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STIMULUS

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ATTRACTION

Words by *Christina Lovin*

Retina scans, lenses retract,
then fan like moon
flowers at midnight.
Blink twice.
Glance down,
up, again down.

Somewhere beneath
the sternum, elevator
cables fray, release.
Viscera plunge the shaft,
then rise. Inhale, exhale.

Blood static crackles
pulse points. Leaning
tower crashes. Just there
my flaming knees
buckle and burn.

LOVE BITE

Words by *Christina Lovin*

A pinch, she claims. Then, glances down to where
two stigma, like an exclamation point,
have spread their shame into the shoulder
flesh, so tender where the arm and torso join.
She shifts the straps of bag and bra apart
as if to prove mechanics of the injury:
the perjured witness of that biting smart
of teeth: sweet suck between the lips of sigh
and moan, and blood that stains like when the moon
has pulled the salt sea higher inch by inch
then slips away to leave the shorelines strewn
with evidence. She swears, It's just a pinch,
(that pervading proof of passion's purple art)
and lays her hand across her liar's heart.

APHORISMS

Words by *Fred Lee*

The fixation on stimulation often leads to the stimulation of growth.

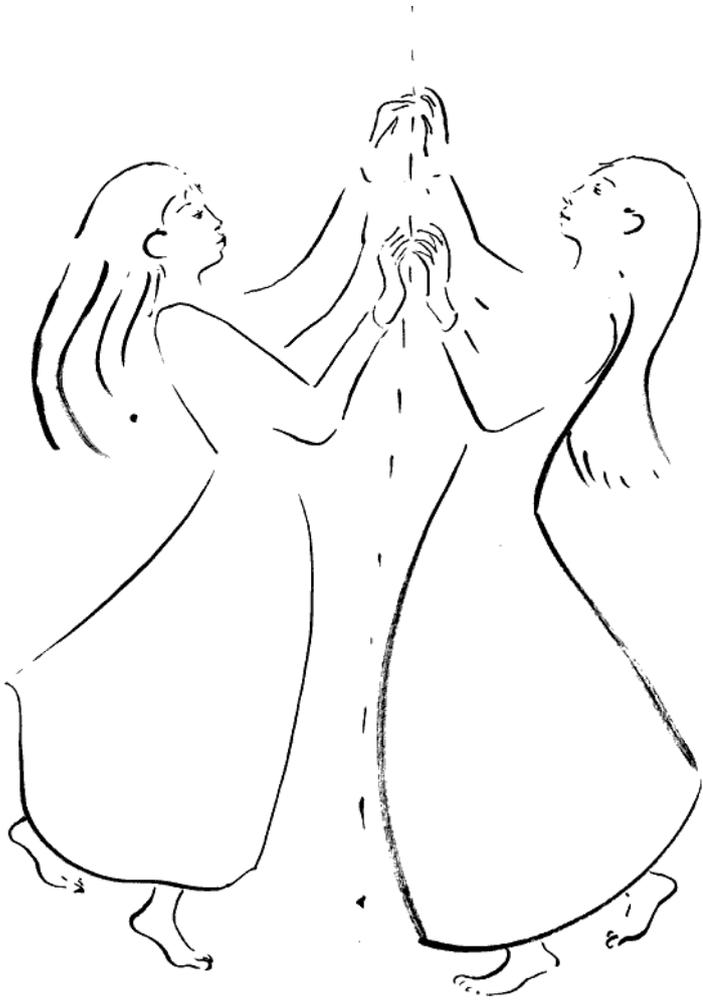
Stimulus is a physiological concept with psychological implications. Economically packaged, stimulus has an anti-political meaning.

Does freedom arise in the gap between stimulus and response? Perhaps freedom of the will does. But that freedom is paltry if it emerges at all.

Freedom resides in our responses; it resides in our stimuli, too.



Image by *Edith Bergfors*



Freedom resides in our responses; it resides in our stimuli, too.



Illustrations by *Estella Mare*





A stimulating effect is the aim of many a simulated affect.
Illustration by *Evipidis Sabatis*

B F SKINNER

Words by *Edward Alport*

<https://studylib.net/doc/9486639/b.f.-skinner>

This is Burrhus Frederick Skinner,
B. F. to his friends who never thought
BF could also stand for Bloody Fool.
Here we see him in his aspect as
Praying Mantis, breaking all of human thought,
All that we have ever cherished and adored
Into bite-sized chunks of Stimulus and Reward.

B. F. is an old, old friend of mine.
We first met in the heyday of his fame,
When every thought we had led back to Skinner,
Clutching his rational standard in its fist.
A Skinner Box was found in every lab
(Or twenty of them, one between the two of us)
A token of forward thinkingness.

It looks so tawdry and archaic now.
Did we really give those rats electric shocks?
But, Sir! Wasn't it barbaric? I mean!
Electric shocks! On those little pink rat feet!?
OK, you have to test it first, I say. Touch it.
The shock should startle it, not hurt. And they subside
Quiet now, but barely satisfied.

So much we didn't question, in the day.
Novel and Exciting is revealed
As Incomplete and Facile.
All I knew is now not only wrong
But makes me wrong as well because I knew it.
And all that cutting edge is a Bronze Age sword
Buried in a textbook tumulus.





On

Walking

*ELLEN
SAMPSON*



Author's note

The film *Things Floating in the Hudson: 11th July 2019* – a lo-fi mediation on the river that bounds the west side of New York – was developed as a psychogeography: an exploration of my embodied experience at a particular place and time. I am an artist who makes work with and about walking, using it to make performances, narratives, and objects. I walk across urban spaces and fields and occasionally trespass on other's land. Watching the film, I cannot help but think about the hours I spent running along its banks last year, the solitary pleasure of body, pavement and air, and of the ease with which I moved through space.

The Hudson is 315 miles long, but this little stretch of it was briefly mine. Made nine months into a fellowship in New York, I walked and ran this paved stretch of shore almost daily-looking at old boats, considering but never playing mini golf, wandering to pier 45 to watch the milonga on Sundays. The river interested me, the way it carves and bisects the land – the tension between the urban and wild, the ways the tides both signify and embody change. In many ways it is unlovely, cleared of the boat yards and dilapidated warehouses where Alvin Balthrop once photographed trysts. Instead it is a municipal space of leisure – the detritus not of industry but instead of play – balls, water bottles, protective clothing.

And yet there was often the sudden joy of the unexpected: a jolt of pleasure at meeting an object out of place.



On

Walking

I have always been struck by the phrase ‘a path well trodden’. A path is made by the repetition of the event of the ground ‘being trodden’ upon. We can see the path as a trace of past journeys. The path is made out of footprints – traces of feet that ‘tread’ and that in ‘treading’ create a line on the ground ... A paradox of the footprint emerges. Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. (Ahmed 2006: xix–xx)

Walking holds a particular place in our culture; not only are our movements learned, but they are socially and culturally specific: the way we walk is indicative of both who we are and who we would like to be. Walking is an intersection of the social, the bodily and the personal; it is learned, enacted and performed. More than almost any other activity, walking, renders us social beings. De Certeau famously commences *The Practice of Everyday Life* with a passage describing walking from the heights of the World Trade Center down into the streets of New York. The marks mapped out by our footsteps are, for de Certeau, cartographies of social structures; they are material and temporal manifestations of our social networks:

Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together. In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of these ‘real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city.’ They are not localized; it is rather they that spatialize. (de Certeau 1984: 97)

The pathways we take are our routes through the world, our negotiations with the multiple forces and agencies at play. The paths we take produce and confirm our identities in an iterative cycle of repetitions and performances. As Ahmed so beautifully describes of paths and the orientations of the body: ‘Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created’ (Ahmed 2006: xix–xx). These lines might be physical, such as those De Certeau writes of, or social, the ways we navigate familiar and unfamiliar cultural terrains, separate from the road and an indication of desired trajectories (Van Wolputte 2018).

In crossing space we are in dialogue with multiple agencies beyond our own. These encounters, the meetings of both human and non-human affecting bodies, are individual, and bodily: cumulative and iterative. These meetings of agencies are the spatial, material and social networks that locate us within the world. We are produced by the spaces we inhabit and, in turn, negotiate those same socially and materially imposed identities by crossing and re-crossing space.

Walking is a confluence of agencies: as we cross space we negotiate the social structures which contain us, veering off track or toeing the line. Though the forces we negotiate may be social or political, it is our material culture which enacts these structures upon us. The things we meet in the world affect us. The shapes of our environments afford us certain movements just as our garments do. In moving our body through the world, we are in an entangled and complex negotiation of the body amongst the agencies which surround it. Meyer's description of how landscape shapes and reframes human experience, so that the spaces we have built shape not only our movements but also our conceptualizations of space and time, illustrates this particularly well:

The steps themselves represent a local time; the minutes required to climb up. In Venice, the steps of the stairway rhythmize the walk through the city. ... The city walker experiences the transition from the rhythm of the steps to another rhythm, clear, yet unknown, still to be discovered. (Meyer 2008: 158)

These groupings of bodies and things are the construction of the self in the world, so that 'bodily schema' (Schilder 1935) extends beyond the surfaces of the body into both the things which surround it and the environments (landscapes, bodies, screens) it inhabits. The spaces we move through act upon us just as do the agencies (material and other) in the things we wear, so that we are in a constant position of being affected, whilst at the same time affecting. Walking is an immersion in a cycle of affects: of meeting bodies that affect us. Walking is 'being in the world' – and in this 'being in' we are also becoming – changed and transformed by the meeting of agencies other than our own. The transformative nature of our encounters with the world is recorded both in the body-self – we are changed both physically and psychically in these meetings – and in our material culture. Ruggerone terms these transformations 'becomings':

The living corporeality of our practices, the fleshy experience of life we sense but cannot fully describe, like the feeling of walking through the city (De Certeau 1984), or sinking into a warm bath or wearing our favorite dress, all these are examples of perpetual becomings, events in which our bodies transform as a result of encounters with other bodies (human and non-human). (Ruggerone 2016: 8)

This text is an edited extract from Ellen Sampson's new book *Worn*, which will be published by Bloomsbury Academic in December 2020. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/worn-9781350087187/>

The short film *Things Floating in the Hudson: 11th July 2019* can be viewed at <http://www.ellensampson.com/things-floating-in-the-hudson>

Things Floating in the Hudson: 11th July 2019

1. Burger wrapper
2. Tennis ball
3. Glove
4. Footballs
5. Kneepad
6. Bottle
7. Tennis ball
8. Pank
9. Bike helmet
10. Leaf
11. Bottles
12. Ring

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FOUR 'VILLAIN'-ELLES

Words by *Christina Lovin*

The Female Praying Mantis Eats Her Mate

You do your yoga while I meditate
on our love life and entomology:
the female praying mantis eats her mate

post coitus when he won't capitulate
to her urges. From pop criminology—
go do your yoga—let me meditate

on Bobbitt's spouse who was led to castrate.
Personally, I cull tautology:
The female praying mantis eats her mate

or she doesn't. Don't underestimate
my whetted interest in phrenology—
yes, I do yoga and I meditate—

but give me your head, I'll gladly dictate
your name on a page in martyrology.
The female praying mantis eats her mate,

but first she takes time to decapitate—
Orpheus's lost head ain't just mythology.
So you do your yoga. I'll premeditate
how the female praying mantis eats her mate.

Mites Are Having Sex on Your Face Right Now

Mites are having sex on your face right now!
Though their carnal capers may not be perceived
they're boffing right under your nose anyhow.

Sometimes I hear Marvin Gay singing real low
"Let's Get It On" in my ear, and believe
mites are having sex on my face right now.

Then I catch Barry White crooning somehow
"Oh Baby, Baby!" he rumbles and heaves.
There's boinking right under my nose. And how

should I feel with this erotic luau
ensuing right on me? Should I be peeved
with mites having sex on my face right now?

How much wild copulation should you allow?
They're humping and hunching until they're bug-eyed
while bonking right under your nose anyhow.

Should we encourage them, bug Herr and Frau?
We are the earth on which they're conceived.

Mites are having sex on your face right now—
they're boning right under your nose anyhow.

Dung Beetles Find Home by Searching the Stars

Dung beetles find home by searching the stars:
their shitty lives brightened by astral bliss
lost on fools and wanderers alike. Ours

were the sun and moon: five houses, more cars,
your kids, mine. A morning fuck. A goodnight kiss.
Dung beetles find home by searching! The stars

do not move. We did. Cornfields to sea to Mars
it seemed. The road not taken always missed,
lost as fools and wanderers alike. Hours

apart for years now, I push grief backwards,
tumbling this turd of pain like Sisyphus.
Dung beetles find home by searching the stars,

looking behind. Such power—avatars
of love misguided, divorces, and splits—
lost on fools and wanderers alike. Our

sparring aside, we might have healed those scars,
but here's another way of saying this:
dung beetles find home by searching those stars
lost on fools and wanderings like ours.

Silverfish Mating is Lengthy and Slow

Silverfish mating is lengthy and slow:
three phases like stages can sure be a bore.
When one wants vivace, the other largo,

it's better to find a common tempo.
These bugs take their time to establish rapport.
Silverfish mating is lengthy and slow:

First, touchy-feely. Back off. Say Hello.
Then she chases him for a senseless encore.
Which one wants vivace, which wants largo?

At long last, there's bug sex larghissimo—
absolutely no rushing this insect l'amour.
Silverfish mating is lengthy and slow,

so whether your lover's a belle or a beau—
it's best to keep pace with your sweet paramour,
if one wants vivace, the other largo.

Perhaps Verlaine would have not shot Rimbaud
had making sweet music been less a chore
like silverfish mating, lengthy and slow,
when one wants vivace, the other largo.

APRES SAINT LEONARD LOIN À L'OUEST

Photographer *Justino Esteves*
Production *Alexandre Misericordia*
@ Storny + Misericordia
Hair and Makeup *Fanny Thubé*





FLORIAN

Jacket WALES BONNER

Shirt ROCHAS

Tie HARPO

Hat STETSON

ALIRIO, MOHAMED et JUSTINO

Jeans LEV'S

Boots CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN

Hat STETSON





AMANDINE

Accessories KIMHÉKIM

Boots vintage

MARIE-JEANNE

Suit ALENA AKHMADULINA

Boots vintage





LENNY

Shirt and Trousers DAVY PARIS

CHARLOTTE

Shirt VICTORIA ANDREYANOVA

Jewellery BORDERLINE by ATELIER PAULIN





OUMAIMA

Dress DODO BAR OR
Top WALK OF SHAME
Belt HARPO
Shoes VANS

FATIMA

Dress JULIEN FOURNIE HAUTE COUTURE





JUSTINO

MARIE-JEANNE

Shirt and dress MARGARET HOWELL

Earrings HARPO





DANIELE

Suit MUGLER

MATHIS

Shirt and trousers ALLED MARTINEZ
Hat STETSON



AN ENCOUNTER, OR "HOW I BECAME A PHILOSOPHER"

Words by *Max Leyf*

"Demonic birds," I burst out as I heaved myself from my desk and lumbered across the room. A band of magpies had perched askance along the balcony outside, guided by an instinctual strategy to cry havoc with the greatest acoustic advantage. I closed the window with a thud, knowing it was more of a token than a resolution, for the double-pane of glass remained as transparent to their insolent and incessant squawking as it was to the sunlight streaming through it. Returning to my chair, I took my book in hand. The book had remained open to the 80th page. "Monadology" was printed topmost, and immediately subordinate was the heading "Section 16." I began to read:

Furthermore, one must concede that perception, and all that depends upon it, are inexplicable on purely mechanical grounds; that is to say, by means of figures and motions.

The magpies persisted in their strident cries. I redoubled my efforts of concentration, intent on preparing myself for the following day, when I planned to vanquish Professor Francis on the field of argument:

Suppose there were a machine, so manufactured as to think, feel, and have perception: it might be imaginatively increased in size (while maintaining the same proportions) so that one might enter into it even as into a mill. That being so, we should, on examining its interior, find only parts which work one upon another, and never anything by which to explain a perception.

