutability that occurs when we realise as much is concealed as tends to be disclosed. But, this threshold is also a place of entry and a point of contact, one we reach for with language—that substrate of communication.

Gayatri Spivak calls every act of communication a "risky fraying which scrambles together somehow" where we might "feel the selvedges of the language-textile give way."[1] For language, she says, is a "clue to where the self loses its

boundaries"[2] while also being "one of the many elements that allow us to make sense of things, of ourselves." It is, she says, one of many elements that percolates amongst "gestures, pauses [and] chance" and "the subindividual force-fields of being which click into place in different situations, swerve from the straight or true line of language-in-thought."[3]

Amidst such swerves and situations, things can always diverge and run off course, for communication can be a convoluted affair. It is not as easy as we might want to *say what you mean* and *mean what you say,* especially at the hinges of reception and receptiveness, especially when tethered by language - fallible and frangible, full of seams and fault lines. For there are times when words flounder, clambering at what we might call the edge of language - its precipice, its limit, its brink.

At the time of his visit, Artaud spoke neither Irish nor English so it is probable that he spent his six weeks in Ireland without speaking much to those he came into contact with. As such and to some degree, he negotiated the island in a world of his own, demarcated, at least in part, by this language

barrier.

This is not to say he did not communicate and, indeed, throughout his trip he wrote many letters to others elsewhere. But, as the actor and writer Olwen Fouéré suggests, in this period he seems to have found himself *on the edge of his own boundaries between all the different realities that he tended to inhabit*.[4] He will have spoken too, of course, with words uttered from a body that made sense, but falling on ears that found them strange, of a stranger.

A barrier is, of course, a border and a boundary, but it is also a crossing, a place where two sides meet. A space, in the case of language, more permeable than impenetrable and fixed. Bound up in the intimacies of co-existence. Lisa Robertson says, "Neither individual nor instrumental, the linguistic aptitude accompanies the beginning of humans as a collective nature through which each subject, uttering "I" "you," "we," emerges and survives or perishes."[5] We might find ourselves subjugated by language, its restrictions and limitations, but we can find ourselves and each other *as* subjects in language too.

In this resides the idea that language shapes

us and our encounters with the world. It is at our disposal, an instrument of sorts. A means of transmission but not always, not completely, the meaning transmitted. For there is always the potential for failure, when we reach that point, the *edge,* where confusion and commotion can begin. And yet, this failure may not signal malfunction, derangement or loss. There can be meaning beyond sense, beyond the flailing perimeters of the limits of language.

On 7th February 1938, Artaud's major work, *Le Theatre et son double (The Theatre and its Double)*, would be published. Here, across a collection of texts, the many points of reference from which his theories on theatre emerged are mapped out. His contentions with conventional treatments of language are elucidated and ideas of language as incantation are put forth. He proposes a metaphysics of performance, advocating for the necessity of poetry and a theatre that does not simply captivate its audiences but disrupts and destabilises the sense of their everyday lives instead. Perhaps most significantly, it is here that his two manifestos appeared together first, outlining his vision for a non-verbal Theatre of Cruelty, where:

"Words mean little to the mind; expanded areas and objects speak out. New imagery speaks, even if composed in words. But spatial, thundering images replete with sound also speak, if we become versed in arranging a sufficient interjection of spatial areas furnished with silence and stillness."[6]

In 1947, Artaud would realise these ideas in a piece for radio, titled *Pour en Finir avec le Jugement de Dieu (To Have Done With the Judgment of God)*. In this, the raw substance of voice as sound and cry mangled with jagged sounds to map a brute and cacophonous sonic territory, pierced occasionally by linguistically inclined expulsions of onomatopoeia and glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. Here, Artaud pressed beyond language, below and before it, getting through to a state that might seem to some a lot like chaos—communication evacuated by language, something ancient and transcendent perhaps, where meaning does not flow but froths and disa(f)rays. But then, an absence of clear and rendered meaning does not preclude the meaningful. *Something* still teeters to communicate. There can be clarity in the cacophony, surely.

Anne Carson proposes that, "Most of us, given a choice between chaos and naming, between catastrophe and cliché, would choose naming."[7] In an essay on translation (among other things), Carson describes the manifold means by which a "catastrophising of communication" can occur.[8] She locates it in how the painter Francis Bacon "extinguishes the usual relation of figure to ground, the usual passage of information at that place."[9] She observes it in how Joan of Arc, at her trial, "extinguishes the usual relation of question to answer."[10] She finds it in the poet Friedrich Hölderlin's translations of Sophokles and his own early work where, over the course of many years, he "forc[ed] the texts from strange to [stranger]."[11] In this, "his catastrophe," she sees "a method organised by the rage of cliché. After all," she says, "what else is one's own language but a gigantic cacophonous cliché. Nothing has not been said before."[12]

Most of us spend most of our lives in language treading the usual relations between words and the world. This is perhaps less stifling if we agree that "a cliché is not to be despised: its automatic comfort is the happy exteriority of a shared knowledge which knows itself perfectly well to be

a contentless but sociable turning outward toward the world."[13] This turning outward is perhaps akin to the swerve, counterposed to the downturn of the catastrophe, poised to inhabit the space(s) of language(s) and the space(s) we meet therein.

A special case of this occurs when two languages meet each other, where the impasse of the untranslatable can arise. Carson calls this a word going "silent in transit"[14] or a "word that stops itself,"[15] pointing to the "[m]etaphysical silence [that] happens inside words themselves."[16]
For much is held in a word, but much can be withheld by it too. There is always a fine tuned and tuning reciprocity at play in any exchange of language, most especially in translation. Richard Kearney proposes that "The arc of translation epitomises [the] journey from self through the other, reminding us of the irreducible finitude and contingency of all language."[17] Drawing from the philosopher Paul Ricoeur's idea of linguistic hospitality—as "the act of inhabiting the word of the Other paralleled by the act of receiving the word of the Other into one's own home, one's own dwelling"[18]—Kearney elsewhere suggests that "we share words as we share clothes," such that "we should let our language try on the

garments of strangers at the same time as we invite them to step into the fabric of our own speech."[19]

Here we see a conceptualisation of language as tangible and passed between us, as shared and reciprocal, a site and situation where we can be construed as both hosts and guests. These words stem from the same etymological root (the Indo-European *ghostis** for 'stranger') and as such are bound up together in origin, each holding the other within it. One can't help but hear and see ghost too, despite the word coming from a different etymological path. But each utterance evokes the other and in common there is the strange. The strangeness of the spectre. The strangeness of the unknown that arrives at our door.