There must be something wrong with this analogy since it is an obvious fact that the brain produces thoughts just like the mill produces flour. That was it: there is no mention of flour in *Monadology*. The argument held no weighting for the train while I can't

Immanuel from Prussia that borders Russia and Tchaikovsky's swans

the mighty birds and yet so soft does music

On my mind alight, so soft,

why does it alight so soft?...

I raise my eyelids, which I did not know had fallen. The room is full of light that seems to have no single source. My gaze catches an empty glass on the table near the window. Like a prism, it showers the table with a thousand subtle rays of colour. My head swims and one of the refractions penetrates my eye, filling my mind with momentaneous light. At once I notice a faint and lilting music, as though of voices singing even as they speak. Along the balcony I see a retinue of beings in their trim, arrayed in piebald iridescent cloaks whose faces shine with a strange and inward beauty. I raise myself expecting a sense of heaviness that would ordinarily accompany this deed. To my surprise, elation floods my limbs and they spring to action. With an excellence that nearly outstrips the speed of thought, they hasten to my spirit's bidding and bear me across the room as a cloud on a sprightly wind. I unlatch the door and the visitors address me in seeming unison: "Hail fellow, from heralds of the vernal goddess, know that Zephyrus bears our Lady hither, your reception she requesting."

Imagining myself to be taken aback by the unexpected announcement, and nevertheless the words proceed as naturally as the rustle of leaves follows the touch of a breeze in spring: "With reverence do I respect her arrival," I responded, each word seeming backwardly to shape the thought that was its cause.

Before my wondering eyes appears a figure with flowing hair like the grain of birch-wood, and eyes like new leaves. "Sophia," I whisper. I continue, suddenly proud: "These seven years I have made myself your disciple, and I am not the worse for it. My mind has been whetted through trial and through study. Today it glitters like a brand as I skewer my opponents in the ring of disputation."

"Dear boy," she says, with words that laugh like light on rippling streams, "remove the bandages from your eyes; the fool alone thinketh himself wise."

I am filled with a rush of shame at my petty conceits. She looks upon me, and from her gaze I feel a swell of pity. "Forgive me," I exclaim, "I have abused your name with literal-mindedness and profaned your altar with idols of dialectic."

“Your repentance is your entry into the shrine of knowledge. The only heart who can look on Wisdom’s feature is the one who sees through the eyes with love. By this light alone can mortals read in the Book of Nature.”

“Lady I think I am besotted; a swell of happiness gives shape to airy nothings. But still I believe, and have heard it said, ‘Love is reason’s blindness.’”

“Silly boy, before you never heard nor looked upon the world at all.
Love gives light to your dark unkindness.
Without love’s sight, can reason only grope in blindness.”

“How then can I know my thoughts do not deceive,
When all I’ve learned, would counsel disbelieve?”

“Ask not ‘How can I know?’” but ‘How to love.’
For you cannot love what is false, nor what you cannot conceive.
Wisdom lights the way for love’s feathery warmth to land,
And love takes lovely Wisdom by the loving hand.”

I reach out my hand and at once I am swept up on a billow of euphoria. Her voice rings through my mind as sunlight through a crystal. She continues:

“Lo! The green grass waxes towards the sun, and the crocus reaches its tender petals for the sky. But truth will pass you by if you attend no further. The grass is the countenance of higher beings, and the blossom is the face of the spirit’s mystery. You must not only look on these outsides, but learn to listen inwardly. When you attend with care and reverence, a world of secret music will announce itself. The whole living world will at once resound in sacramental song.

“A tiger-lilly, triumphant, upward-opening and cupped, sounds the joyful blast of trumpets.
The angels play on tulips as on flutes. Violets ring like tiny triangles. Poppies sound in soft and plangent keys.
But as you listen deeper you will see that these instruments do not sound of their own accord, but attune themselves to celestial harmonies. Their music is an echo of the stars above, And angelic hierarchies that sing in choirs of love,
The love that moves the sun and other stars.

“Behold the birch; its whole form resounds
With intervals measured by the music of the spheres.
The tonic rumbles, stern and muffled, in its solid trunk.
The second sounds about its first furcation where the bulk divides and ramifies.
The third emerges with the branch and rounds off its major in the bud.
The fourth sends its keynote through all that’s green.
And the fifth achieves its glory in the shining blossom.
The sixth opens not from in the tree, but in being seen
By other beings from without, in parity and complement;
A bee alighting on the tender-opened couch
Within the sanctum of the blossom’s bower
Sounds the sixth for a brief ambrosial hour
The seventh sings of longing and departure, autumn’s key

The octave echoes in the seed, the birth to be.

“Behold the sylphs that teach the colours to mingle
And weave the elements with air and light
Behold the undines that with the ebb and flow
Of sap, meander in devoted rhythmic tides
Behold the gnomes, like miners shrewd and quick of wit
They lay the roots like briny tracks of life
And lo! Let your glance graze but do not tarry
On the fleeting forms of streaming fire
That wend about the withering blossoms
Reaping warmth from flowers as they fade
And the shining summer spirits upward bearing
To where light patiently waits to receive her own.
Queen of the Elements: now you know the quinta-essentia.

“Before this day, as skies made dark by stormclouds,
So your eyes were hid by scales of lovelessness
Let them fall and swift depart
For the eye that clear is portal to the heart
Which is love’s exaltation and his throne
As heaven’s vaulted ceiling to the sun and stars
That dispel the earth her gloomy shroud
So Nature’s book is closed up tight
To the one whose eyes convey no light
You see by the same light you consent give
In which you think and feel and also live.
I take my leave, adieu, adieu
For if my form does not depart from you
My sun will never fill your inner sky
My light will never stream forth from your eye.”

Her words seemed to coruscate and flutter in the spring air. I gasped. At once I began to weep. May my tears cleanse and wash away my sin and idiocy, and baptise me into the church of Wisdom and of truth! During the entire encounter, I had failed to notice that she had been peopling the meadow with flowers with the substance of her speech. As though in intimated recollection, I beheld every word as it descended with a flutter to perch as a blossom, like a thousand butterflies that bind themselves to the green earth. I had failed to see that with the play of expression over her features as she spoke, she had been colouring the landscape in infinite gradients of light and shadow. Each creature was a unique prayer to Wisdom, and I only had to allow my heart to be instructed in this exultation.

I stood on the balcony and looked out on the vibrant field below. The troupe of magpies had retired to the roof where they now held conference in a forgotten tongue. Nature was a speech, a symphony, whose every moment had already transformed into the one to follow. I recalled a line from one of Rilke’s letters: “how all things are in migration.” What remained? I could neither match nor capture abundance of creation. All that remained was to sing praises to the world’s glory in my own poor tongue; to add my small voice to the chorus of gladness. I was buzzing inwardly with a fluent euphoria as I returned to the open book on my desk. I chuckled faintly. Perhaps the reader will not be taken aback if I remark at the childishness with which “the hard problem

of consciousness” now appeared to me. One might as well quibble over how mere syntax could give rise to a formulation of the problem in the first place. I returned to the balcony, book in hand, and seated myself against the south-facing wall. I took up a pen and did not set it down again until I had scribbled out the following modest lines, which I have transcribed from the margin of my copy of Leibniz’s *Monadology*:

Before the world was made I knew her
Her joy was my completion and delight
She was my only muse and inspiration
By her breath the days were numbered
The seasons were her days and nights
For her the depths and heights were sundered
The axis of the world became her spine
To join the Earth and Sky in life divine
On her hair I patterned plays of sunlight
Which sparks and dances on Elysian streams
Her eyes became the sunbeams
Blithe, the world’s joy and lumination
For her form, the rolling Earth did I design
And all the trees and grasses fine
Her smile made me think of flowers
And for her soft repose, I made the bowers
And about her heart demarked the sacred garden
That stretches four full chambers wide
Therein the life of creatures to reside
And flowing thence in rivers out of Arden
Wherein our spirit-selves abide.

Movies Mystery Magic <-> A simulation-stimulation

Bengali Original by *Buddhadev Bhattacharya*

Translation by *Sourav Roy*

Illustration by *Ansuman Chakraborty*

(1)

Darkened screen, clammed up theatre, the air achingly curious, and the mandatory whispered voiceover (baritone):

“Where the night streets are lonely; and the light from neither row of lamposts can reach the darkness in the middle; there, in that hypergeometric strip; the stray dogs come to do their nightly aaa-ooo-eee-iii-s. All reason topple over tongue-tied at that inauspicious territory. Legend has it that unsated spirits rain down there.”

Fade in, 'suspicious' music plays

The first shot of the film – a street at the dead of the night – no sign of life to be seen – shutters are down in all shops. The houses are encrusted with dreams – muddy gold in hue. The cold neon filter has washed all the flowing life off the streets. It has also made the night sky irrelevant. The camera waits, then looks around silently, obediently. Suddenly from the right side of the screen a pack of stray dogs go – bow wow

wow oooooooooooooo – their shrill cry takes over the entire screen, so our eyes finds an alley to escape – on the left side of the screen, between two rows of houses – barely a few feet wide – it waits with some blood-curdling secret, hesitant to join the main road. The dogs stop their ruckus but wait for something to spill out of the alley with a menacing grrrrrrrrrr. Then that too goes away, full silence returns. A nasty ice-cold mute-moment –

suddenly the surround sound of utensils shattering on a kitchen floor – our eyes pick up the panic of our ears and we see – we see a chunky bald man with a tight paunch – wearing gold-framed glasses – bursting on to the screen and running for his life; chased by something or someone. His bottom-heavy body in motion almost topples over by gravity; but he saves himself, swerves, corrects course and turns right. The dogs have already started making a noisy nuisance around him. The camera goes dab smack onto his face - sweat is dripping, clothes soaked through. Keeping the sweating man in low angle, the camera starts hurtling noisily ahead of the character. The

background score huffs, puffs and pants while the lens breaks the fall of fat, oily drops of sweat – The man seems like a dripping sticker on our visual consciousness. But the viewers stay in the dark about who or whether anybody was chasing him.

Gunshot! The lens gets a few blood splatters but which body part gets it? We don't know. The man falters and tries to run again. Another gunshot! His ugly mug stumbles over the camera lens.

Cut. The camera goes into the flashback mode, half an hour back. The location is a local market – cramped, muddy, stuffy – open drains are filled with the detritus of vegetables, blood too. When walking through, people like us pinch our noses; a wide variety of dead flesh is being carved. If you don't want to see the heads and ribs and other body parts being sized up to turn live animals into dead meat, you better keep your eyes shut for a few seconds.

The Catfish-Carp-*Hilsa*-Minions-fish cleavers are

glistening under the naked light bulb; the sprightly camera slithers, pans and captures a meat shop – the small TV is playing an overspiced Bhojpuri film, over that we hear the voice of the owner, a dark fatso - “Sirji, we don't soak the goat, no cheating with our meat, the weight is very correct...” He bares his stained teeth, almost black, in feigned friendliness. After showing us this, the camera goes to a single storey house behind this shop. The doors are locked. A door opens, and a man comes out. It's a gambling den, mostly cards. The long, narrow room looks even more congested in the narrow screen. The benches are arranged in two rows – with just enough space for one person to walk, crab-wise. Everybody is deep into trying out their luck, bodies bent forward in attention, with a glass of hooch close at hand – erases the pain of loss, for wash-rinse-repeat. The counter for cash and hooch are hidden deeper inside the maw of this den - the chunky bald man with a tight paunch comes from there – walks to the camera via the narrow gap - his phone starts ringing in his breast pocket – he stumbles on a gambler's stretched feet – after getting

a nasty look, the gambler smiles sheepishly and fixes his pose. We know why the gambler goes sheepish – our man looks like a six feet tall big brown bear wearing delicate golden framed glasses and a balding pate – his round face as snarly as a dog's. He hisses and grunts on the phone, incomprehensible. His lower lip is curled outwards, pressing the juice out of the tobacco stuffed close to the gum. His hisses and grunts, translated - “ Wait up, you prick! Dumping the stuff ...coming in half hour – that kid of the MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) ...buggering me raw with missed calls!” He steps out and spits a big, black blob on the lens and on our face, and disappears.

While he walks down the road, missed calls keep pouring in. His face drips with irritation. His right hand holds a small oblong handbag, the strap is held around his wrist, but the shine of a thick gold bracelet peeps through. Our man walks with a busy gait. This whole flashback is happening in a reddish semi-lit world – with some brutal stock music – the kind one calls 'deadly' in Bengali.

In almost-pitch darkness, a bare building under construction. The camera captures the ghostly building – the black pond next – the slice of blackish field next to it – as an eye from the sky. Then it suddenly zooms in and alights on the terrace. It turns around, gingerly checks out the semi-darkness and then races down the stairs. It is too dark to see much. The camera descends three floors and barges into a room. The entire screen snuffs itself with magical blue light. Three or four male bodies are strewn around on the rough cement floor. Only one man is standing up dialling his mobile phone non-stop. Is he the last man standing? Are the rest quick or dead? The blue light turns a shade more sickening. The camera keeps throwing its strobe-like gaze on the floored guys.

Suddenly a paunched man climbs up the dark flight of stairs and stands in the blue light. This is that baldie with the handbag. The flashlight in his mobile is lit and he starts growling before he is done climbing the stairs, “You dickheads will take stuff only from me and can't wait for a second? I fucking gave you extra stock yesterday, thought you won't need today....but what pricks you dickheads are...” After vomiting out

his grudge, he takes a big breath and stands on the landing. Before we could guess anything , a bullet whistles past his left ear – his paunch starts running ahead of him, for dear life...

Cut. And the camera has escaped from the flashback sequence. The place is now the open foyer of the High Court. The public prosecutor is mobbed suitably by TV channel cameras. His white shirtfront is shining through the V of his black coat. Some clueless bystanders are also around. The mob and the reporters are making their due share of white noise in the background. The prosecutor speaks with rehearsed respectability: “ You must be aware of this ghastly crime story. Still, I want to reiterate the demands I want to present to the honourable members of the court.” He takes out a paper and holds it, “you might already know, that among the four young lives extinguished by this unknown assassin was a poisoning with a drug overdose, was the son of our respected MLA. And another innocent bystander was murdered because he was a witness to this crime. Can you imagine how perverted this assassin is...” His voice trails off. Camera leaves the court premises. The scene vanishes.

**

I've no idea how I ended up in this Cinema Hall. And how I've been turned into a shareholder of this ghastly entertainment scheme. I am sitting in the luxury row, with a tray of fragrant steaming lunch on my lap, but I don't feel entertained. I can see rows of dark heads gaping at the megascreen. Are they thinking at all? Or overthinking? Maybe their afterthoughts are about the complex visual politics of lens-based art forms...or not.

Before we can think any more, the film restarts. I just realised it was not an intermission, but someone pressed pause...

Wan light of the silver screen in the hall

A lonesome night. Busyness has downed its shutter for the day at a mofussil and retired. A girl clad in white salwar kameez is almost running on the pitched, dark road – her body is soaked in desolation. We see her from the back vigorously moving in the narrow screen - faceless. A long braid snakes down her spine and the strap of her bag is constantly slipping off her left shoulder thanks to the agitated pace of walking. She keeps adjusting it. When the camera zooms out a little, we see two men are following her, from the right side. They are tall, their body lingo loafer-like, wearing track suit pants and loose wife-beaters. Their hands are roving across their own torsos unmindfully. A strain of psychadelic music is slowly looming larger across the screen, overcoming the darkness -

The camera hones its gaze rightwards and toggles between the movement of the heavy breast of the girl, the self-carressing hands of the men and the dark street. The right breast, the right halves of the torso. If these close-ups were taken from the left side, would the sequence have been perfectly mirrored? The director doesn't mention. Anyway, in this sequence, the three close-ups start periodically rotating amongst themselves. The cuts become faster and faster, as if moving towards an escape velocity. Soon the cuts get too close to tell them apart, suddenly the camera stops. The woman's right hand now enters her handbag – there's a glimmer of cold metal – the two men turn around and run for their lives – the close-up of the woman's face: hardened jaws, stern gaze -

The camera starts a backstroke. It reaches out and captures the frame of an autorickshaw rushing through the darkness of a midnight road – with the same deftness of the nightvision of an owl. The trumpeting of popular Bollywood music floats on the night air. The auto rends through the street, through empty fields, through ghostly ponds -

A girl was sitting in the auto, that woman we just met. The frame was lit with green so her formal shirt and tight jeans were looking darker. She was sandwiched between two blokes – the camera is the

invisible fourth, sidling up to them. The blokes have large sweat stains spreading around their armpits, the girl's face's dotted with perspiration, and Hindi music is loud. If you could add the dimesion of smell to the whole movie screen, the whole audience would have been stuffed inside a gigantic, sweaty armpit. The girl was egging the driver on to drive faster, faster, and the rickshaw was flying, almost...