In 1998, the French filmmaker Matthias Sanderson travelled to Aran in pursuit of Artaud's past. Over the course of the resulting film, *Une Histoire de Fantôme,* we follow him as he attempts to retrace Artaud's steps 61 years previously, hoping to piece together a sense of what and where he had gone through. From the island, we see dark shadows on a stark landscape and

waves collide with the cliffs. Warping dry stone walls portion up the fields and, again and again, images shudder of rocks, clustered, scattered and fallen, creviced and cracked and inky like the sea. With a steady thrum beneath, there is the shrill wind and the raw screams shriek from beyond, with collective prayers like chants as gaeilge interspersed. All tableaux channelling the sense that this is a place "where 'the veils between the worlds are thin.'"[20]

There are no subtitles so much of what is said falls beyond my grasp, unfolding as one amongst many other elements in the film's sonic layers. But there is one scene about which I see much of all of this turn. A kitchen, two women and a priest. The first two were there when Artaud was and, here, as witnesses, they recount his presence in their ancient language. A softness and a sympathy unfurls between them. *Un pauvre ermite,* the priest says. *Díthreabhach bocht*—or something like that.

Once a forlorn guest. Here, at the edge,
a ghost.

1. Spivak, G. (1993) *The Politics of Translation, Outside in the Teaching Machine.* New York: Routledge, p. 180

2. Ibid. p. 180

3. Ibid. p. 179

4. *Artaud on Aran* (2010) TG4 documentary

5. Robertson, L. (2012) *Untitled Essay, Nilling: Prose Essays on Noise, Pornography, The Codex, Melancholy, Lucretius, Folds, Cities and Related Aporias*. Toronto: Book★hug, p. 73

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Mainie Jellett, *Decoration* – Looks, Visions, and Residue

Jennie Taylor

Mainie Jellett (1897-1944)
Decoration, c. 1923
Tempera on wood panel
89 x 53 cm
National Gallery of Ireland Collection
Photo, National Gallery of Ireland
Credit Line: Bequeathed, Evie Hone, 1955
NGI.1326

This piece is a part of a series in which Taylor writes around and from imagined, fictionalised and entangled associations with one of the first abstract works to be shown in Ireland – Decoration (1923) by Mainie Jellett.

She looked out her window every night. An activity that she felt should bring her peace. Or an experience with a sickening level of meaning. In reality, it did nothing for her. She did it anyway. Her bedroom had a sea view, framed by a mountain range. Its profile etched in her mind. The only objects that truly bored her were those mountains.

On lucky nights, the moon sat perfectly centred in her window, creating a silver band on the sea below – glistening and proud. Easily pretty. She connected this sight to a poem she learned in school, *The Silver Road*. Yet, she knew this was internal fakery. She told herself she should feel the poem come alive while watching the moon's reflection on the still water.

One night, she lay in her usual spot, stretched on her bed, lying on her belly with her chin resting on her folded arms, like a character. Not like herself. She didn't fully recognise her own performances. There was little way of her knowing the difference between her performed and authentic behaviour. A sensation of being watched by a one-eyed god 24 hours a day was baked inside of her. As she stared out her window,

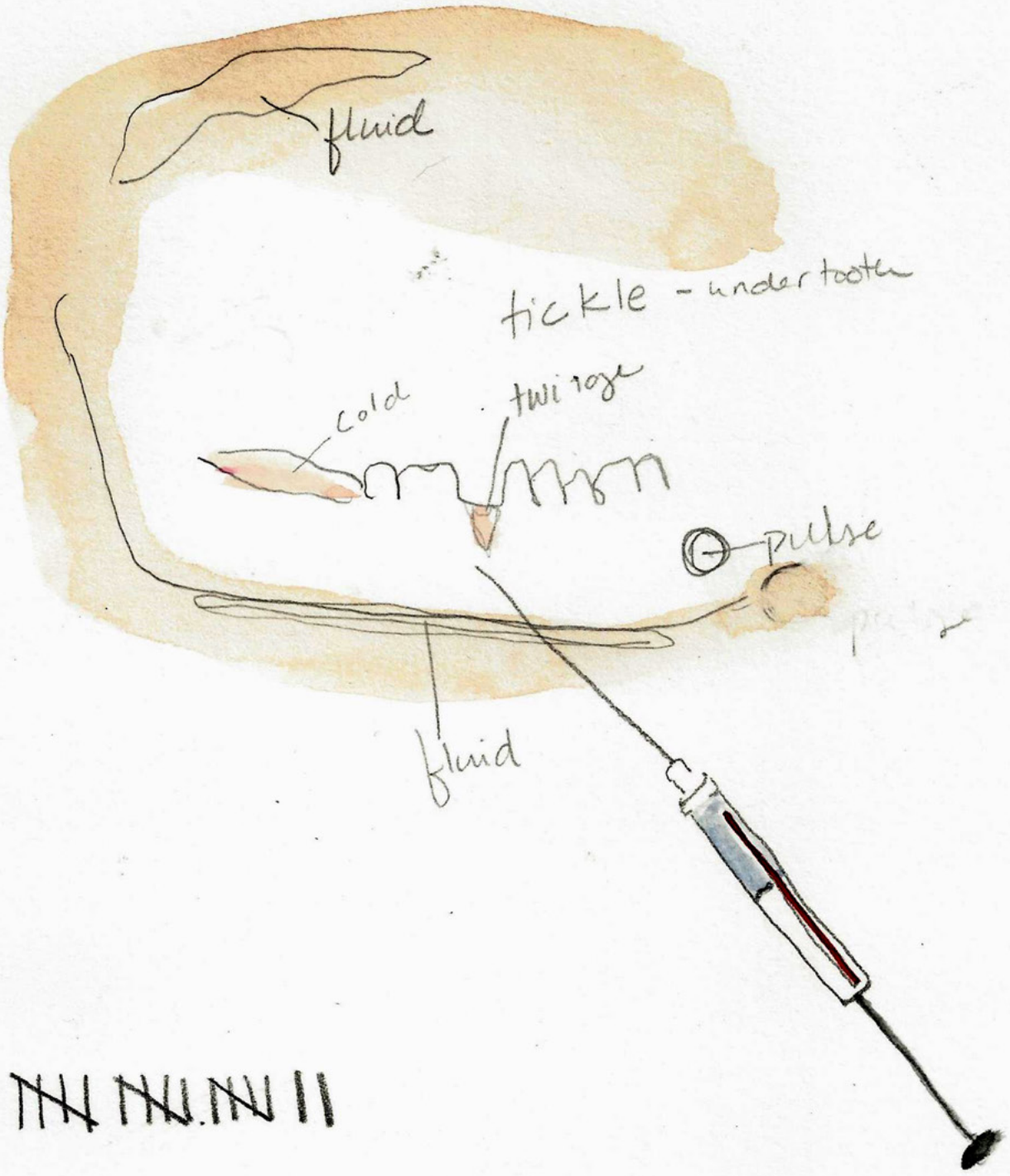
her gaze sometimes shifted to the windowpane, focusing on milky marks and streaks from thoughtless cleaning. The crystalline lens of her eye distorted by their moving muscles.

She refocused her gaze outward and saw multiple coloured shapes hovering in the night sky. Some moved left to right, others right to left, overlapping to create chunky, flashing crosses. For the first time, she looked at her bedroom view with genuine wonder. A peaceful feeling washed over her body.

Every hyper pore on her skin embraced its true role, to be open and to simply be. A coherent multiplicity was happening inside of her and in front of her. Her eyes fixed on the window, her pose remained the same but her head was now upright and intentional. The fragments of colours wept. Drips of red, gold, blue, yellow, green and barely-there navy moved down the sky as if against a clean, darkened wall. The drips vanished before they hit the horizon, each like the end of a firework. The same fragmented shapes reappeared, this time moving to the centre, eclipsing where the moon would be. They joined and overlapped as if solving their own puzzle, with a bespoke

logic – indifferent and autonomous. The now unified fragments resembled various subjects: buildings, maps and two figures – one holding the other.

To her eyes, the image was pure form and colour, reflecting the movement of her gaze. Both her eyes flitted in sync with the placements of colours and shapes. The fragments settled against a bed of tiny speckled, technicolour dots. This felt like a conclusion to her own creation of multiple selves inside her mind and room – some tailored to please, some free. Seeing the dots provided her with an alternative viewpoint. Faced with this sight and this truth, she somehow understood that no one was watching. She felt snippets of her autonomy multiply. Accepting what she witnessed, she rested her head, knowing it was still out there, flecks of its colours reflected on her varnished floor. It didn't matter if she missed anything. She could invent the rest.


fluid
tickle - under tooth
cold
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Less Reflective Than Coal

Lucie McLaughlin

This text is a response to 'Nekya: a river film' by Regina de Miguel (74 minutes, 2023). Appearing in italics, words are incorporated directly from the film. Language between depiction and description drifts, accumulating silence as a form of (mis)understanding, its slippages and multiplicities transmitting the sense of a story.

Regina de Miguel's film, recently exhibited in 'Remedios: Where new land may grow' at Centro de Creación Contemporánea de Andalucía (C3A) Córdoba, broaches the complex emptiness of the Riotinto River in Huelva, Andalucía, frequently described as an *analogue of mars* due to its inhospitable conditions, stemming from the naturally occurring heavy metals and the pollution from industrial exploitation. The water, soil and subsoil here are of unique *mineralogical and geochemical conditions,* with metals such as copper and iron extracted for thousands of years. The abundant sulphide minerals appear as *vast pyritic strips* and cubic crystals softening the jagged edge

of rocks.

Cobalt, mercury, tungsten, beryllium, bismuth and iron are minerals and materials that act as *underground witness* to *all the defeats, strikes and rebellions, drowned in blood*. The river lies still as cut glass, its surface a deep purple onyx that fades into red at its edges. A bed of rock tumbles down from cracked mud flanks, disappearing into the depths below. The sun hits the water and the surrounding arid landscape unequivocally, with such force that it seems to detach a beat from the rhythm of the insects in the air, causing them to falter and slow down.

Throughout the region's past, historical silence has followed suffering. There are many tenors to the silence, thrown in sharp relief by key events such as the discovery of the tomb of one hundred animals sacrificed to ancient gods, British colonisation in the 19th century, the subsequent Riotinto massacre and the disappearance of dissidents during the Spanish Civil War. The Romans built *extensive networks of underground tunnels* in the Riotinto mines, where slaves worked, *abandoned in the tunnels when they died*. By uncovering the personal and collective memories

that have been long forgotten by most, the film allows us to enter into the flow of different depths of time: generational, geological and cosmic. Moving amid the unusual current of this unique river, silence both obscures and reveals historical truths.

Several months after watching the film, I visit the site of the river. A few people pose for photos at the shore where there is space for cars to park. Further upriver, I don't encounter another person. The hoarse hum of insects rushes past, mixed with the indistinct rumble of scrambler bikes in the forest on the other side of the water. I make out distant, hollow cooing and the crinkling flow where the river bends. As one disembodied sound moves closer, and I try to take hold of a thought, it breaks apart. Spume gathers, slides.

Disquiet is audible in the otherworldly colours. Deep ochre lichen smothers rocks at the river's edge, while sharp white streaks reveal the waterline's movement over time. I walk a dirt path that curves along the river, where the train tracks once operated. At points, the old wooden sleepers half-emerge from the ground, brittle and ridden with deep cracks. They mark a path that began

at the mining complex set up by the British colonial project in 1873 and ended at the port of Huelva. When the British bought the mine from the heavily indebted Spanish government, they bought *not only the soil and subsoil, but also the airspace, the hilltops, the lives and the properties.*

The British named their project the Riotinto Mining Company and obtained pure copper by the combustion of raw materials in bonfires that *burned uninterrupted for six or twelve months of the year*, giving off smoke that poisoned the land and the people. A group of workers organised a peaceful protest in opposition to the damage being done, now considered the first known workers strike for environmental reasons. The people were fired at *indiscriminately.* Hundreds of their bodies disappeared, perhaps *into the slag heaps, in the old galleries of the mines,* or *on the night train to the sea*. The disappearance of the bodies after such a totality of violence was a tool the industrial capitalists used to continue their exploitation of both people and land in the area. They instilled silence around the event not just through fear but in the records made at the time of the executions, which included obfuscating language such as *death by lack of life.*

During the film, a woman is searching for her grandfather who was executed at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. The years from now to when he was lost are many tonal layers, settling on top of one another, what a dream might sound like. The woman tells us how her mother told her to *close the front door,* and then explained what she knew of the situation. The woman travels through stacks of papers in public archives, and requests files that can *not be found,* meeting instead her family's *inaudible massacre* and *impossible memory*.

Late, but perhaps also at the right time,[1] forensic archaeologists are working on *the exhumation of the mass grave of Rico Reja, in the cemetery of San Fernando, Seville.* They have found the bodies of miners who were ambushed in 1936, recognised by the presence of heavy metals in their bones. The film describes the grave as a *place of shame,* while also holding *hope for reunion with the disappeared*.