The driver set his side mirror to fit the girl's body in. With an eye on that mirror, he cuts off the sound system - “Why so hurry, darling?! Will you do sssssusssuuu...” then he starts whistling through his teeth, ssssss -

Suddenly the twos starts getting into a queue to become fours and the air gets heavier with fear. The bloke on her right side grabs the hint and mimics in a girly voice, “Stop the auto on one side, dickhead! We will all sssuuussuuu together. Only one thing, we will all pee standing.” He puts stress on the 's'-s and then grins like a straggly tomcat appreciating his own joke - The girl has tears in her eyes. In a choked-up voice, he says, “Brother, please drive faster. My folks are all stressed - ”

“Oh ok, if you have problem peeing standing will all sit and pee...”

“Stop fucking around and stop the auto on that side!” the gym-boy sitting on her right hollers.

The auto stops next to a dead pond. Bushy undergrowth all around – the stubborn girl acts difficult, they all have to work hard to drag her down. Her body is thrashed around into the maw of a loose bush. The theatre fills with deafening sounds of the cricket, the girl's muffled screams – the naked dance of the crazy rapists -

A parallel frame appears on the screen – deep inside a tropical jungle, tribal men are eating a girl up, someone chopping up her breast with a knife, someone tearing out her lower lip with teeth. Enough cannibalism to make even horror movie pros shit bricks. But it all looks overwrought – some trick of the director or the camera guy, may be...

Both the frames are paused at the same time. From there the original frame of rape gets uploaded to a website.



Title: Hot Movie Scene; Category: Entertainment; Notice: Age-restricted Video;

From that website the old rape scene restarts. Below the video there are options for 'Like' 'Dislike' and 'Comments' section. Then the cursor double clicks itself on 'Related Videos' and they start playing relentlessly. The video clips are rape scenes from popular films, mostly gang rape scenes; the sly foxy eyes of the villain, his crooked smile -the pleadings of the victim - dragging herself away on the ground – trickling blood; after watching five odd clips – my senses go numb, my head feels empty...

After watching rape after rape when I was getting comfortably numb, ignoring the screamed demands on even my inner organs to get erections – the browser page vanishes, the rape continues in full screen mode.

The audio and the visual both get more hellish. Suddenly among all these manly bodyplay a gunshot! One of three got it right in the forehead, before the blood can come out of the bullet hole, he falls face down on the girl. The other two get it below the belt, in the next second. Their trousers soaked in blood, they join the chorus of groaning with the girl. Two more gunshots till total silence! The raped, and three flaccid rapists around her. The next frame gives cover to the girl, she sits up – without her left breast – and hollering; the silhouette of the gunman reloads her gun and gives it to the girl; after he leaves the girl touches the muzzle to her forehead and falls off like a sack -

Back to the foyer of the High Court, the prosecutor continues “...there are evidences against the assassin to hand over loaded firearms to civilians, we are collecting more conclusive evidences for our honourable judges. Imagine, if things go on like this, will there be any law in the land?...”

The location shifts again to the multi-meat, crowded bazaar. It is still early in the evening, but the market is thronged by early bird shoppers, impatient to go home on their way back from work. The giant fish heads are rolling one after another with the rapid handiwork at the cleavers.

On the other side there's the gambling den, smelling widely of hooch, people bent down on tables to look for their lucky break. There's something moving swaying at the far end of the den. Could be a woman, this could be a sex den, too...the reddish light doesn't help much –

We've been in this meat shop before. That lungi-clad fatty is sitting on his haunches, the hamhands are lolling below his knees. There's a long queue at the shop today. The TV is playing a raunchy Bhojpuri film song. The gentlemen shoppers are stealing a glance or two at that, then it's back to the meat...

Close to the shop, beyond the gambling den, there's a space where the lights of the naked bulbs don't reach, the moonlight and the darkness have gathered in a pool there. A man's silhouette bends down, puts something there, startles himself by his own act and starts screaming “Bomb! Bomb!” The bomb scare gets booming across the bazaar in seconds. There's a split-second of lull - decision taking happens. Then everything goes pell mell, the muddy streets gets muddier – the den empties in seconds, the benches overturn, the people push each other over, a few necks are thrown right at the giant blade of the cleaver, the blade does its job as well as a desi guillotine – dead men, scared men, dead fish, man head, fish head – all in all a cutthroat cadaverous cacophony.

The bomb squad finally arrives with sniffing dogs. When those police dogs are done sniffing, their stray cousins start theirs. White letters appear on the screen - *N.B: all dogs can sniff out bombs as well as ghosts.*

After a lot of combing, hemming and hawing, the bag is picked up and found to be stuffed with drugs. The cops lay them out on a table to show how much and how many kinds – then the camera cuts-

Next morning. Lots of newspapers on a lot of tea tables, with the same headline, “Bomb Blast, Many

Dead” with grisly pictures of the dead. One of the headlines, “Four Killed in Bomb Scare” being read by the chest of a headless man (his head is out of the frame). Headline – front page photo – two heads – four bodies – a bag of drugs in the inset.

The prosecutor's open session is back on camera, “... the accused raised a false bomb scare and got four people killed. Although they were not innocent...they had pending criminal cases against them for running an illegal gambling and sex shop in that market. They were antisocials, yes, but no one can be allowed to take the law in their own hands... We are presenting all these cases with adequate evidences and arguments to the honourable judge. Hopefully by the next hearing we will know his verdict...” Before he could finish camera gives a long, loud beep and we see 'no signal' sign on the screen.

The famous newschannel's breaking news appears on the screen : “*The Mysterious Assassin is Unmasked!*” The scrolling advertisement below reads: BURN FACT LOSE WEIGHT UP TO...

The calmly young girl reads the text from the teleprompter, “At last, thanks to the exclusive research from our newschannel the identity of the mysterious assassin lies exposed. According to the team report, this man, now in his mid thirties lost his parents very early. Then this orphan boy gets recruited in a band of beggars in this city. After almost a decade of life in the mean streets, he joins the infamous antisocial Cut-eye Bachchu. Slowly he becomes Bachchu's right hand man. We have spoken to the other gang members. They said they noticed an aloofness in the assassin for the last few months. Probably he was bored with run of the mill crimes. He has become a pro in all of them. After everybody slept off at night, often he looked at his hands with tears in his eyes. That must have been a symptom of his mental breakdown, his close acquaintances in the gang, say. The experts all agree on his full mental derangement, currently...” A few 'artist's impression' animations are shown. The anchor girl resurfaces on the screen: “Let's see what the people in the street have to say.” The camera shows us a few incoherent bytes and sheepish smiles of pedestrians. Clearly they have been caught unawares....

The camera leaves for the court. This set of court interior is pretty dated, complete with the blind justice statue. On the right the accused is standing at the docks next to a few cops in uniform and plain clothes. Some portraits of great men out of focus, the moving pendulum of the clock...The judge is writing with deep concentration, the hammer lies next to him...a few feet away the writing clerk waits.

The camera finally locks on to the face of the accused. He has a pleasant, fair face with a bit of bad boy smile. Slowly his vampirically fair face gets fairer, the white stripes in his jailbird costume grow wider than the black stripes, the brightness is turned up so high that it hurts our eyes...

Pin drop silence in the court; the verdict is about to

be announced. The faces in the advocate bench are dripping with eagerness. A tension hangs lightly in the air. Suddenly I start doubting whether I am going blind, every time the camera captures the accused, I feel like a pile of almost identical images of his face are being badly superimposed on each other – with added sound effect of electric sparks; but I am reassured by the rest of the frame, everything else in the court is in HD clarity, maybe the director is doing some VFX with the accused, some illusion -

The judge is ready to pronounce his verdict, all eyes are on him, including the camera's-

Suddenly we hear the subdued noise of an explosion, the camera shakily turns to the left. The accused is not there at the dock any more, there are millions of red ants instead. And these red ants attack the audience who were slobbering for a fresh kill...the ants get in everywhere under their clothes...drives them crazy... somehow they run out of the court room helter-skelter – but thousands of red ants leave the court premises in a disciplined, army-like row – camera cuts again, an explosion – the accused explodes into a mountain of red ants – cut – director's name appears – the high-frequency music is ear-splitting...

The End

S-T-I-M-U-L-U-S

STIMULUS SLIT SILT SMUTMIST LIST SUIT SLUT LIST LUST MUST SIT

brown-study works

STIMULUS

SCENE # 1

EXT. NIGHT. OPEN FIELD

Is this how we are going to begin?

-Yes, why not?

Do beginnings really matter?

-Yes.

More than the endings?

-No?

Every story begins the same way.
The way we know. Each might end differently though.

*-What's more important then?
For all the stories to begin the same way,
or for every story to end differently?*

If all the stories do not begin the same way,
can they end differently?

*-If all the stories ended similarly,
will each beginning be different?*

SLIT

At first it tasted of sumac, and then iron. I didn't want to play the guessing game, it might as well have been just about anything. The colour had continued changing for days now. Night after night I kept waking up,

frightened I had slept on it, rubbed it into the fabric, that it had disappeared, that it had grown, that it came from between my legs. I dreamt one night that it was being scrubbed, scrubbed torturously and in vain but if I didn't stop him it would eventually fade. Then yesterday I spilled some hot sauce. Now there were two spots. One a bright red, the other a deep dark brown slowly turning purple, like blood clotting. So then I took out bottles and tubs, and soft fruit from the fridge and laid them out on the bed. Each one would leak, would fall, would get squished. All by mistake of course, I wouldn't do it purposely. It would look like the recreation of the scene of crime. I decided to take a nap, I wouldn't be able to help what happened when I wasn't conscious. But I sat up after no more than twenty minutes or perhaps two; I couldn't will myself to sleep, that would be cheating.

I wish it wasn't satin. It was an experiment, there would be wine and music and sex. Satin would look good. Nothing happened that night, no one came home, no one played music and the wine did not spill on the white satin bed sheet. But the next afternoon the stain was there. It was fresh that day, there was only a small window of time so the culprit was obvious. But what was the crime?

SILT

There is a process to exfoliation. A roommate once brought back snake skin. My mother said the snake would smell it and come with its family. Why though? You abandoned it, to be picked up by strangers. Unless it was all a scheme, and the point was to be able to trace it back to the picker. So they could be murdered. Murder by snake skin.

Snakes exfoliate regularly. My mother does too. I don't. They say that in a space station, the detritus- dead skin- simply floats in clouds, without gravity. Invisible dust on earth becomes snake skin in space stations without good ventilation.

But that's natural exfoliation. My mother uses a coir scrub and chickpea powder everyday to reveal smooth skin. You can also use acid peels that remove the dry scaly cells from the epidermis. Raw, slightly reddened skin exposed to sunlight. Imagine the skin of the whole body peeled in its entirety. Baby soft, soaked in donkey milk, kept out of sunlight for days. Snakes could have a similar process instead of the otherwise irresponsible disposal. My mother collects fallen hair strands, which are then sold to wig-makers. A 100 hair strands a day. It's acute waste management of human shedding. In ground and in space.

SMUT

The word sha-ri-ri-ka which means bodi-ly
has so much friction in it that it can burn
the best of ideas to ashes
The ri and ri sit too dangerously
close to each other - they'll start quarrelling
anytime now -

The sweetness of sha, the softness of tongue
licking the hard palette in such stark contrast
with ka - it's coarse cousin
that leaps out of throat

If you have ever lived outside your body,
you know what it means to live with this
friction

Two eerily similar incompatible cells
Or sounds or organs or breaths

Or two divided stresses locked
In a battle somewhere
in a pulled muscle or a tired shoulder
Both claiming to be the original
Occupant and the other an alien
Inhabitant

The skin that covers it all
Like letters over language
And words over meaning
Can neither be too taut
Or too saggy
Agile like a reptile
It must glide over this nuisance
Like grass grows unrepentant
On mountains.

MIST

Excerpts from "The Inner ear"

"I didn't quite realise when the sounds stopped. You don't hear with your ear as a veshakaran, you create the sound. Inside the body is the reverberation of the chenda. This starts from the heat under the feet that rises slowly to meet with the heat burning down. Both meet in the middle where the heat is contained. It is not one long canal you see, it is two that move in different directions and then get contained to sustain rhythm. This vibration is not like white noise, as one would imagine. Not the same reverberation left in your ears after the performance. How you hear is through the ear. The outer ear captures the sound, the middle ear has three tiny bones that are set in motion, this motion then causes flux in the fluid contained in the cochlea. Linearity. Not simultaneity. So the reverberation in your ear, is not trapped in the centre of the body but in the brain. There is clarity in this sonar impulse. They play the chenda** to my feet, my feet persist because of this sound and this sound is the sound of the chenda. The ear has no function here. That is not how I learned to hear. Now, I have a bionic ear."*

*Veshakaran- Malayalam, performer.

**Chenda- Malayalam, percussion instrument

LIT

The night was stormy - lightning, thunder, and then a downpour. I was inside the house, looking out of the window, at an open drain and its dark waters, which shimmered under the flashes of lightning and trembled at the touch of rain. My eyes were looking out, but my ears were stuck to the door, waiting for his footsteps to pass by as he climbed up the stairs. These days, a part of me lives outside of myself. Like an obsessive listener, it traces every moment of his footsteps and picks up all the little noises he makes in the room above. It clings to the ceiling and bolts, here and there, chasing him from the kitchen to the bathroom, resting with him as he sleeps on his bed, but awake to the possibility of creaks and moans when he turns in his sleep.

I have seen him only in bits and pieces - stealthy glances, a door ajar, an angular gaze from the window - a partial view, him checking his mailbox, scratching the slight stubble on his cheek, his red tie, his brown leather shoes. But the sounds of his being have filled my body to the brim. A river rages in my gut, to the rhythm of his steps on stairs, my heart sinks and rises when he walks on my roof, barefoot, carefully as if keeping a beat.

He is late today, perhaps because of the rain. Or have I missed him, in the wake of all this thunder and rain? Is it possible that he passed by, unnoticed? No. Today, I will see him. I will follow him and wait as he climbs the last flight of his stairs, wait till he reaches the faint circle of light outside his door, and then - from the darkness

below, I will call him, and wait for him to turn and reveal himself to my wanting eyes.

Sparks fly out of the transformer, and all the lights die out. The rain comes to a screeching halt, and in that sudden silence, three quick knocks on my door - it is him, his knuckles tapping against the teak door. My startled ears leap back into me, and I walk towards his shifting feet outside the door. I turn the knob, I open the door. He is in front of me, but I cannot see him still. Lightning strikes, and once again, a partial view - his neck and a portion of his jaw damp with droplets. I look down - another strike of light - his tie tonight is dark blue in colour, and embroidered on it, is a deep red rose.

SUIT

At a bar this one time, I had an argument with a potential lover. Does Zizek's attire correspond to his politics? He was of the opinion that a scruffy, shabby, sniffing communist will prevent communism from being taken seriously. I was of the opinion that he shouldn't dress like the enemy, he should look like he doesn't buy into the common consumerist logic. Why would I take him seriously if he didn't live his politics? Foucault called it the Art of Living. The Romans believed that you must look like an ethical being, the politics must be apparent. He agreed with me, but insisted that meant that Zizek must wear a suit. "Have you ever seen a picture of Karl Marx?" Yeah. "And what is he wearing?" I didn't go home with him that night. But I did a week later.

SLUT

The thing that bored me most was the fat on the arms. There were other things too, hair in places hair should not be. Hips that seemed to have widened over night. They weren't girlish anymore; but 'womanly' could afford to be a little slimmer. This was bordering on the offensive. None of the curves were smooth, they spilled instead or at least threatened to. The face was alright I suppose. It had retained some of the fat but age had come with a severity that left a slightly unpleasant but desirable look. The kind that would keep the wrong kind of people at arm's length and the right kind intrigued at the very least. Not bad, not too bad. Slightly fuzzy eyes at a certain distance would still mistake me for an attractive woman. But without a slight squint, just boring.