Shame orbits our relationship to place in Northern Ireland in complicated ways. While there is much noise made about the atrocities carried out during the recent Troubles, the connection between our contemporary lives and

the seventeenth-century colonisation of Ulster is limited, restricting our collective understanding of place, historical and ongoing conflict.[2] To enter into the flow of our own different depths of time, we need to undo the perception we often experience from others that we live in a place of simplistic binaries.

Throughout the Troubles, seventeen people 'disappeared', buried in boglands and near beaches. Some of the bodies have since been recovered by forensic archaeologists, with and without the help of an independent commission[3] and a bereavement counselling phone line which offered to field information anonymously from callers wishing to disclose their whereabouts. The shadow of these disappearances still has a great impact today, not least by dominating discussions around the legacy of the Troubles in post-conflict society. Relatively unknown is that during the 1919–1921 War of Independence in Ireland almost one hundred people went missing, *only to disappear into a silent oblivion*. Although there has been recent research published on the kidnappings and executions, linked to the party founders of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, neither the Irish nor British government want to start

digging.[4]

*

Liquid is a captivating material, like language, it holds its content in suspension, creating an atmosphere of its own, while reflecting that which surrounds it. In de Miguel's film, light flares from beneath the surface of the river water, revealing slowly floating pinpricks, the amoeba-like outline of shoal debris. Viscid, flossy strands of algae lengthen along the textured basin. Simultaneously, the river carries its stories at a scale which is both *controlled and chaotic* in a confluence of the overwhelmingly small and the unimaginably big: individual lives, collective struggles, *those who are in ditches*, and the gradient rush of the colour of dissolved sediment.

In the film, art and science intersect, crossing over and under one another, trying to fill a silence by meting out their distinct rhythms in the words of a voiceover and interviews with scientists. Science has become the dominant arbiter of what counts as knowledge in the west.[5] To reject the subjective world and to appear scientific is a tendency that creates noise, the noise then giving the listener duration as an artefact: something to hold onto.[6]

As a site for research into '*extremophilic' conditions,* the river is *a place where you think life would be impossible, yet the conditions there allow it to develop.* Looking for life *in the subsoil hard rock,* as opposed to the surface, astrobiologists and other researchers working at the river aim to come closer to understanding whether life originated on Earth or outside it, while exploring the *possibility of life* in other parts of our galaxy. *On rocky planets, even if there is no water on the surface, there can be life in the deep subsoil. At extreme depths, under immense pressure.*

*

People who are born into the suffuse silence, after conflicts have passed discover their parents are often emotionally unavailable, crying, *maybe crying for us,* without explanation. A recent study in the North of Ireland identified silence as the key mechanism in the transmission of mental health issues between generations.[7] The next generation senses 'absence' very strongly as an inarticulate 'something'.[8] In Northern Ireland, as it did in Riotinto, silence has become a cultural and historical practice, with the knowledge that something is wrong, without knowing what is

wrong, causing the cycle of sensations to loop and repeat.

Full of inherent contradictions, silence is something proper to language[9] and yet we repeatedly attempt to use language to surpass it, as we trace the outline of a shape built from negative space. 'Nekya: a river film' does this with its words: *less reflective than coal* is a sentence that stops itself.[10] It sounds perfectly articulate while enfolding all the misunderstanding and opacity that poetics can lead to. Fixing or legitimising in language the inarticulate 'somethings' of place: a difficult subject, violent past and speculative future, might run the risk of them disappearing. Yet it is a risk worth taking when *in many parts of the world, there is no desire to make the journey to be reunited with the dead,* or to *interrogate them about the future.*

Scientific researchers in Spain recognise that after many years of silence and subsequent lack of awareness in younger generations, it is in the arts that efforts are largely being made to recover historical memory.[11] The impenetrable background noise between sound and silence presents as a somewhat abstract material in an ocularcentric society. Digging reveals a

polytemporal worldsound: many worlds at once. Words are the *thresholds, passages, tunnels, margins,* and *shores,* between these different worlds.

De Miguel's film succeeds in describing the atmosphere of silence from which its knowledge comes, without eclipsing it. By amplifying that which is ambiguous, difficult and beyond articulation, de Miguel demonstrates a process of untangling the past as connected to the current moment, where the stories that remain silent or undiscovered are fiercely present, and most importantly undestroyed. With art that brings to light the forgotten, disparate moments of collective history, it may be possible to create a speculative space where attempts can be made to confront and accommodate unresolved issues, often unwelcome elsewhere.[12]

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Performing Real Life

Day Magee

When I was eight years old, I wrote an unremarkable poem about Jesus. Despite its simplicity, it pleased my father. It pleased him so much, that he showed it to members of our church. A painter in our congregation called me "King David", after the biblical poet-warrior-king, and another prophesied that I was destined to speak God's will from a stage. A pastor was also enamoured and asked if I would read it to his congregation.

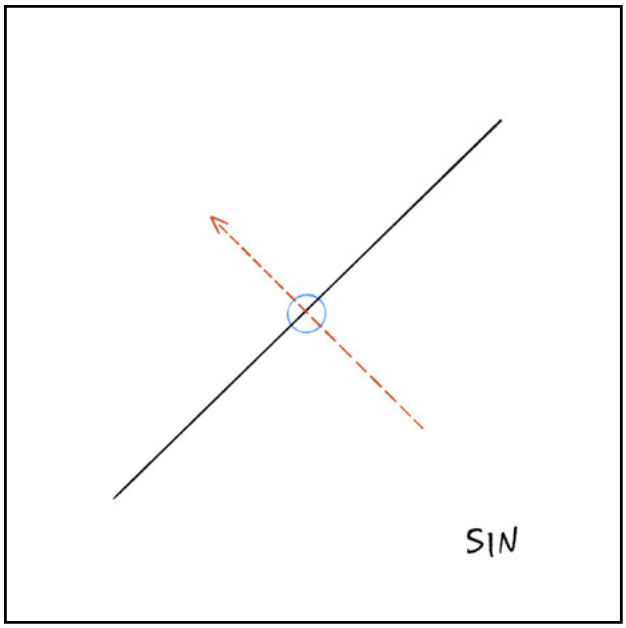
Raised in evangelical Christianity, I often watched the pastor perform his faith for all to see. How all eyes would be on him, not simply as he spoke, but after, and then after again – it was his job that his faith should not end, that he sustains his beliefs through action, day to day. That he be an example for others to live by. My father asked if I would be comfortable reading the poem. His pride felt like sun on my skin, and I could not look away. I agreed to it, but I was *afraid*. As a child, I felt others' gazes locking me to the sticking place.