All the things I think of when I write has to begin with vanity, an excess of it. It seems like the right way to begin, almost like a ritual. Like the opening of a vanity case with all kinds of jewels, rubies and emeralds for their colour and richness. Maybe fabric, velvet or lace even satin would be appropriate. Colours for the cheek and lips, deep hues of red and purple. All dark, nothing demure. The vanity that does not accurately bring up any kind of beauty but the sensation of it. A faint ache of something that simultaneously wants from fulfilment but is pleasurable from the lack of it. A touch of melancholia perhaps. Such things vanity can do while trying to skirt around the word 'beauty' or the even more terrifying 'love.'

LIST

i loved many people as a child
the next door neighbour
the new actor on television
the new priest for the new house
the young teacher who wore too much makeup
the classmate too pretty to be a friend
'i love you' to all of them, written in scribbles in many public notes
discovered, sometimes in stealth, sometimes carelessly strewn on the study table

when i was a child, i love you was the beginning

you said it, and then you were together forever
or they said they didn't love you and you were alone forever -

a letter stained on both sides with red sketch pen
a phone call, even in hushed whispers leaked desire
a friendship band, pulled from a back pocket on a private bicycle ride
a red rose, thought about, spoken about, grown in the garden -

when i was a child, it was deeply embarrassing to accept or give an object of love.

LUST

I waited on the banks of the Nila, but my lover was late. At night they say there are poisonous snakes in the fields waiting to find a careless foot. She insists on being barefoot. Last summer I had gifted her a pair of white and blue slippers. Blue was her favourite colour. But she refused to wear them for fear of her love being discovered. Sometimes she carries the slippers with her. She is easily amused when I turn around in fear, hearing the dull pressure of sand behind me. What amuses me though is that satisfied with having given me a scare, she then removes the slippers and carries them in her hands once more. I smile now, alone in these little moments that we save for the river bank at night.

Sometimes I bring her flowers. She asks for the white, it has a distinct fragrance. But the jasmine, or the white as she calls it reminds me of others. So now I bring yellow marigolds. After a night of lovemaking the petals fall apart, sticking to parts of her body. Each petal becomes a discovery of her. Another evidence she leaves behind of her love. I smile again, in conspiracy with water and a small trace of the moon. I am worried now, and then I am not. Even in faint moonlight, she'll find her way and the snakes won't. She will play a prank and laugh loudly and cover her mouth in fright to stifle the ringing of laughter.

Tonight there is a drizzle.

MUST

Shall I begin from the beginning? In the beginning there was a river. Or perhaps not. In the beginning there was the writing about the river, the river itself took three seasons to appear. And promptly left a season after. As if one has disappeared and left their clothes hanging in the air. If there is no water subsuming the sand, is the empty land still a river? Or must we wait three more seasons for the river to return?

What happens to the writing in the three seasons the river disappears? So I must simply write about the clothes hanging in the air then? It's brown in colour, stretches as far as the eye can see, people frequently walk over it as if walking on water. Nothing poetic about it. No beautiful descriptions of the bending and curving of the river, its lasting affair with the moon and its incessant need to make a poignant affair of sunrise and sunsets. It leaves no words with the writer, as if the ink has run dry. The abandoned writer filled with air bubbles and cliches, rhetoric and little else.

SIT

SCENE # 47

INT. DAY. BEDROOM.

(On the other side of the window is a woman wrestling with a curtain. She engages in a seemingly ridiculous task. She wishes to keep the windows open but the curtains drawn. The curtains will not let her have it her way, after all there is a binding logic to fabric

thin and translucent : that they are amenable to the moods of the winds. Yet she continues pointlessly arguing against the existential basis of the curtains. Frustrated, she drapes the curtains around her body and stands by the window, fully covered peering through the translucent fabric; suddenly serene.)

[No Dialogue]

THE END.

YOUR WELLIES

Words by *George Evans*

[00:24 – 00:37]

From the hill you could see the whole village. It was late October, the leaves were on the ground, and chimney-smoke was in the sky. Little dogs scurried around the base of the hill. Shooting glimpses of amber and white fur, weaving amongst the knotted bushes and trees. A man on a horse rode up alongside the dogs. His crimson coat stood out against all that was natural like a star which had fallen to earth. He drew a little brass horn from his coat and blew it—the sound was the pitch and rhythm of a fly buzzing around rubbish. A fox dashed across the wet grass into a barren field and a score of dogs burst from the undergrowth. The riders sat upon their horses, backs erect like scarecrows, faces gaunt and long, peering after the hunt.

The field with the fox's body was left empty and it became December. The days squeezed themselves between dusk and dawn. The sun only rose to eye level, as if to remind the villagers that it was still there, but that it was too tired to do anything in particular. Wispy silver clouds crept into the sky from over the hill as an antique souvenir to the world that existed beyond the winter; beyond the hill. The sound was that of wellies^a; the unmistakable flip flop of rubber on pavement. Rain fell steadily into the fabric of the earth: into the trees, the grass, the space between the natural and the manmade. The water pushed itself into the cracks of the road and stretched out the asphalt like a surgical retractor; potholes appeared as unstitched wounds on the lanes and highways.

It was the last week of March, and buds of wildflowers began to push from the mud and reach for the sun. Daffodils scattered sides of roads and lined gardens, their yellow heads were brighter than the sun in those first few days of spring. A little hedgehog woke up in the night. He was hungry from hibernation, and walked out from under Caroline and David's shed.

On the ground he found a few berries and a little bowl of water that Caroline had left for him when they found him all the way back in January. Next door, two boys sat out on deck chairs and smoked marijuana^b. The sound of their inhales was loud in the quiet of midnight. Beneath their breaths was the sound of grass growing, beneath that was a mole crunching on a worm, beneath that was hard, silent rock, and beneath that was the sound of yawning as the earth's igneous mantle moved at an imperceptible speed, but moved nonetheless so that, if you looked at it over a thousand years, you might think you were looking at treacle rather than solid rock.

The field at the foot of the hill grew a hairy top of maize. A pole was erected for May Day. Ribbons hung lifeless from its top like a ship's sail cut into a rainbow. The small gravel car park filled up. Then beyond—cars parked on grass and into the nearest road: a line of shimmering Subaru's that stretched as far as the eye could see. A pig was skewered. A fire was lit. Stalls were erected. A pattern began to form on the maypole. Tighter and tighter it wound; blue into red, red in yellow, yellow into green. Down the pole, wrapping itself to the sound of a **fiddle**^c

[1:10 – 1:50]

The fiddle played into July and it was hot. The clouds were made of mottled rug and the ground was a hot water bottle. Grass turned brown, rabbits died, and crickets sailed a pitch of noise across the whole village. Only cider could touch the spot that the heat left. Heaps of ice were thrown over bowls of sweet fermented apple juice. Sitting out in the evening, shielded from the orange sun by a tree, you would swear that the whole world was made just for cider to be drunk in the summer.

Cumulus clouds appeared on the horizon. They cracked open and dropped rain. It was the kind of thunderstorm you remember. The kind that pushes

out any previous impression of thunderstorm you might have had and takes its place. It was terrifying to be under, and beautiful to be a part of. The whole village had butterflies in their tummies for the evening. Every time the sky flashed a thousand voices quietly counted out “one mississippi, two mississippi, three mississippi.”—boom—“it’s three miles away.”^d It was all drama, it was all life, in July when the year feels ripe and things are happening. The whole thing feels like a barbecue.

If July is a barbecue, September is a casserole. The people get out their jumpers and their jeans. They put away their tank-tops and throw on turtle necks. The whole village turns orangey brown. The sun arcs lower every day. It rains more often, but not as violently. More like a statement of fact that the summer is over and autumn has begun.

On a drizzly Saturday morning a mini-bus pulled up to the village’s field. 14 sleepy teenage girls got out. At either end of the field white goal posts went up. Blue jerseys got pulled on over bed-heads. The home team arrived and put on yellow shirts. A referee arrived in all black and blew a whistle. The players begin to play. Yellow and blue start off as neatly divided particles floating on a pitch of green. Then they mingle: the yellow into the blue, the blue into the yellow. Patterns form, take formation, shrink and expand. The white ball is catalyst, spread around by blue, tussled back by clumps of yellow. Blue press in the shape of diamonds and triangles into the yellow half like an experiment gone awry. A blue kicks the ball, half a pound of mud flies off the bottom of her boots, and the ball wraps itself into the net. It’s all over and they pack back into the minibus, soaked through and victorious.

A small fox eats blackberries and sniffs pathways. It lies down in bush. It huffs out a breath and falls asleep. It wakes up, late afternoon, to the sound of a snout. A loud obnoxious horn wakes it right up and it takes off, out of the bush, into a field. A woman is walking her dog and watches it happen. The fox twists and turns while the dogs chase it. The fox is faster and deserves to get away, but the dogs hunt in a hungry pack. The woman is focused, watching it happen,

watching the fox run like a gazelle. It’s better than a scene on the Serengeti, but she wishes for the fox to get away. It looks like it’s all over, the pack of dogs fan out around and trap the fox. The fox whips away and heads for the new building estate. It finds a trail between a fence and thick blackberry bushes, the dogs can’t all fit in and the fox is gone. She finally takes a breath and realizes her wellies have a hole in them again.

The End.

i

David threw two tea bags into two cups and turned on the kettle.

“My feet are soaked,” said Caroline as she placed down the baby monitor on the kitchen’s center isle.

“I told you to get a new pair this year.”

“Well yes, but I get a new pair every year and I feel awful about the plastic.”

“Just because Jenna has started an anti-plastic movement in the daffodil society, doesn’t mean you should have to go about with soaked feet every time we take the dog out”

“But I think so much of her. She talks so passionately about the need for each of us to do more. David, you should come to one of the meetings just to hear her talk about the environment. She’s ever so clear.

“You’ll end up using more plastic in duct tape than a new pair of wellies. I’m going into town tomorrow morning, I’ll pick you up a new pair,” said David

“Ok. Pick up some marmalade while you’re there.”

The kettle pinged and David picked it up. He felt the water jumping about in the kettle. He’d filled it too high and the water leapt from the spout before he’d got it over the teacups. It smacked the countertop and turned itself half into steam; the rest spread out over the surface like woodlice that had been revealed under

a fallen log. Caroline whipped up a tea towel and patted the surface dry.

“I just wish there were a way out of it all. There must be a way to get wellies that last more than a year,” said Caroline.

“I think you worry about it too much. I mean look at us, scraping out our jam jars and composting our bananas while BP spills another ton of oil into the Pacific. The way things are there’s not much hope to be had.”

“There’s no hope,” Caroline repeated.

“Well, I mean. There is, but I just think we’ve got to make the politicians do something about it.”

The baby monitor screeched and Caroline took her tea upstairs.

ii

“Do you think she loves me?”

“No.”

“Do you think I should tell her how I feel?”

“Yeah.”

There was an inhale, and another puff of smoke sent itself up into the heavens.

“So why should I tell her. If she doesn’t like me too.”

“Because it’s better to have it out in the open. Like a cut. You can put a bandage on it at first, but eventually you want it to breath or it’ll never heal.”

The orange tip made a dance in night, being passed from one hand to the other’s.

“That’s good advice.”

“It’s easy to think about, but it’s harder to do. That’s the problem with good advice. I couldn’t take it, either.”

“I’ll do it. I’ll tell her. I think I’m over her already.”

“That was fast.”

“Yeah. But I’m ok with it. Like you said, it’s better to have your wounds out in the fresh air so everybody can see them.”

“That’s not quite what I said.”

“I know. But it’s how it’ll be.”

“You’re thinking too much.”

“I’m finding it hard to think at all. I’ve been sitting here trying to figure out what love is while we’ve been talking.”

“I’m no help there. But take this,” the orange tip drifted across the night, “I’ll get something that ought to help.”

Deep inhale. And another. Heavy breathing though the nose like you do before you fall asleep.

“Here, I’m back. Put this on.”

“What is it?”

“Dressing gown. You always think better at night when you’re in your pajamas. It’s like your body knows that the practical hours are over, and it lets you relax enough to think a little. I’ve got one on too.”

“You’ve got two dressing gowns?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s nice. Where’d you get it from?”

“No idea.”

“What is life, then?”

“It’s a roundabout.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Probably. It’s a roundabout, and off the roundabout are exits you never take; they’re overgrown, dusty, full of blind corners, so you never take them. Then there’s one exit that leads to the most beautiful stretch of motorway you’ve ever seen. When you’re driving down this bit of motorway you see sheep grazing in fields, the weather is always just great, there’s not too much traffic, and it goes up a mountain side so you can look down on where you’ve been and say ‘wow’, because it is a really, really cool stretch of road. Only, the problem is you’ve been on this motorway too many times, and you don’t say ‘wow’ anymore. You look at it and say ‘yep, that’s where I’ve been.’. Then the road winds its way back down the mountain and past the sheep and you get on the roundabout again. You spend some time on the roundabout, then you decide to take the same exit again. That’s life.”

“You read more than is healthy.”

David went running while Caroline went to the village fair with the baby. The village had many old trails that led into woods and thickets just to disappear. He'd tried to find and run them all since they moved to the village a year ago and planned to recover a few of the best for other runners in the village.

There was one trail that started at the back of a new housing estate. It began between the estate's fence and overgrown bushes—evidently the parish allowed the building to squeeze in as much room for private property on either side of the legally protected, but practically abandoned trail. It took less than twenty steps for David to remember that he hated running. He had been running four times a week for two years, and still the only pleasurable moment was the very moment he stopped.

The trail weaved away from the housing estate. There were big, primordial feeling trees on this side of the hill, and the trail just kept going up; long switchbacks looped around and mere creases of light patterned the woodland floor. Last autumn's pine needles were crunchy on the ground, the mud was slightly slick and David lost his footing here and there like a lurching car.

David made it to the top of the hill and thought, "I hate this," and so he stopped to take in the view from the side of the hill he'd never ran on before. It was like being on the dark side of the moon. Beneath him was woodland and telephone poles. There was another hill off in the distance; somebody else's hill. He wondered if someone was on it, looking at him, also hating running.

There was a commotion below and to the left of David. Shrubbery was being jostled, a few twigs broke, someone coughing. There wasn't a trail going down that way, and so it was strange to hear people out on the wrong side of the hill while the village fair, that everybody was supposed to be at, was going on.

David slowly made his way towards the sound. He wasn't on the trail anymore and the pine needles were stacked up like logger piles in miniature. He

had to crouch to make sure he didn't lose his footing, eventually butt scooting as the angle became more and more dramatic. He was close, the sounds were louder. It was two people. They were just behind a blackberry bush. There was a moment where the thought he should just go. Not be curious, just not see what these people didn't want to be seen doing. Then there was another moment where he thought maybe he should call out "hello?" and try to reach the people on the other side of the bush with words.

Neither of these moments happened, instead David peered through the bush and saw Jenna with a man; both naked from the waist down. Their motion was frantic like a pair of stalling, lurching cars and David's face grew crimson. He ran away like a boy, and thought "how has this happened? Why has it happened to me? Do I need to tell Catherine?"

The morning after the storm. The last few drops of rain plopped from leaf to ground. The bees woke up and began working. The birds brought sounds back into the world.

One boy woke up next to another boy.

"Why do you think the morning feels so much better?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. Mornings always hurt the most."

"Really?"

"Yeah it's like my brain is doing summersaults and my eyes are trying to look at stuff and my belly is all messed up."

"Wow. That's different. I feel all good."

They picked their noses.

"I guess it's good to not have to think about anything yet."

"Yeah, and you know you've got breakfast coming soon."

"We should go somewhere for a walk today."

"That sounds good. Where'd you want to go?"

[00:00 – 00:57]

STIMULA®TION

What do we do when ideas dry up, what are the projects we return to for re-energising, who are the designers or activists we look to for values and levels, what are the songs that remind us of irresponsible youth, what machines elevate our capacities beyond our capabilities, what are our desert island concepts, what drum sound makes us stand still and listen, what apps make us smile, what hacks make us panic, what lyrics make us look at our speakers, what amount of money will we do it for, who are we trying to impress, what do we do if we lose all our jobs, what can we do if we can't travel, where inside do we look, where does help come from, what sleeves make our hearts flutter, which stories do we actually believe, which games make us grind our teeth, whose compliments do we crave, whose eye do we want to catch, what do we want to leave for posterity, how often should we make stuff, how many projects are the right number, is it ok to look back to the eighties, which TV series make us drool at the budgets, which artworks make us want to give up ... for a while, how much should we leave after we die, what would it take for artists to go on strike, what is your Degree worth, what's wrong with being silent, which type do we rely on or which font do we dream of, which family member drives us mad, where does our dog go in her mind when she gazes off, which new colour should we invent, what is the point, is there a future for banners, what makes us click our fingers, which dream makes us perspire, what projects do we direct students to, what makes our eyes water, when are our most creative times of day, do creativity lessons belong on TV, what is blended learning, who do we sing for and why?

Alan Dunn, May 2020

F= believes in the revolutionary act of connecting people, to empower us all to feel able to speak up and to find common ground. We use art to make visible and listen to voices of the past present and future. Patriarchy has tried to disconnect us but histories continue and together we can reclaim the discarded, repressed and brushed aside. It takes just a sideways view, an opening of the third eye, to see what really lies before us and inside of us. In this we make space for clarity and understanding that we all hold within us.

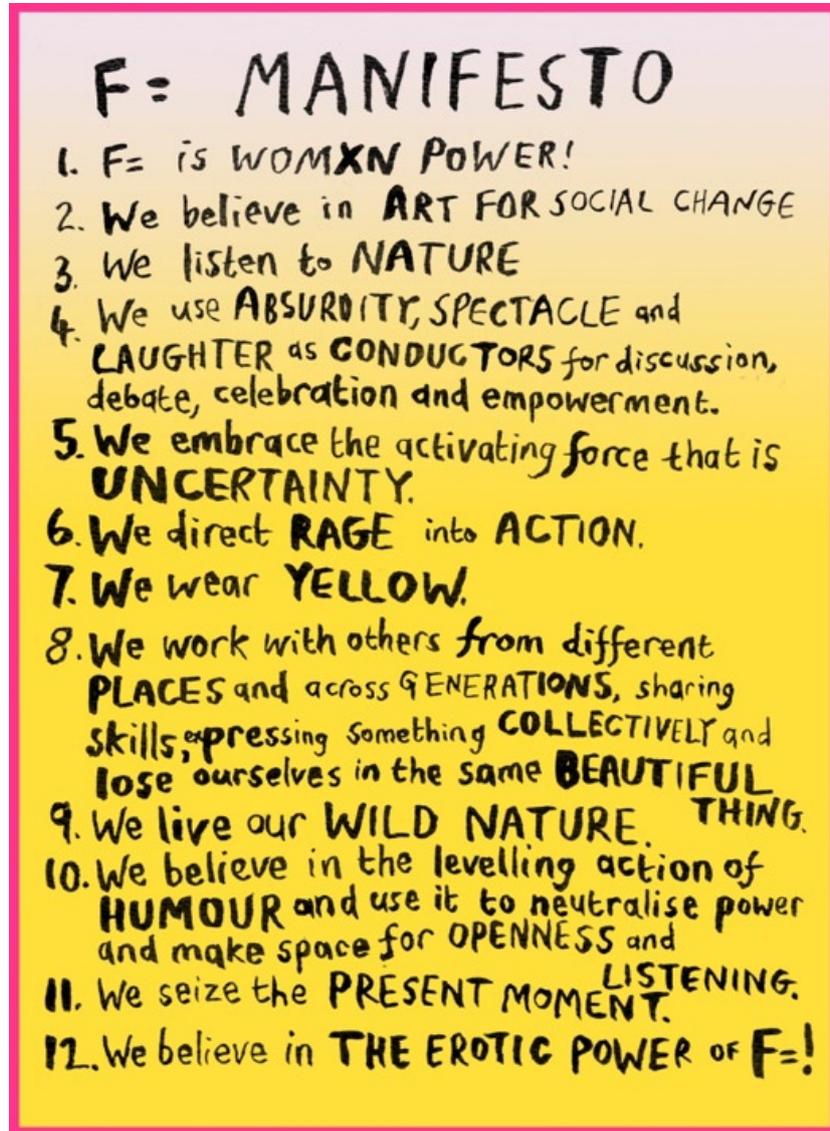
F= explores the significance of feminism in creative practices and use playful acts to activate sites of learning.



<http://www.fequals.co.uk/>

FEMALE GAZE

This section celebrates feminist art practices, featuring work connected to feminist legacies, provoking and interrogating dominant patriarchal structures, proposing other realities and fitting within an ethics of feminist principles.



F= have chosen *The Erotic Power of Animals and Our Wild Selves* as the first theme in this new section.

In the F= collective we are exploring our different relationships to non-human nature and our inherent wildness. We do this through art making. We do this to remember that we are intertwined in the fabric of this earth life because we're not just cultural beings - we are also animals.

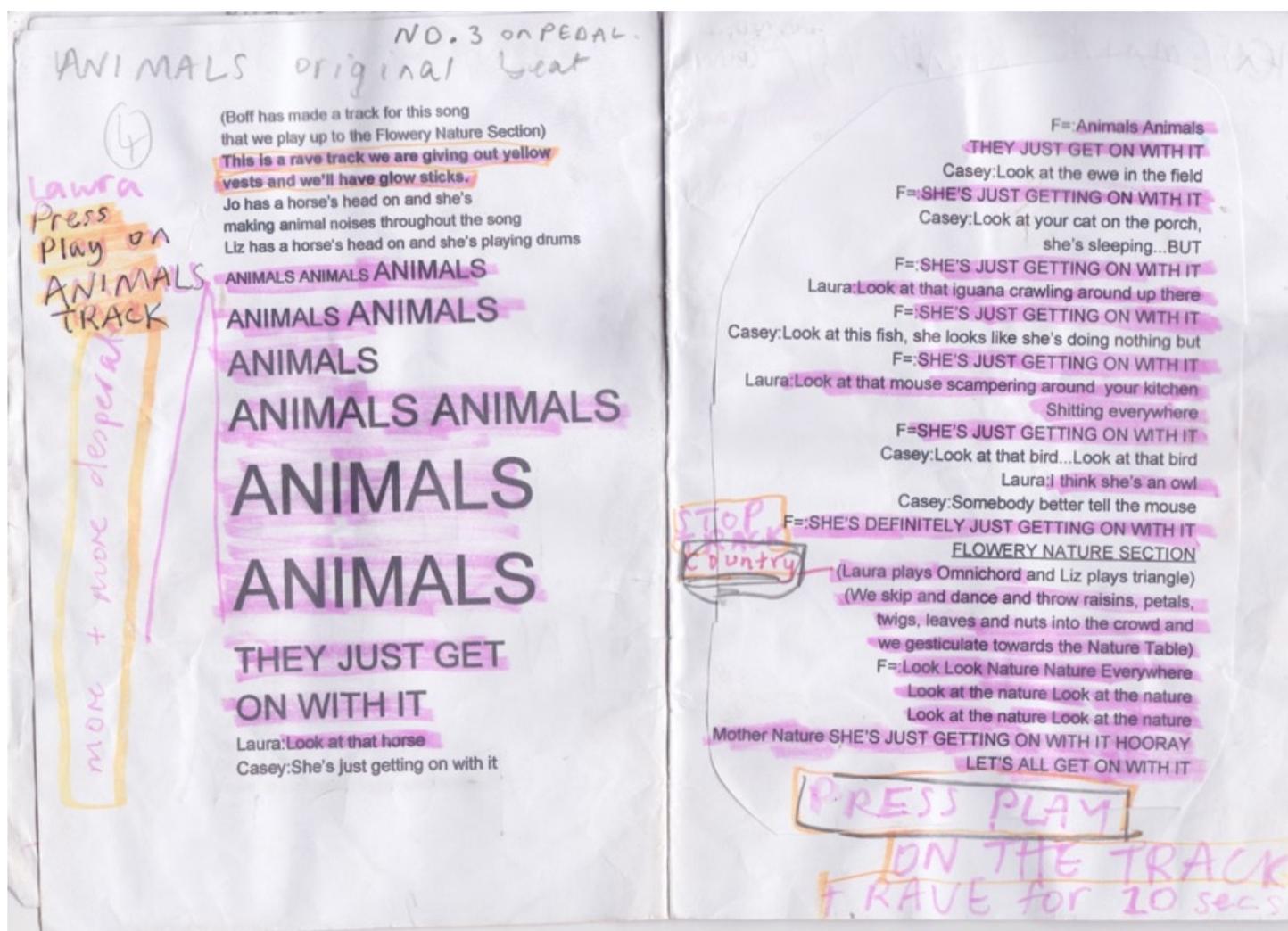
Artistic outputs can be seen as a way of elevating us into a cultural sphere, away from nature and the environment, separating us from our animal selves. In Western society, nature and culture are conceptualized as distinctly separate. Not all cultures make this distinction between nature and culture. For some being natural can mean something more than not cultural. This is something we explore in our work.

This idea references feminist anthropological thought that emerged in the early 1970s, specifically Sherry B Ortner's 1974 paper *Is Female to Male As Nature is to Culture?* The paper is concerned with the devaluation of women, that women are universally seen as inferior to men and are aligned with nature and natural processes while men are perceived and perceive themselves as aligned to culture.

As artists, academics, activists and in our domestic lives we consciously align ourselves to nature, saying, yes, perhaps through menstruation and childbirth, hormones and cycles, women, untameable, wild, are aligned more to our bodies, to nature. And it's not to say men aren't organic beings as well but maybe it's harder for us to forget our innate wildness because our bodies are always acting in untamed ways.

We are women engaged in these cycles and also engaged in culture, the making of cultural artefacts and in the discourses of cultural meanings. We use metaphor and the relationship between images to try and articulate and form questions about the meaning of life and the wonder of being. These cultural activities are seen as going beyond engagement with the limitations of lifespan and the functions of the physical body – making stuff that continues to be a part of the ongoing swirl of culture. But surely our constructions are temporary in relation to the lifespan of the earth and the processes of nature.

This is what we're exploring as artists; our own interconnectedness with the animate world and the ways we all communicate and live our forgotten selves.



Interview with Lourdes Orozco, Associate Professor at the Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds.

My research interests are on contemporary theatre and performance mostly in Western European contexts. My two main areas of research are Animal Studies and Cultural Policy. My practice also falls within these two areas. I am interested in working with animals in performance contexts and some recent publications in this area are: *Theatre & Animals* (2013), *Animals in Performance Practices* (co-edited with Prof Jenifer Parker-Starbuck, 2015) and articles in *Studies in Theatre and Performance* and *Performance Research* among others. I am part of the Centre for Cultural Policy at the University of Leeds and a researcher within the Leeds based Donut Group (a group of cultural organisations working outside the Leeds city centre).

F=

Hi Lourdes, thanks for being part of this first editorial piece under the heading of *The Female Gaze*. This is a new project for F= working as editors and this is a new section dedicated to 'feminist art practices.' Our intention here is to explore work and ideas across disciplines which are related to feminist art practices and connect to the themes and ways of working that have emerged through our collective activity. One of the key areas that we wish to pursue, and which came out of our recent *Erotic Power of F=* Tour, is the interconnectivity of humans, non-human nature, politics, creativity and performance - just a few things! We've been exploring ways of connecting that seeks to change the perspective that the human-centric view is everything and which continues to persist even in the face of global environmental disaster.

Lourdes, from our brief conversations and insights into your work I (Liz) have really enjoyed thinking about the things we have discussed, from cycling to work in an ape costume (did that happen or was it a fun speculation?) to giant moles rolling down hills in a park and other interspecies explorations. I was intrigued by your trip to the *Earthbound* Symposium in Aarhus <http://www.secrethotel.dk/en/earthbound-2018/> and your interest in spending time with horses. Could we start by you telling us more about this project with the horses?

Lourdes

Hello. Great to have this opportunity to chat to you about our work. I have been looking at your *F= Conduit Tour* book too and I think there are definitely some shared interests.

Before I talk about *Horse Lab* (Aarhus, 2018). I'd like to say that yes, I did cycle to work with a gorilla mask a couple of times. I've always really enjoyed random surreal humour, the kind that just appears in your day-to-day life, unexpectedly. I imagined this from the point of view of the spectator. I thought, how funny it would be if on my way to work, at the same time, every day, I saw someone cycling with a gorilla suit on! That image made me laugh so much, so I did it. It was hilarious and exciting, but also pretty dangerous as I couldn't see much, so I dropped it. Maybe I should do it again. We need that kind of laughter in our lives in this grim context of gloom and doom. It's the extraordinary in the ordinary. I love that element of the surreal within the day to day. I like that kind of work that doesn't make a fuss but produces an encounter just like, as you go about your daily life.

The moles rolling down the hill is another example of that. You are going about your daily life, walking your dog in the park, doing your weekend morning jog, pushing your baby in a pram to sleep and a bunch of people dressed up as moles appear parading in the park, setting flares up from time to time, rolling down the park hills, sleeping in the trees, building up leaf piles. It's funny, it's surprising, it gets you out of yourself, it opens a space for taking life less seriously. This was part of a whole month of activities organised by Phillippe Quesne at the Nanterre-Amandiers theatre in Paris entitled *Welcome to Caveland* <https://www.kfda.be/en/archive/detail/welcome-to-caveland>. An important part of all of this for me is to take the human less seriously and to especially take the attention away from the human and open a space for the non-human in art, in our lives, in a way that feels right rather than abusive, objectifying, etc.

This, I guess, brings me to the horses... *Horse Lab* was a collaboration between Kat Joyce, Ruairi O'Donovan and me, and it was commissioned by *Secret Hotel* in Denmark. We met in Aarhus and spent some days with two horses - Hrapinni and Kveikur. We then presented *Horse Lab* as a work in progress in the grounds of the Moesgaard Museum of Anthropology. The project brought up lots of questions about how to produce a piece of performance with animals in a way that feels like the horses are part of the piece and we are not just forcing them into it, making them do tricks etc. This also produced a challenge for us as there was a feeling that we needed to create a piece of performance and while we might agree that that term is loose it also has certain expectations attached to it - there needs to be something in it that it's worth watching! Of course, this is where we might differ with audiences. For me, going to a field to look at horses doing their thing - 'getting on with it' as you say in your song! - is a great way to spend my time, but some people might disagree and say that that is not something they consider worth calling art.



Some of what I am saying here about surrealism, surprise, the day-to-day and art without a fuss, amateurism, seems clear to me in what I know of your practice. Would you say? I loved the song in your book about animals. There is a lot to say about that song!

F=

Yes, those elements really resonate with F= and part of an open approach that both celebrates this and invites others to join in. Personally, I love performing the *Animals* song the most, it feels very freeing and ridiculous and fun, although an animal sound expert might not identify any of the animal voices - ha, this returns to your interest in humour. I love attempting to be a non-human animal and the humorous futility of it. And yet in my imagination it's kind of happening and has a likeness!!

Lourdes

Yes, I know what you mean. This is when the performance becomes internal and seems difficult to translate to an audience. What I mean is that there is a layer of performance happening for the performer that is very personal, internal and intimate that stays at that level somehow. I am not sure how important it is that it does reach an audience - the likeness to the animal I mean - because everyone gets something different out of a piece in any case. However, I am interested in audiences experiencing this inter-species space in some way or other, and this is why *Horse Lab* invited audience participation. We cannot control the audience experience - it might not be a likeness or a connection in any way, but the invitation is there to consider how close or how far we, as humans, are to these horses and what are our shared histories.

F=

Is it important for you that the audience experience that likeness? Or are you happy with it being an internal experience? 'Something that's worth watching' is such an interesting subject to interrogate and as soon as the performers expand into non-human animals - for example horses - a shift is required in an audience and everyone involved in an 'event'. It really challenges and questions what we consider constitutes a performance, where it should happen, for how long and what might happen. It also points to each performance being different, that scripted or scored may not be appropriate and it opens up a playful space where all preconceptions are challenged. It disrupts the idea that a performance is a contained event suggesting it could be all-day-every day and so do you think we are always potentially 'at' a performance?