Being looked at constituted a kind of harm, and any form of performance or public speaking felt like a ritual of that harm.

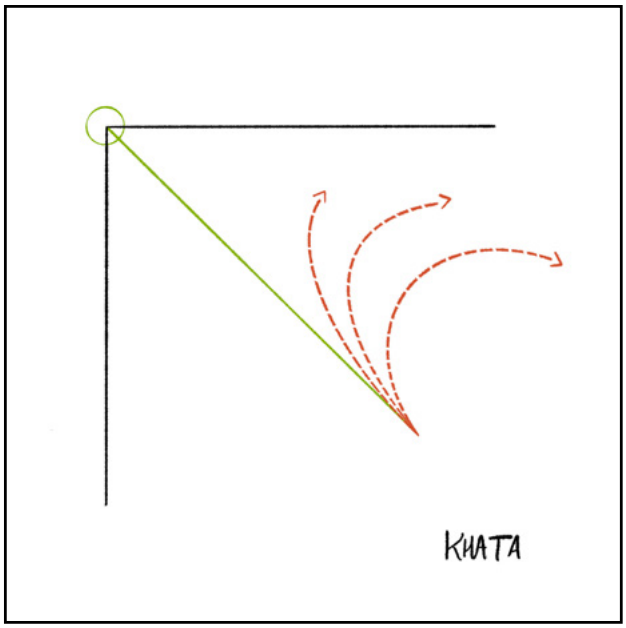
The night before the reading, I broke down, wailing into my father's arms that I couldn't do it. His reassurance – that it was okay, that I didn't have to do anything I didn't want – did not convince me. I believed I had failed not just my father, but God. I felt I was rejecting the gifts God had blessed me with, holding them in contempt. How could I ever expect to be in the world?

I was taught to believe that we are born in sin and that God's love is unconditional – not something earned through actions. Humanity's love, conversely, could only ever be conditional. The word sin is derived from the Middle English "synn", which means "violation of divine law". "Synn" itself derives from the Hebrew word "Khata", meaning "to miss the mark". A violation implies a border, the profaning of a boundary, but also, necessarily – convergence. To miss the mark implies a trajectory, a line of flight that veers recursively from the straight and narrow – a deviance. Both concepts involve direction, circumference, and how

space is occupied, demarcated, and traversed. Evangelical Christianity's modus operandi is the viral potential of storytelling – how salvation is accessed relationally from one body to the next via testimony. Testimony derives from the Latin "testis", meaning "witness". Performance is the medium of witness.



Accompanying illustrations by the author, Fig.i



Accompanying illustrations by the author, Fig.ii

Shortly following the unread poem, I began drama classes. I thought that if I could learn to perform, then conceivably, I could learn to be loved. I learned to act through the careful rehearsal of scripts, the improvisation of warm-ups, and the timed staging of bodies and props. I understood conversations as rhythms between people, improvised within contingent parameters

as social compositions: a slight smirk at a remark; cocking an eyebrow and tilting toward the next speaker; interrupt, don't interrupt; exaggerating and retreating dynamically as the collective volition seems to demand; telling a joke rehearsed in former conversations with a slightly different delivery to invoke irony to those who may have heard it before. Walk the talk, talk the walk. It is a dance. I learned to perform exactly the self that would keep the world at bay, one that could stand to be seen.

The body behaves, is choreographed, according to its position in space and time in response to its surroundings. It is guided by its relationship with other bodies, the awareness of these spectators and performer's own self-awareness. The body is not separate from the mind, its experience shapes the neural pathways that branch into the brain. It gathers sensory data from its surroundings, narrativises them as thought, and enacts them somatically. The body is a story that it tells by living. As philosopher Alva Noë said "Consciousness is not something that happens in us. It is what we do."

Life is indeed the enactment of bodily experience.

The body characterises its environment, the theatre of the mind dramatising experience, composing and performing the life score. The contraction of the lungs to breathe, the articulation of the spine to bend, the positioning of the fingers to reach. From cells to muscles, the body micro- and macrocosmically arranges itself into fractal shapes in space, which persist through time as patterns. These are the constituent elements of performance.

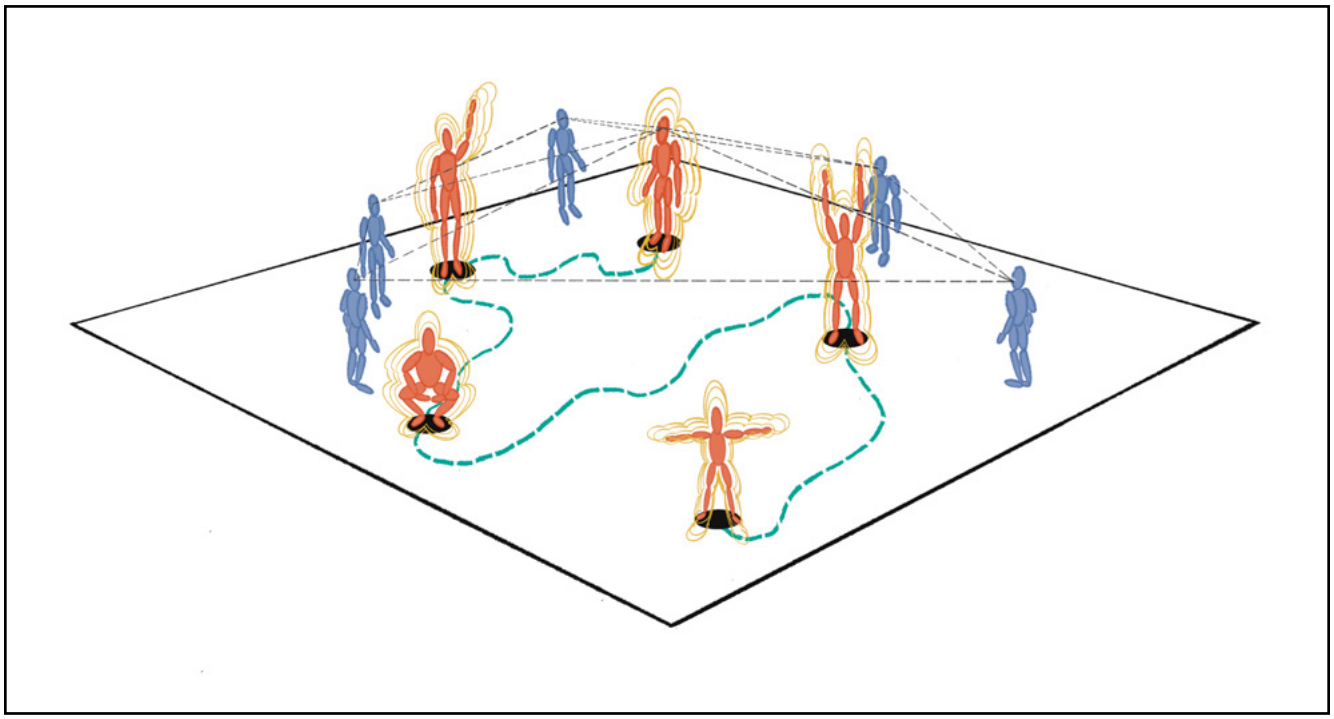
I began making performance art at seventeen years old, in secondary school. With the permission of my art teacher, I stood on the stage of the school theatre. Holding a mirror aloft, I looked into it, blinded by a tall, black crown that covered my eyes, my body wrapped in snaking rope. I pointed the mirror at the audience, guiding it from face to face, "collecting" their reflections. I imagined myself drawing a kind of power from it. My fellow students had previously known me as quiet and awkward – a Christian convinced that the Earth was six thousand years old. Afterwards, a man I was in love with told me, "You should be a performance artist". I took it as a sign from God.