Lourdes

Yes, absolutely. It is very interesting that even in what we might call experimental performance practices we are still bound by these expectations of what performance should look like, how long it should take, where it should take place. At the end of the day, we are working in a commercial context and the work needs to be packaged and consumed. Programmers want to know what you will do and audiences come to see you based on that label. As much as I can I try to work outside those contexts but then... everything seems to need a frame. I don't necessarily think that we are always at a performance. I do believe that performance is always 'on' and in everyday life. However, there is work that has an intention, a focus and is 'framed' as such. So, we need a beginning, a middle and an end. However, I do think that the frame needs to be expansive and flexible in terms of concept but also in terms of how the event encounters the audience. In terms of working with animals, we need to, most of all, and this is VERY IMPORTANT - *expand* our sense of time. We cannot impose human-time onto animals. Events in human and animal lives occur at different speeds and in order to get closer to each other, we, humans, need to slow down. This is one of the things that *Horse Lab* is interested in - slowing down, noticing small changes, being without rushing or thinking about the next place you are going to. We tried to experience time closer to the way horses experience it. There was not much to do other than walk about a bit, eat grass, walk about a bit more and eat more grass, wee, poo, eat more grass. Slowing down means we are more aware of the small changes, and we are more aware of our surroundings. For me, being aware of small changes and the surroundings is very important. If we notice these things we might care more about them.

F=

This feels really exciting as to what can happen and what radical methods can be used to engage in developing closer connections to non-human nature - reconsidering humans' position on the planet, if not the universe. But also, do you think it connects to other past cultures or rituals where inter-species relations have been much more reciprocal? So many things to think about within a beautifully simple idea.

Lourdes

Yes, I guess that's true. Although I have not given the past much thought. I think it is an issue of the west as well as historical. There are many communities on this earth at the moment outside the west but also within western cultures that have a closer connection to nature. I think this is important. I think that with connection comes respect. For me, work needs to produce that connection with the non-human because at this point of environmental crisis humans need to learn to respect other beings. Of course, it is not that simple. Humans don't have much respect for human life either... but that is not the work that I do. I am interested in going beyond the human and recognising that we are not as important as we think we are. Our deaths and our lives do not matter more than the lives and deaths of others. You mention simplicity, and this is also an important word for me. On a personal level I love big spectacle, I am an opera lover and I love experiencing big large spectacles and dramas from the darkness of the auditorium. However, as a maker and thinker I am more interested in work that is simple, accessible, that reaches its audiences in the day-to-day of their lives.

F=

I am interested to know a bit about how the days went. From the photographs it looks like you moved around different spaces. What changed in you and did things change over the time of the 'performance'? Also (and this may be an obvious question), are the human performers becoming horses in the sense of shifting behaviour to

be able to be with the horses?

Lourdes

In terms of how the days went with the horses, this is very simple. We had a kind of routine I guess where we went down to the paddock in the morning, spent time with them, being around them. Kat and Ruairi would try different stimuli with them. Moving in particular ways around them or around the paddock, asking them to engage with different objects and move in different ways. There was a lot of experimentation and *just being*. For me, since I had a dramaturgical role in the piece, and not so much of an active engagement with the horses, most of the time meant I was watching and being there with them, which I loved. It made me learn to let go of expectations, whatever happened in the paddock was good, was just what it was, was interesting to watch. Just having the privilege of being there, taking the time to watch something for hours. I had to shift my way of thinking. Rather than expecting things to happen, I realised that things - small things - were happening all the time. A gesture from Ruairi provoked a gesture in the horse, which in turn made the other horse move. A look from Kat provoked Ruairi to do something which meant that the horses became attentive to them and so on. We did move about the area a bit. We realised that in the paddock the horses were really at ease. Once they got used to us being there, they were happy, getting on with their lives which mostly meant eating grass. Kat and Ruairi had the idea of taking them for a walk around the museum grounds to see what would happen and then we realised that the dynamics between all of us began to change. The horses were more inquisitive about their environment and demanded things from us: they wanted to stop and sniff, wanted to go other ways from the one we wanted to take them to, etc. I was particularly, more on edge, and horses know this very quickly. They can hear your pulse and heartbeat. So being in the built-up areas of the museum changed the quality of our relationships and meant that the horses had to be on leads, which emphasised the domination of the human on horses, and also somehow we moved into a mode of performance that felt more about making a show. Kat and Ruairi started creating a kind of score, etc. It is very interesting how the space shaped us all. We were suddenly in the theatre trying to perform with horses. In the final sharing we wanted to convey this. So, we moved the horses from the paddock to the built-up area of the museum in order for the audience to experience these differences. I think they did experience it. It felt like they behaved more like an audience there, watching from the outside, expecting a show. In the paddock the audience could come in and spend time with the horses at their leisure. It was very different.

There was no intention of achieving likeness between horses and humans in the piece. I think that what was in the air was more the idea of connectivity and communication. This came from recognising that humans and horses are different, but that they can communicate and work together in some way.

In July 2019 I took part in a performance by Captain Boomer Collective which also used live animals: *Pasture with Cows*. <https://www.captainboomercollective.org/pasturewithcows/> The company had similar ideas of connectivity and time to those that *Horse Lab* explored, although there were also marked differences. In *Pasture with Cows*, the company bring-to-life a classical farmland picture of farmers, farmland and cows. The picture is brought to life by actors that perform short sketches of farm life in an enclosure shared with two cows. The enclosure is a frame in the classical sense, a picture frame. In July 2019, when the piece went to Leuven in Belgium, I spent about an hour in the enclosure acting as a farmer, with three other actors and two cows. One of the most interesting aspects of the piece is sharing time with the cows in a way that feels totally unpressured. As performers and audience members we were invited to be with the cows in simple, matter of fact ways. Back to a life - and perhaps this brings back your question about past times - where animals and humans were connected in deeper ways. In the images you can see what I mean about time. The performance is designed in a way that invites the audience to take time out of their day-to-day; to take a break and sit down and watch some cows in a field. This is very simple, but it is very important for me. Performance is a break from this day-to-day and an opportunity to take time off.



F=

I love *Pasture with Cows*. It's so important in pointing to how we can change how we see non-human animal experiences in relation particularly to urban living. These usually consist of 'trips out' to the country which emphasise a divide of the urban and the rural, and a clear separation where one is more recreational and the other more functional. I remember visiting a green, mixed-use area in Stockholm amongst flats and houses that included trees, open green areas, an allotment with a cafe serving food from its own growers, and a children's nursery whose main feature was an urban farm. It had a really lovely atmosphere of function, joy and exchange across species and plants in the midst of a built environment.

One of the things that's so interesting in your description of the *Horse Lab* is shifting how we perceive non-human animals and how they are interacting. By slowing down, staying and observing you notice those subtleties of communication and connection between the horses that otherwise perhaps we don't. A horse in a field may be observed as alone but actually we are singling out and isolating an animal that is communicating and receiving in so many ways with their own species and others. Because we as humans can't see or hear something we assume there's nothing going on. It seems that the horse hears our heartbeat better than we do.

Going back to the audience experiencing *the likeness*, I just think it will always be different. I think that what people like in our performances and in others that Laura and I have done as non-human animals (dogs running around galleries, sloths lying in a tree) is the energy of it and that playfulness that it gives others permission to perhaps do or at least think about. When we are out walking and talking to people dressed in yellow it seems to also change the space in terms of time and giving space to be in the present moment. I love your discussion in the article *Animals in socially engaged performance practice: becomings on the edge of extinction* (*Studies in Theatre and Performance*. 38:2, 2018) of repositioning the human in relation to the non-human animal who is the expert on which humans rely. It seems to have taken until the edge of extinction - or quite possibly we have

fallen over the edge - to start to realise how much expertise and brilliance exists and that we are in so many ways the least equipped animal and that we all need all of the experts.

Lourdes

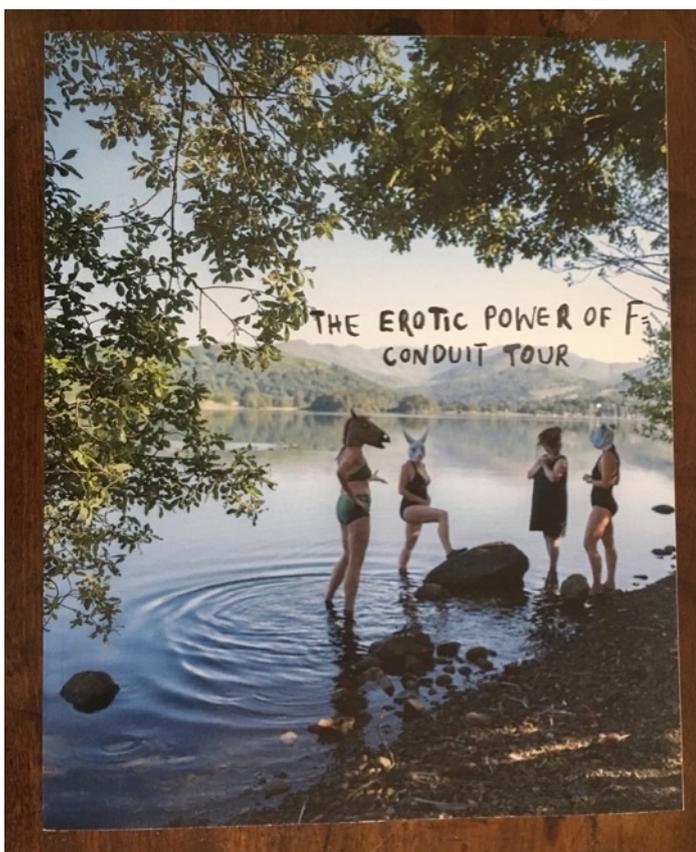
In that article I was very interested in this idea of the expert. This is something that I have explored in my research around the idea of risk and performance. The figure of the expert in human terms has been repositioned. In risk theory we needed the experts to tell us what we should and should not do in order to avoid risks. In economics, environmental sciences, medical sciences, these experts were seen to have the knowledge that enabled us to live safe and happy lives. Now we know that all that knowledge, all that forecasting, is incredibly fragile, as are the structures on which we build our societies. Then we have a turn towards the non-expert model and the famous Michael Gove quote on the uselessness of experts. This is incredibly interesting because our society is founded on the idea of knowledge belonging to some and not others, and the hierarchical and power structures that shape our societies are very much interested in maintaining the location of that knowledge where it is. So, in that article, I try to reposition that knowledge. I look at works that I think are attempting to decentre the human as an expert and look towards the animal instead. What would happen if humans followed the animals' lead? What would happen if, for once, we were not in charge? I am interested in this idea of knowledge located in the animal rather than the human. It seems to me this is a radical idea because so much of human supremacy is based on cognitive and rational power. You mentioned before the connection with past cultures, and I think this resonates in my article. The repositioning of knowledge from the human to the animal takes place in the context of rituals that belong to past cultures or non-western cultures (shamanism for instance). Rituals are important but they also imply performance and distancing to an extent. We can very easily see those rituals as something that others do - people like us, who are interested in performance. I would like to think of ways in which this repositioning happens in everyday life, in our day-to-day, which I guess takes us back to the beginning of our conversation and the intervention that artistic practices can make into everyday life.

Is that the end of the conversation?

F=

Yes I think so. For now anyway!

Thankyou





'Anne's unicorn embroidered into a tablecloth as part of 'Live Your Best, Ambleside, November, 2018'





EROTIC POWER







COVID-19: a call to PAUSE

Words by *Gruppo Pause*

The following text, written on the 3rd April 2020 during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, was a response to the mechanisms then being put in place to manage the temporary closure of arts institutions, galleries, museums, theatres and performance venues across the arts and cultural sector in the UK. And furthermore, a critical reflection on the immediate drive, on the part of the global art world and all its actors, to transition to online platforms and continue to incessantly curate, make and produce for an online audience. This text draws attention to the mass rush to fill the void that continued without pause, thereby reducing the possible spaces and vital capacity in which to imagine other possible worlds.

Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.

(Illness as Metaphor, Susan Sontag, 1978) (1)

03/04/2020

Arts Council England has recently announced its Emergency Response Fund to provide ‘financial support for artists, creative practitioners and freelancers’, a scheme designed to support artists who have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance for applicants, in particular the eligibility criteria for support, raises concerns. Many of us do not easily fit into simple financial categories of accounting. Many of us are invisible precarious workers, the ‘dark matter’ of the creative economy. (2)

As artists, our working lives do not align with Arts Council England’s evidently narrow understanding of how artists actually survive, get by, and create the conditions to sustain a practice. More worrying is what this scheme reveals about Arts Council England’s definitions or categorisations of what an artist is, which is based on economic success. Over the last few decades, the art industry has laid bare its own precarity. Many artists and institutions have been involved in the open critique of hierarchies of power, repeatedly drawing public attention to the exploitation of unpaid interns, volunteers and zero-hours contracts in the maintenance of systems of art production. What might appear to be minor details in a necessarily rapid drafting process of empathetic support for artists reveals the unswerving neoliberalisation of creative work.

Just as with Government’s fiscal packages in the form of loans and grants to support the self-employed and small businesses affected by COVID-19, many of us cannot apply, because we don’t fit the criteria, are already indebted, or must now demonstrate profits. Balance sheets showing losses reveal the fact that artists of all forms and descriptions not only subsidise their own practice, but the creative industries themselves, through many forms of unpaid or poorly labour. Artists, like most other precarious workers in a gig economy, have many jobs, typically a combination of cash-in-hand, PAYE, freelance contracts, grants, per-diems, honorariums, fees and short-term contracts. Our current economic system is built on the backs of the neoliberal subject in the form of a ‘flexible’ workforce: the self-employed, the entrepreneur, and the part-time leftover fragments of labour on the cutting floor of what were once full-time positions.

And yet, under the published funding criteria, Arts Council England will only award grants if your creative practice accounts for more than 50 per cent of your total earnings. This can be read as an attempt to establish a legalised professional identification for an artist, one in which money is the main measure by which we should value art.

Arts Council England's insistence that one must earn more money from their practice than on PAYE is ethically dubious and discriminatory to practitioners and makers. It distorts the primary motivator of artistic labour. The presumption of a steady stream of art commissions or sales, and a consistent profit margin, means that only those who already have money can apply for money.

Cancel everything: pay everyone!

We are less concerned here with the politics of state funding for the arts and more about how neoliberal society defines the role of the artist. The COVID-19 pandemic brings this into sharp focus. In this moment we are reminded of how it would be unimaginable to cope in isolation without music, books, film, performance and other forms of art and culture. This moment is also an opportunity to break from our usual patterns of consumption, and pause to rethink.

Every obstacle is a challenge to circumvent, but what these attempts to selectively support individual practitioners reveal is a different kind of monstrosity: the artist as neoliberal subject and 'cost centre'. More competition! is the cry into the void opened up by COVID-19. What comes back through the screen, the tablet, and the phone is an exponential demand for more, even more than before. The spectre of self-invention is reflected in a viral hall of mirrors.

The blurring of art into life, and life into art, as a world of endless over production and consumption, leaves many artists on a treadmill of self-exploitation. COVID-19 demands a response. The cultural economy and the public are fuelling early demand for content in a pandemic that has not yet peaked. This could be read as a premature shock reaction to the abrupt cessation of life as we know it under capitalism. It is as if someone pressed the pause button: a harsh awakening for many, and for others an opportunity to stop and rethink. This unique opportunity to actually pause demands that we stop pouring petrol on the fires of self-exploitation and the entrepreneurialisation of the self.

This is not a critique of necessary distraction and the sharing of creative responses and storytelling that genuinely help create vibrant online communities and alternative visions. It is a challenge to shape a different political subjectivity, first by accepting the invitation to PAUSE, and secondly a refusal to accept business as usual in the world to come.

To pause is to acknowledge privilege. COVID-19 does not distinguish between rich or poor. But the lock down ruthlessly exposes inequality and COVID-19 is worsening its spread. All around we see life without security.

In response to these recent measures, and in solidarity with all those on the frontline who are not able to stop and reassess, and all precarious workers, business owners, self-employed, the least employed and the unrecognised labour that supports life - to all those that cannot get the support offered, we call upon artists to PAUSE.