When I perform, I enter the space, dispersed

among the audience. As their gaze fixes upon me, I too become fixed, tied to their perceptual tracks. TS Eliot wrote of the "unseen eyebeam", of roses that "had the look of roses that are looked at". In performance, I humble myself before the audience, becoming simplified, reduced to a series of actions and the story of whatever happens, in or out of my control. Here I am exposed, vulnerable, naked. I am opening myself up to shame.

Upon Adam and Eve's eating of the fruit of knowledge – the first sin – they realised they were naked, and were filled with shame – but as God tells them, "you have always been naked." The conceit of a performance is that once the curtain unfurls, it is no longer real life. But whether in the theatre, the gallery, the street, the bar, or the home, the abiding mechanism of bodies moving in time and space remains. The social contract bends and curves like space-time around the matter of its occupants, their crowd dynamics inducing contingent forms of social gravity. A performance's gestural sequence is captured under the surveillant entity of the witnesses – the eye of God. Each witness collects the unique phenomenal data produced and surrendered to

one another, constituting the event. When and if the performance ends, we simply move on to the next one.



Accompanying illustrations by the author , Fig.iii

Before the performance ends, I move through it. I might rub the soles of my feet atop sandpaper until I bleed into the grain. I might speak through a microphone in response to previous recordings of myself, attempting a dialogue with my past self. I might do very little or even make a mistake. Whatever the case, I conduct my body in a manner otherwise deviant from other social contexts. I can do things I cannot normally do – I can be in ways I normally cannot. A novel ontology. From there it is condoned in the form

of applause – even a career of sorts with enough time, enough practice, enough experience. The audience has borne witness to me – they have seen me, they have *believed* me. Their faith, too, is the material.

After a performance, whether professional or personal, I feel unspeakably empty. There is always a cost. Not simply an energetic one, but an existential one. The moment I have successfully created for myself passes. The audience leaves, and I am alone, no longer in control. The butterflies that once fluttered in my stomach before the performance now lie dead, filling my gut with the weight of "What have I done?"

And what exactly am I doing? I have dedicated my life to performing a self at the cost of the body that manifests it. Identity is a daily religious observance; my cognitive and behavioural habits are religious devotions. The faith I once had in this self seems to be running out, even as my life seems to be going somewhere. If life is the ultimate creative medium, if one's life is a work of art, my self-image has become legible enough to scrutinise. And I'm not always sure I like what I see.

I left the church at fifteen, a decision spurred by the failure of conversion therapy, and the realisation of my queer identity – one of the first ways in which I could not help but stray from the path laid before me. Before I could ever get "a real job", I developed debilitating chronic migraine and fibromyalgia. After ten years without a meaningful response to treatment, a neurologist speculated that my pain was a somatic result of autistic masking.

The prefix "aut" means self – that is, conceivably, a pathology of selfhood. I think of Alan Watts, who said, "The sensation which corresponds to the image of ourselves is a chronic muscular tension". Autism is often identified socially – through how the body behaves amongst others. It is characterised by difficulties in sustaining reciprocal social relationships, leading to "masking", a social strategy of suppressing autistic behaviours. This compensation can result in executive dysfunction, mental illness, and physical health problems.

I abandoned notions of a "normal" life to become an artist, fashioning my own religion and rituals as a creative practice. To be an artist, never mind an

autist, however, is to be pushed further out into social orbit. Bodies that successfully enact and maintain viable social personas – characterising social functions – fulfil the arbitrary conditions that determine normativity and net harmony. Those who fail to do so must enact novel ontological systems, speculatively living new models of being into existence. The systems of social gravitational orbit are composed in time and space.

Like the planetoid Pluto, the *artist/autist* does not occupy the centre of their own orbit but revolves around a void, a pocket of empty space. The *artistic/autistic* self is similarly decentralised within gravity – there is no self at the centre. No fixed identity anchors them. Pluto, sharing this emptiness with its moon, Charon, the ferryman guiding the souls of the dead, symbolises this existential uncertainty. Charon tows Pluto, keeping its world turning, like the practice tows the artist, like the social mask tows the *autist*. Pluto's status as a celestial body remains ever in dispute among the rest of the solar throng.

From this far-flung vantage point, I see a self, performed not to please others but to survive

them. Despite every effort to conform, one inevitably deviates, becoming ever more discreet among others. The path ahead winds as one struts and frets upon it. Should I walk the straight and narrow, or embrace a wider arc? And if I do both, at what rhythm must this pendulum swing? What will it take to not miss the mark – to not fall short?

The answer might be that I *am* the mark – my own. I am a point in time and space. These coordinates curve around me, shape me, and are performed through me. My body is *their* mask. I do not fall; I spin, I dance. I know all the moves. I have learned not simply how to act, but how to believe – and am now learning *what* to enact, *what* to believe. I take the proverbial leap of faith, and take my place among the heavens.

Signwriting and Other Occult Practices

Megan Hadfield

The television play *Penda's Fen* was first aired in 1974, as part of the BBC anthology series *A Play for Today*. Deviating from the gritty social realism dominating much of the series, the play was only aired twice before vanishing into relative anonymity. However, in the early 2000s the BBC archive began to be digitised and a version

appeared on YouTube. With a renewed interest in what Mark Fisher has famously coined the 'weird and the eerie,' *Penda's Fen* found itself a cult following, fitting neatly into the increasingly popular folk horror genre.