This has rapidly become an exceptional time of social upheaval, and like the pandemic, we are only at the start of many struggles that are emerging from this crisis. Artists will be called upon to bring new poetics and objectives into these social struggles as they take shape.

The pandemic has caused work to stop. Paradoxically, only a general strike could have achieved this before. Artists were among the first to invent responses to the social and political events during May '68, in a coming together of workers with students and artists in the production of a radical critique. 'Art is the armchair in which the State sits for its own pleasure' wrote Alain Jouffroy, an artist active in the strikes as he joined others in putting art in the service of revolution. In this moment of COVID-19 the pause, as a deliberate act of non-productivity, is not an intention 'to end the rule of production, but to change the most adventurous part of "artistic" production into the production of revolutionary ideas, forms and techniques.' (3)

To pause is to cease to be usefully productive for capitalism, but not to surrender your work. The pause is the moment to regain strength for the refusal to accept business as usual in the world to come. Artists have the ability to reassign their labour power to resist commodification. It is the act that reassigns the labour of non-productivity to imagining and instituting other possible worlds and futures.

To pause means we down tools, at least for a little while. It means taking time to look at the world we've created, not in abject horror or fear but to make sense of our collective responsibility. Embrace the void, accept the silence. Live with your personal responses before propelling them into the world. Learn to own your emotions without transforming them into opportunities for others to consume more and more. Pause to consider what it means to really share.

Let others breathe. Let everyone who is able to do so, pause.

We cannot switch off our social media, we should not. We are in an unprecedented moment of community building and connection. We need each other. But don't drown out this moment by asking us to consume more, look at more, read more, share more, produce more. Many of us are facing a multitude of fights to simply survive this crisis.

To pause during this pandemic means galleries, museums and other cultural institutions participate too. Participate in the pause - embrace the void, accept the silence. This pause is open-ended: we must not rush to fill it, abolishing the horizon. Let us use this space to think, not show more and ask of others to produce more and to consume more. Yes of course let us use art to reflect and to help us understand, to come to terms, to heal, to imagine other possible futures. But not when we are in the thick of it, not when our friends are struggling, not when we don't yet know what lies in front of us.

"As a gesture of protest and in solidarity with my peers who are not getting paid, my website will be closed until further notice". To pause is a courageous act that others have already taken. Whether that's in solidarity with precarious workers, to think how to proceed, to refuse business as usual, to manufacture alternatives or to imagine alternative futures.

To pause, we give ourselves the space to ask questions. With a longer pause we create space in which to think about the answers to those questions.

The urgent questions we need to ask right now are too numerous to list here. Let us instead consider how COVID-19 and the cessation of life as we know it, exposes capitalism's cracks. After years of austerity, growing inequality and exploitation, capitalism now depends on socialism for its own survival. Precarity as the condition by which neoliberal capitalism has enacted its domination is now fully exposed.

To pause is to evaluate. Do we want more and more of our lives 'online' and to work remotely? Before we have even addressed this question, the pandemic brings about its inevitability. We are living out right now the triumphs of Silicon Valley and its dream of total neural connection and distraction, seduced to reside in cyber space via the tentacular internet of things. The digital world is gearing up to facilitate an ever-present online universe, taking our ancient practices and rituals of togetherness and proximity and making them virtual. In the months to come, unless we pause, we will help eradicate the imperatives of space and proximity in the pursuit of machine intelligence and surveillance revenues, further dismantling the institutions of social solidarity. Universities will learn to better commercialise distance learning and AI capabilities. Companies will let go of expensive office and work spaces in favour of working from home. Galleries and museums will find new revenues from virtual audiences and online exhibitions.

PAUSE means facing the world, and acknowledging that this is not the world we want to live in.

Calls for a new ecological thinking reverberate in empty skies, with no planes overhead, and the uncanny appearance of dolphins in the Venetian waterways, where once giant cruise ships docked. In this unprecedented moment of temporary cessation, the opportunity arises to invent new narratives and mentally prepare for a post-carbon economy. As we discover new ways of being together and acting collectively, we will also develop strategies of adaptation. As artists we have a responsibility to invent responses, to invent new languages of criticism and of hope.

The one refusal we must share in the formation of new struggles and new solidarities is the collective cry that says NO to *business as usual*. We cannot go back to *business as usual*, to how things were. We cannot truly say NO unless we pause first.

Gruppo Pause (Ben Parry, Lia Mazzari)

1 Sontag, S. (1978), *Illness as Metaphor*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

2 Sholette, G. (2006), *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in an Age of Enterprise Culture*. London: Pluto Press

3 Jouffroy, A. (1968), 'What's to Be Done About Art?' In Casseau, J. (ed.), *Art and Confrontation: The Arts in an Age of Change*. New York: New York Graphic Society.

LOOK, LOOK: OP ART/POP ART IN XTC SINGLE SLEEVES 1977-83

Words by *Peter Mills*

Andy Partridge is a true believer in pop, and the aesthetics of the 7" 45rpm record: the single. Indeed the last commercially issued new XTC track penned by Partridge was his tribute to the 45, 'Spiral' (2005). In an irony which would not have been lost on him, it was an internet-only release. Between 1977 and 1983, the first period of XTC's life *en publique*, they were touring and recording incessantly, yet Partridge designed all but one of the sleeves for XTC's singles of that period. While producing one's own cover art may be commonplace at the DIY /Indie level it's much more unusual when the band is working at a high level of success, as were XTC back then. We can't discuss them all here, but I've chosen a representative sample illustrating how the band's music was packaged by their own chief songwriter. It's art to look at as well as listen to.

To be clear: XTC was by no means just Andy Partridge. Colin Moulding was there throughout and wrote many of the band's biggest hits. Terry Chambers, Dave Gregory and Barry Andrews all proved irreplaceable. In matters of design, however, Moulding told me that while he had some input on 45s featuring his own songs, 'Andy was fiercely protective over what he thought was his domain. I think the people at Design Clinic did the donkey work'(1). Partridge's very strong visual sense – he *sees* the music- comes over in his songs; in the documentary *This Is Pop* (Charlie Thomas 2017) he explains and demonstrates how this works, how certain musical tones suggest visuals to him, which are then turned into words and melodies. It's a music-focussed synaesthesia. This visual realisation of the musical tone or chord goes way back to his adolescent musical endeavours with early versions of XTC trading under the names Star Park and The Helium Kidz (that 'Z' evoking mid 70's British pop at its Sladest). Furthermore he knows the lineages of pop music; what it sounded like, what it looked like. He also loved comics, pulp sci-fi (recording a whole instrumental album inspired by the art of Richard M. Powers) and pop art. That pop/comic sensibility informed the covers he designed for XTC singles; wit, invention, and an extension of musical meaning into the visual.

XTC were signed to Virgin in Spring 1977 and despite future difficulties with the label they were the ideal home for someone with Partridge's creative sensibilities. Virgin had welcomed mavericks since the label's 1973 launch: Mike Oldfield, Slapp Happy and Hatfield & The North albums all sported striking, wilfully eccentric covers. Indeed, legendary 49p album *The Faust Tapes* may have influenced XTC in unexpected ways: Bridget Riley's kinetic op-art piece 'Crest' on the back cover was echoed in a 1983 single sleeve, as we shall see, and the label design was recreated/revived for XTC alter-egos The Dukes of Stratospher's *25 O'Clock*.

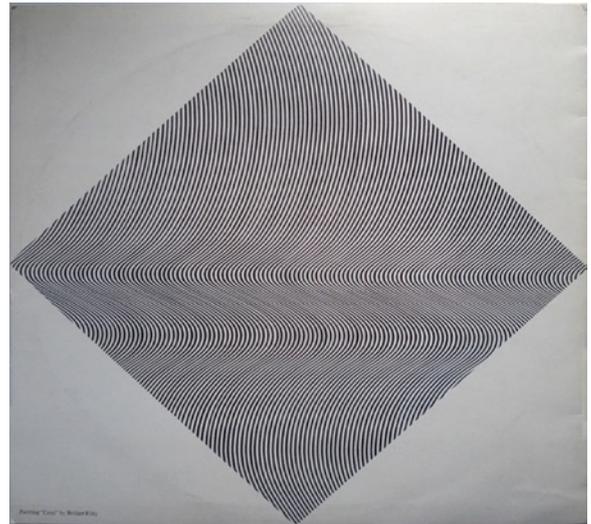


Figure 1 Bridget Riley 'Crest' on back cover of *The Faust Tapes* (Virgin 1973)



Figure 2 Original Virgin Records label (1973-76)



Figure 3 Label for The Dukes Of Stratosphear (XTC) 25 O'Clock (Virgin 1985)

The sleeve for XTC's July 1977 debut '3D EP' brings this mix of retro-futurism to bear, in a kind of pop art/op art/ sci-fi collision. The cover says that just as you need special lenses to see this cover properly, you need to listen differently to this music as well. In the 70's the idea of 3D was antique in that the pop sci-fi experiment in 3D cinema in the 1950's was by then an arcane footnote, while its digital revival lay decades ahead. So it was at once both a retro and a futuristic device. The front cover carries no information about the music or the artist. It could easily be a standalone artwork, not a record cover at all. As far as I know the record did not come with 3D glasses to help the potential buyer.

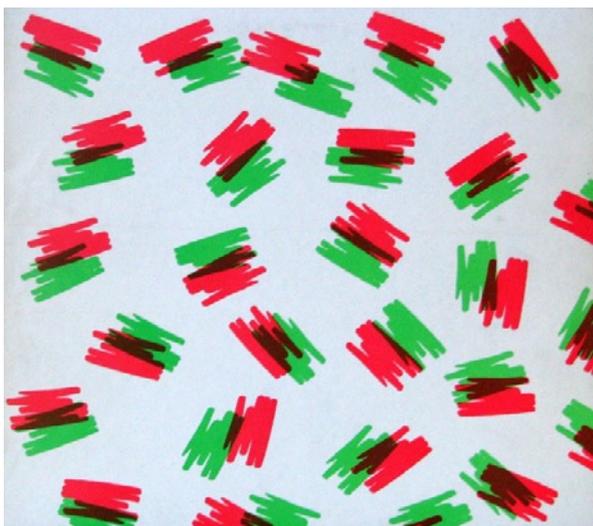


Figure 4: XTC '3DEP' (Virgin 1977, front cover)

Flipping the sleeve you'd see a more conventional back cover, but one still rendered in 3D. You can read it, but you have to make an effort. This is in itself a tone-setter. XTC music and sleeves always require you to engage, to give something to the artwork, to

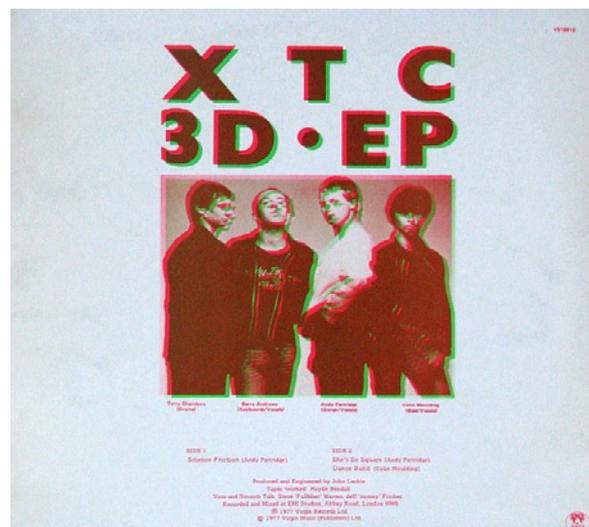


Figure 5: XTC '3DEP' (Virgin 1977, back cover)

make an effort: they ask the viewer and listener to become more than a passive receiver.

We see the band name – as a debut release, few people would have known them– and the disc's title is rendered in two pairs of characters, both of which 'mean' something in their abbreviated state:

'3D' [three dimensional image] 'EP' [extended play record]. What is now considered a classic early portrait of the quartet occupies centrefield, with credits introducing the players to us. In the lower segment are song titles and mandatory recording/publishing credits. Catalogue number upper right corner; in the bottom right, that very recognisable 'double' Virgin logo. Incredibly, only four years separated the '3D EP' from *Tubular Bells* and *The Faust Tapes*.

Partridge disliked the design given to their next single, 'Statue Of Liberty', from their debut album *White Music* in January 1978. He commented via email:

I designed the first one, '3DEP'/'Science Friction'. Then we were touring constantly and 'Statue of Liberty' got released which I wasn't around to design. So appalled was I by that sleeve that I swore I would design all sleeves from then on...my sketches being worked up to finished artwork usually by Ken Ansell and Dave Dragon/Jill Mumford at Design Clinic, now just called Clinic. (2)

Here is the cover to 'Statue of Liberty' that so upset him. Clean white field, band logo (which they stuck with for some years), bold type, title-friendly image. I quite like it - but it's not my song.

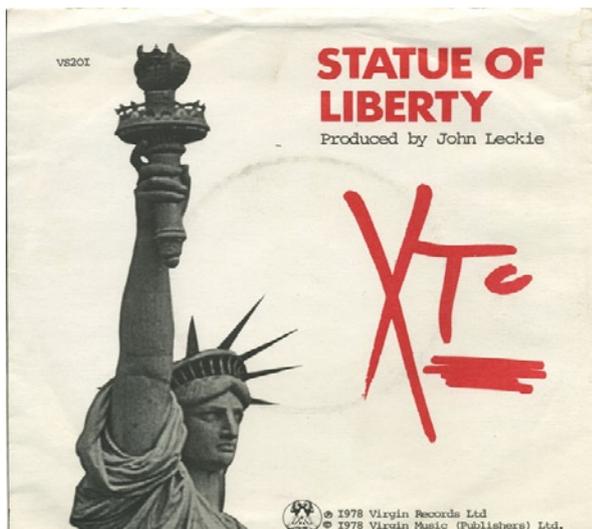


Figure 6: XTC 'Statue Of Liberty' (Virgin, 1978, front cover)

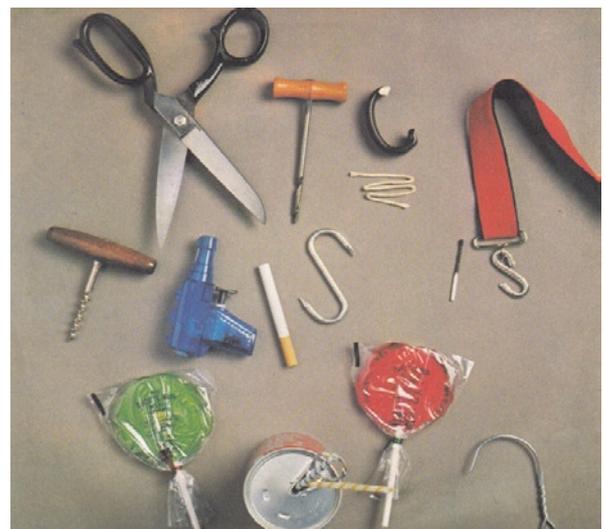


Figure 7: XTC 'This Is Pop?' (Virgin 1978, front cover)

The next 45 was all Andy. 'This Is Pop?' is a zoom'd up re-record of the *White Music* version. It's a declaration of intent and self-identification; yet, ever suspicious of the easy assertion, Partridge adds a question mark to the sleeve – the wire coat hanger - and the song's title. It's 'unheard' on the record, but we hear it feelingly.