For the playwright David Rudkin, *Penda's Fen* is aligned with other overtly political works in the series such as Alan Clarke's infamous borstal drama, *Scum*. He has often sought to shake the folk horror category, describing *Penda's Fen* as 'a bloody political piece.' The play explores the dangers of classification, and how the use of institutional language restricts the multiplicity of sexuality and identity.

Genre, categories, place names and even language itself are continuously disassembled throughout. Set in Pinvin, a rural village beneath the Malvern hills, the viewer is led through a hallucinatory coming of age story. The plot is centred around Stephen, a vicar's son who resolutely prescribes to a cultural conservatism and Protestant purity rampant amongst a 1970s middle class. As the first act ends, Stephen sermonises about angels and demons to a soundtrack of haughty classical music.

Stephen then encounters a sign painter named Joffer, who has been hired by the local council to laboriously paint and repaint a road closure sign. Carefully he reproduces 'No Road to Pinfin Go Via' in solid block capitals. Stephen points out his misspelling yet Joffer remains confident in his mistake. The events that follow are peppered with strange shots of road signage and place names, all with slight mistakes, misspellings and do-overs.

These unreliable place names slowly uncover the occult and pagan Pinvin that exists between the mutating lexicon. As an alternative world opens up, Stephen encounters a series of alternative role models that cause his hard-line values to slowly unravel. He becomes open to the theories of a left-wing playwright, Arne. Despite initially feigning disgust at Arne's support of the trade union strikers, by the end of the play Stephen is enthralled by his claims of a nuclear bunker beneath the village. During a wet dream, triggered by a late night visit from an unearthly sleep demon, Stephen realises he has feelings for the local milkman. Towards the end of the play, Stephen's liberation from conservative repression is consolidated by the appearance of Penda, Britain's last pagan king. Unearthed from

beneath Pinvin, Penda entrusts Stephen with a sacred flame of 'ungovernableness.' The realities and characters conjured by misspellings have allowed Stephen to exist outside the constraints of language.

*

A recent council recruit is tasked with the painting of various new signs across Pinvin. Under Joffer's guidance he attempts to establish an encounter between contemporary Pinvin and an occult reality from the 1974 television play.

PIN-F-IN

The swimming centre echoes, an unfinished husk waiting to be filled first with workmen, then with gallons of medicated water. Rob arrives unusually early. One of those rare, clear-headed mornings. The local radio station catches his attention. Live on air, locals bemoan the closure of the pool and announce a stake out. True to their word, Rob sees a gathering of equally early risers, pressed against the glass doors.

Rob eyes them from his bench, directing a limp sandwich towards his mouth. He misses

and, jaw gaping, returns it to a plastic container. Bobbing out of sight, they reappear with renewed determination, fog collecting in place of their grumbled discontents. Six months and the refurb job has been moving slow. Six months of winding roads, accusatory glances and the inescapable stench of chlorine. Repainting a large notice above the changing room entrance, a muddle of cerulean and yellow spell out 'Pinfin Leisure Centre, safety notice.' The colours blur, he fills the voids of the letters with red. Arne approaches, peering over his shoulder, a concerned expression on his face.

'Spelt wrong, that.' Rob rubs his eyes and checks his phone. *'Easy job, phone signal not great.'* He rereads the message, clicks off it, then turns his attention to the wall before him. Mistaking Rob's distraction for workplace guilt, Arne takes a deep breath, ready to embark on one of his recitals. 'Right at the start of the pool, when this was nowhere, the village brought a bunch of workers in like us.' Arne enacts the digging of the foundation, the tiling of the walls. 'Then, the problems began.' Arne explains and simulates the collapse of an invisible wall, architectural debris flying at him from all sides. He mimes a dramatic

sinking into the floor.

Rob half-knows this anecdote; he calls to mind images of rubble strewn across the project manager's desk. Chalk fractures laid about, wheelbarrows full, and a large pile dumped behind the council estate. 'Pool kept draining, didn't it, and a dry pool is no use to anyone. Still, no one could work out why all the trouble. Necessary surveys had been done, the land was meant to be stable. So they went ahead and dug it all up again.' Arne continued gesticulating wildly as if relaying his story to an audience much larger than Rob.

Twice since the leisure centre had been rebuilt, cracks appeared, dis-infected liquid seeping out, ingested below. The chalk looks bodily next to the igneous granite of the Malvern Hills, like slimed corners of a dry mouth. 'So we'll probably be back in a year anyway, you'll get it right next time,' Arne concludes. He pats him sympathetically on the back and wanders off towards a neglected metal vent. Rob sighs, sits back down, tries again with the sandwich. A flake of grout falls off his thumb as he bites. A bitterness spreads to the back of his tongue.

P-E-N-F-IN

The ground is stale with dried out morse, the air stuck with all year's pollen. Red tape, MDF board and a bundle of hi-vis jackets lie on the ground. Rob retrieves crumpled plans for a signage graphic from inside his bag. He shifts paint tins about with his toe, pushing them closer to a hastily assembled road barrier. Content with the arrangement, he leans back to survey the blank road sign. He rolls up the sleeves of his boiler suit, opens up the paints and maps out the letter 'P'. An insect he fails to recognise, embroils itself in some wayward paint residue.

As the afternoon emerges and the heat starts to dull, he stretches, the base coat complete and only the ornament to form. He inspects for mistakes, this time the lettering seems clear, the crisp lines easier to decipher. He feels for his phone and a bus card. He sends a short text *'late at work, don't wait up.'* Rob heads off in the direction of the local pub. He flicks aimlessly through dating profiles, *not much happening in Malvern* he grumbles to himself. Sighing, he approaches a man at the bar whose body bends to accommodate the wood veneer. They speak animatedly to one another

before pints are dealt out. The man is taller than Rob, his hand hovers over Rob's glass, emptying a small packet of chlorine powder into the fizzing liquid. The room fills with a familiar stench and the pair laugh. A new crowd enters. A younger figure with a mess of freckles and a serious expression takes two drinks. Rob focuses on the constellation of freckles but they soften, the pattern blurred.

As the group swells, a low mumble occupies the room. The pub-goers discuss an unwelcome pile of rubble, appearing behind the estate. Arne claims to have seen an unmarked vehicle depositing the trash. The others ignore him and consider the chalk hermitage once discovered on the grounds of the rectory. Despite being heavily eroded it had fetched a decent price. Speaking over Arne's misgivings, the group make vague plans to hire a van the following day.

Aware of the plot, Rob shifts his position, leaning closer to his date. Focused on the conversation, he manages to block out Arne's shrill protests. The pair spill out into the dark. Heading toward the leisure centre, they zigzag through the middle of the road, swerving to avoid the odd taxi. It is late,

the streets are largely vacant. Reaching the steps, Rob produces the keys and lets them through the back. Inside they slide clumsily across the tiled floor, holding onto one another as they feel their way towards the midpoint. Afterwards they huddle together along the dry pool coping. Rob's date likes to wear goggles. He says it makes time slow, watching the limbs flailing underwater, floating directionless. Rob listens intently, realising he recognises the speaker's voice from the previous morning. The distinct grumble of a bemoaned local on live radio, matches exactly the tenor of his date.

P**E**-N**D**-**F**-**E**N

The motley collection of pub-goers arrives with spades and chisels, ready to collect the backyard chalk. Dressed in adjacent pastel tones, they are delayed by an incomplete road closure sign. The ringleader, an older figure with oddly veined hands, signals for them to unload the van.

Behind the sign, a line of trestle tables form a strange deserted street party. The tables heave beneath mounds of rotting fruits and stewed meat. Embracing this change of events, the group drop their tools and settle on a seating plan.

Descending on the feast, cores and seeds are discarded, flesh is picked apart and the contents of the table quickly dissipates.

Rob arrives to work late, Arne following behind. Both are confused to meet with the entire convoy of last night's pub trip, cavorting around, jaws swaying. As the diner's faces twist in recognition, they hastily toss the slop away. Choking and spluttering they expel the contents of their mouths to the ground. Deposits of calcified mulch surround the table in steaming pools.

Amidst local gossip, the condemnation of the local swimming pool and an audible chewing, Rob attempts to complete the sign. The spelling is difficult. He misremembers the order, disorientated by the raucous spitting and flinging of food. Rob mutters under his breath.

PINVIN

P-E-N-V-IN

P-E-N-F-IN

PE-ND-F-EN

PENDE-FEN

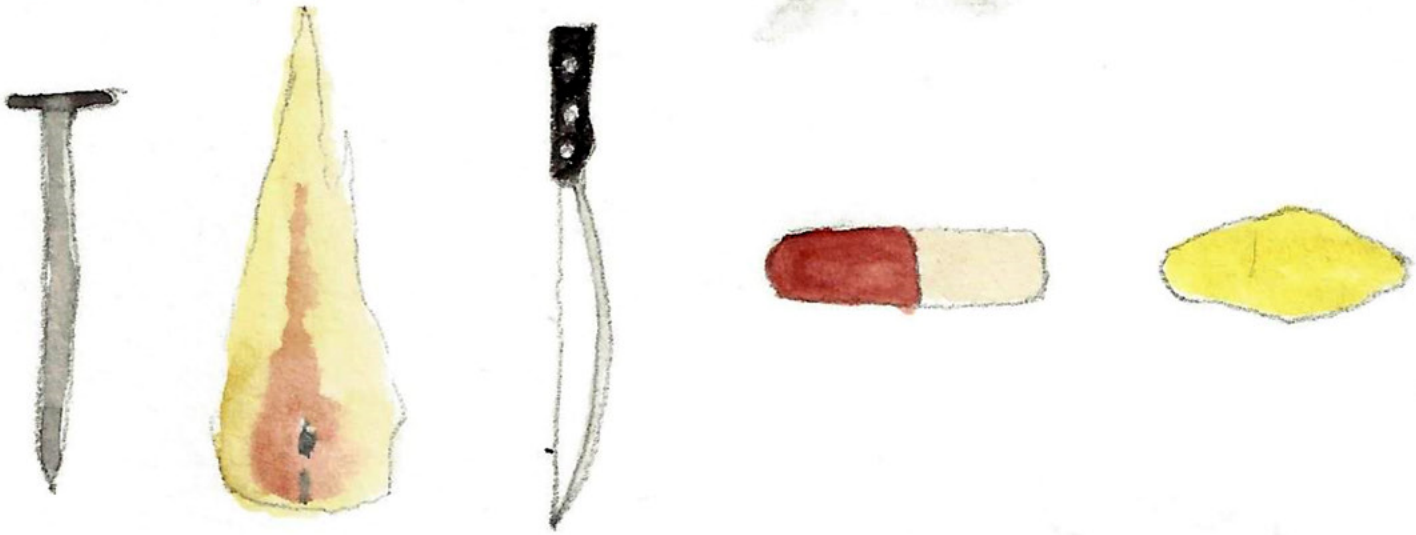
Taking up brushes and enamel paint he completes the curve of an ‘o’ and the straight edges of the descender of a ‘p’. Arne, attempting to quieten the revellers, embarks on a retelling of his chalk theories. He is humoured for a time, until he reaches the part about a buried nuclear vault. Exasperated, the ringleader points towards the ever-increasing pile of food. Leftovers strewn across the ground double, triple, in size. Rob is unable to concentrate, letters tangle into a muddled heap.

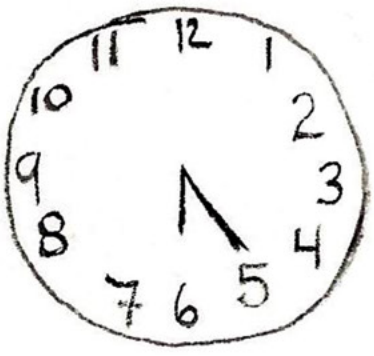
Deflated, Rob settles to the ground looking out across the fens. The road remains neither open nor closed. His manager would be waiting to hear about this latest failure. Imagining Joffer’s look of contempt, he decides to sit a little longer, turning about the misremembered place name in his mind.

Correspondence between Penda’s Fen and Pinvin, would go unrealised. In light of council funding cuts, Penda could lie dormant for at least another summer, lulled to the sound of disorder and feasting.

Still from *Penda's Fen*, directed by Alan Clarke, BBC, 1974, S04E16 of *Play for Today*.

THERE IS ~~NO~~ HOPE





Artwork: Mollie Douthit

Cover
Pet Me
oil on panel, 30x20cm

Page 02
Fire in the Hole

Page 03
Birthday Bottles

Page 04
In mourning
oil on panel, 30x20cm

Page 06
Yee Haw

Page 07
There She Is
&
Oceans and Books

Page 11
Angel Hawk

Page 12
Displacing Pain

Page 24
First 48

Page 25
Have You Ever Wanted to Go to Switzerland
oil on panel, 30x20cm

Page 38
Common traits
oil on panel, 20x30cm

Page 43
This Is Only a Test

Page 53
Ladies in Blue

Page 55
Theoretical Cake
oil on panel, 20x30cm

Page 66
Removing the Crispies Edges

Page 67
Bernies

Page 80
Hope

Page 82
Second Day

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