The cover is a collage of what we might now call 'found' objects, everyday items you'd hardly notice in the normal scheme of things, which we most likely would not think of in terms of their design at all. It's almost like a puzzle: make something out of these household objects. Mark Fisher, creator of the XTC fanzine *Limelight* discussed this sleeve with me:

They [the objects used] are democratic: the scissors, corkscrews, lollipops, coat hanger, cigarette, broken cup handle, belt and water pistol are everyday objects that anyone would have to hand. It's not the unattainable glamour and cocktails of Roxy Music, but the cheap accessibility of a sweet shop. (3)

This insightful nod to Roxy Music - great exponents of artwork adding to the ambient meanings surrounding the music – reminds us that these are aesthetic and commercial choices; a sublime kind of advertising strategy. A collage can often generate meaning through the serendipity of juxtaposition but here the elements are consciously employed to serve an important question – *this is pop?*. I enjoy the incredulous tone that the question mark adds. Note too the little squiggle of string under the 'C' of XTC, recreating the scribble in the band's logo as seen on the 'Statue Of Liberty' cover. The question really is, are you paying attention? The camera shy question mark of 'This Is Pop?' moved to centre stage on the sleeve of October 1978's 'Are You Receiving Me'. A standalone 45, it was the last to feature Barry Andrews, arriving a fortnight before the single-less *Go2* LP. It was their second successive single with a question for a title, but this time there was no ambiguity. The sleeve features a huge, centred question mark rendered in a kind of typewriter font, with inkily uneven margins, on a matt white field. It's absolutely clear but also kind of...smudgy. It's also suggestive of a letter or note typed out and sent from one person to another; the letter arrives, and is read, but is it understood? 'I put it in a letter/What could be better?', says the lyric.



Figure 8: XTC 'Are You Receiving Me' (Virgin 1978, front cover)

The dynamic simplicity of the design reminds me of a piece of pop art, or the reverse polarity version of a silent film intertitle, which were usually white text on a black field.

Yet if we look at the title on the sleeve, and indeed on the record label, we find no question mark. This woozy drifting in and out of presence feels like the surge and fade of a radio signal; anyone who used to listen to Radio Luxembourg in the 60's and 70's (and I will bet you ten shillings that Andy Partridge did) will know that sound. Radio waves as metaphor for communication were not new for XTC – *White Music* opened with 'Radios In Motion' – and this clash between hearing, seeing and feeling is at the heart of Partridge's songs. Are you receiving me? Thoroughly 'through-designed', the single's b-side was Colin Moulding's 'Instant Tunes'. The form is absolutely consistent with the a-side and the exclamation mark is a pleasing fit with the song – where 'Are You Receiving Me' was loomed over by a big question mark on its sleeve (if not appended to its title), 'Instant Tunes' has its NASA space food vibe confirmed by the immediacy of the exclamation mark. 'Instant tunes, only just been made' runs the lyric. It's also an observation on the quick turnover of the pop industry – the volume of it, we might say – to which the band suddenly found itself subject; with the constant demand for new songs to take to market comes the idea of music as commodity. The exclamation mark delivers the apposite bolt of current, the sting of surprise, the shock of the new. Pay attention!



Figure 9: XTC

The exclamation mark was a staple pop art device, of course. It adds much to any

word or title (imagine The Beatles' cry for *Help!* without one) and 60's pop culture sprinkled them liberally. Think of the works of Roy Lichtenstein, or the cartoon emphases of *Batman*, while Michael Nesmith got to wear one in the 'cheerleader for war' segment of The Monkees' 1968 movie *Head*, too: all Partridge favourites.



Figure 10 : i) Roy Lichtenstein 'Pop!' (*Newsweek* magazine cover 25/4/66)



Figure 10: ii) Adam West as Batman with cartoon intercession (chewing gum trading card, 1967)



Figure 10: iii) Michael Nesmith in *Head* (Bob Rafelson 1968)

Once Barry Andrews left the band in January 1979 XTC were reconstituted as a guitar, bass and drum outfit and, unusually for them at this time, spent three months off the road writing and rehearsing with new member but old friend, guitar player Dave Gregory. First fruit of that was the pointedly 'old school' 45 'Life Begins At The Hop' which won a spot on *Top Of The Pops*. Colin Moulding's song showcased the band's new guitar-focussed sound while Partridge's sleeve paid tribute to the band's Swindon childhood. It recreated the design of the Garrard RC 121 turntable, typical of 1950's and 60's decks. Garrard was based in Swindon and, after the railway companies, one of the town's top employers. The vinyl was clear, the better to blend in with the design, in which a clear plastic pocket was overlaid with the turntable graphic and invites us to relish the rituals involved in playing, responding to and plain enjoying pop records. Garrard's operations in Swindon were scaled down after it was sold to Plessey in 1979, so there is also something elegiac about the imagery on this sleeve.



Figure 11 : XTC 'Life Begins At The Hop' (Virgin 1979)



Figure 12: Garrard RC 121 turntable, made in Swindon by Garrard Engineering and Manufacturing Company c.1960

This recalibration of form – from retro-pulp sci-fi to local habitation - was registered in the title and content of their August 1979 album *Drums and Wires*, the success of which surprised everyone, not least the band. It was led from the front

by XTC's first top 20 hit, 'Making Plans For Nigel'. Again it was Colin Moulding's song, and the sleeve builds upon and extends the song's meaning. Initial copies of the 45 contained a board game. In 1984's *Play At Home* documentary, Partridge spoke about his love of inventing board games, even demonstrating one he'd had custom made, called 'Ant Hill'. So the narrative of 'Making Plans For Nigel'

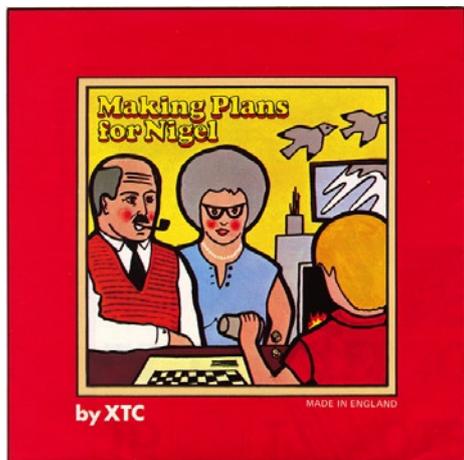


Figure 13: XTC 'Making Plans For Nigel' (Virgin 1979, front cover)

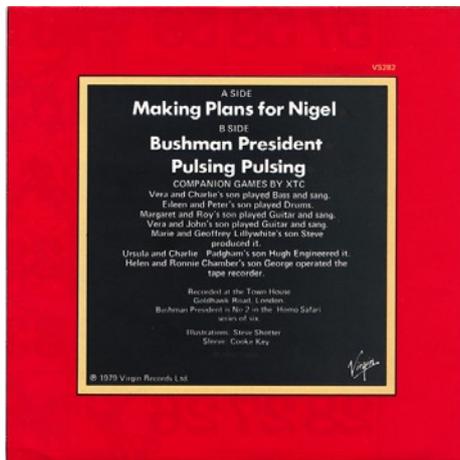


Figure 14: XTC 'Making Plans For Nigel' (Virgin 1979, back cover)

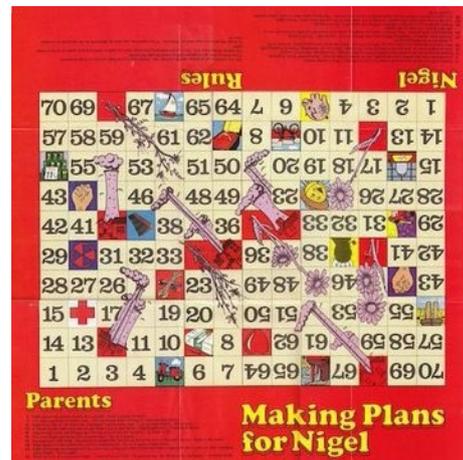


Figure 15 a, b: XTC 'Making Plans For Nigel' (Virgin 1979, board game included with initial copies)

becomes an actual game you can play, with no guaranteed winners. Sleeve credits list the contributors via their parentage, resonating with the song's subject having no real say in his own life: Nigel does not speak in the song 'but he loves to be spoken to...Nigel is happy in his work'.

Partridge didn't feel as though the final sleeve reflected his original vision, surrendering the task to the Design Clinic while XTC toured the world and elsewhere promoting *Drums and Wires*:

Anything that I could do with sleeves I'd have to phone in from wherever we were on tour. I'd have to try and post in sketches, or whatever. And it was all snatched on the hoof really. But I liked the idea of having an interactive single bag, where you made decisions on Nigel's life and played it as a game. (4)

Even when imperfectly realised, his ability to 'see' the music provides the means for connecting sound and vision, relating the realms of tactile object and intangible sound.

The sleeve to 'Great Fire' –issued in May 1983 - is effectively a multimedia performance device: every time you take the record out of the sleeve you start a fire. The description of the sleeve on Discogs beats any paraphrase I could muster: 'The cover comes in a plastic sleeve with a corresponding wavy pattern on it, so that when the paper cover is removed, the action of doing so produces a fire-like visual effect.'

Like the collage of 'This Is Pop?' the sleeve playfully employs a formal art method. Moiré isn't or wasn't a person – it's from the French, being the name of a type of textile pattern which has a rippled appearance. This gives a kinetic effect which suggests movement to the eye, not unlike the Bridget Riley piece used for *The Faust Tapes*. It's a prime op-art technique, and one Partridge was enthusiastic about. He discussed how he put this sleeve together:



Figure 16: XTC 'Great Fire' (Virgin 1983, front cover with kinetic 'flame' effect)

You can sometimes see these little sets of Moiré patterns in books...and you can run the patterns across the book and where the lines on the optical pattern on the plastic interacts with the optical pattern of the drawing underneath, you get a third image. You know that principle, you sometimes see a stagecoach wheel on TV and it seems to be turning backwards. Our whole stage light show was built on the white lines principle, interacting mechanical optical patterns from three projectors. So I thought that was a good thing to carry over into the artwork as well. (5)

It is fascinating to learn that he applied similar ideas into the kinetic artwork of the band's light show, too.

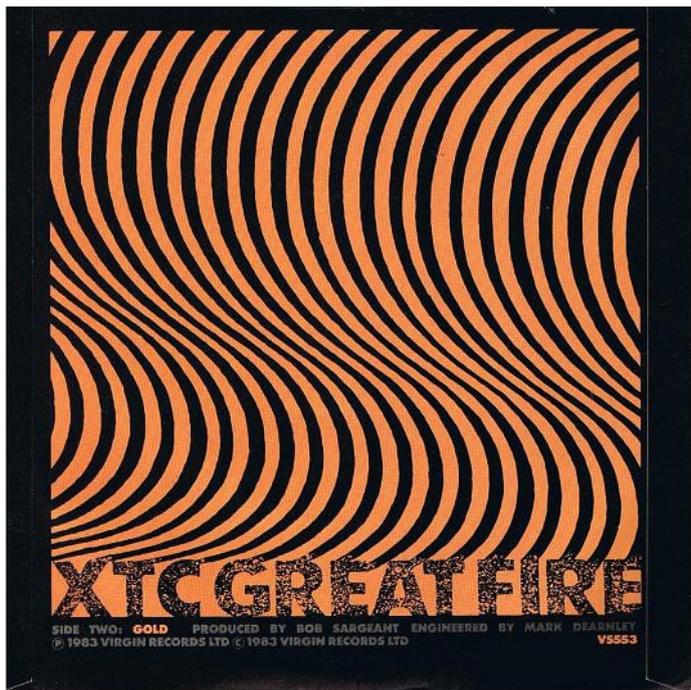


Figure 17: XTC 'Great Fire' (Virgin 1983, back cover)

I asked film maker, musician and art lecturer Stuart Hilton about the Moiré technique, and this sleeve:

I do love the idea of laying a screen of thin parallel lines over another similar - or slightly dissimilar one - to create unexpected patterns or better yet illusions of movement - it's ready made abstract animation without having to do anything strenuous. That sleeve has got that op art Bridget Riley thing going on - and a really nice connection between fire and waves. Also another really important factor is that he knows what you have to do to put the record on - it's a physical performance of having to slide the inside sleeve out to get to play it. It's interactive! You are the animator! You want to control the effect when you see it. You make it burn.
(6)

Hilton draws our attention to the similarities in representations of fire and water as elemental forces, and how one can cancel out the other according to circumstances: evaporation or dousing? The kinetic movement of the sleeve is in the hands of the user: 'you make it burn', as Hilton observes. It is also the work of a real lover of 45s, the man who went on to write that hymn to the single, 'Spiral': 'he knows what you have to do to put the record on - it's a physical performance of having to slide the inside sleeve out to get to play it.'

My final example is 'Love On A Farm Boy's Wages' issued in April 1984, based on Partridge's observation that a 'double single' (a mid-80's marketing device, four songs across two discs with a 7" gatefold cover) was not unlike a wallet.

"That was actually my wallet. I got together again with Dave Dragon [Design Clinic] and I said, "What I'd really like to do, to signify wages, is to make the double gatefold EP type sleeve a wallet." You know, 'cause you open a wallet and that's what shape it is." (7)

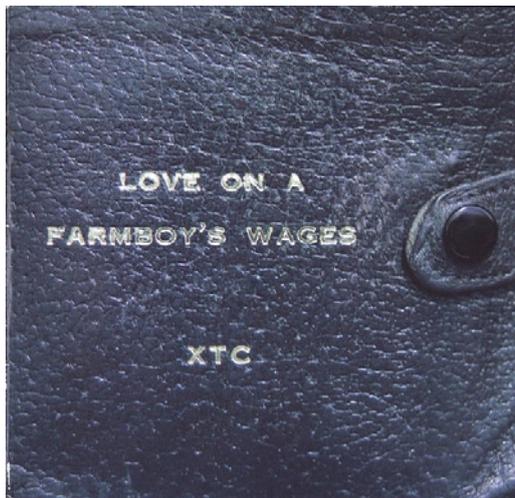


Figure 18: XTC 'Love On A Farmboy's Wages' (Virgin 1983, front cover)

The song's title is embossed in gold on a real wallet, band name below. The button which closes the wallet is popped into place to the left of the image. It's not a picture of a wallet; the sleeve *is* the wallet. What's inside?



Figure 19: XTC 'Love On A Farmboy's Wages' (Virgin 1983, double single gatefold, inner)

A picture of a young woman dressed in 1930's style, an old salmon-pink 10 shilling note, a cloakroom ticket, a Players' No.6 cigarette voucher (my own father used to collect these; I recognised it instantly) and a wage slip. The stuff of work alongside scraps of hope and pleasure, glimpsed and tasted briefly. Almost incidentally, papers bear the titles of the extra songs, 'Toys' and 'Desert Island'. The 45's themselves are tucked into the two halves of the wallet. Nothing is here without good reason; the wallet is a curated artwork. For all the apparent simplicity of the package, my feeling is that this is the most satisfying and integrated piece of art/music, op art/pop art produced for an XTC 45 during this initial period of creativity.

XTC's career went off on wayward tangents after they stopped touring in 1982 and became a studio band – The Dukes Of Stratosphere, the huge success of the Todd Rundgren produced *Skylarking*, the lost years battling with Virgin –but Partridge continued to design the packaging for all the band's music in order to both reflect and push back against all that happened. But that's another story.

Notes

1. Colin Moulding via TC & I Facebook page 24th of April 2020
2. Andy Partridge via email 19th of March 2020
3. Mark Fisher via email 23rd of April 2020
4. Optimism's Flames website accessed 10th of February 2020
5. *ibid.*
6. Stuart Hilton via email 24th of April 2020
7. Optimism's Flames website accessed 10th of February 2020

Selected Discography

XTC:

- '3DEP' Virgin Records 1977 (VS 18812)
- 'Statue Of Liberty' Virgin Records 1977 (VS 201)
- 'This Is Pop?' Virgin Records 1978 (VS 209)
- 'Are You Receiving Me' Virgin Records 1978 (VS 231)
- 'Life Begins At The Hop' Virgin Records 1979 (VS 259)
- 'Making Plans For Nigel' Virgin Records 1979 (VS 282)
- 'Great Fire' Virgin Records 1983 (VS 553)
- 'Love On A Farmboy's Wages' Virgin Records (double single) 1983 (VS 613)
- 'Spiral' (2005, issued online with download code included in *Apple Box* (IDEACD007))

As The Dukes of Stratosphear

- 25 O'Clock* (six track mini album) Virgin Records 1985 (WOW 1)

Other:

- Faust *The Faust Tapes* Virgin Records 1973 (VC 501)



THIS CO-AUTHOR DOES NOT EXIST



THIS CO-AUTHOR DOES NOT EXIST



THIS CO-AUTHOR DOES NOT EXIST



THIS CO-AUTHOR DOES NOT EXIST



THIS CO-AUTHOR DOES NOT EXIST

HUMAN-MACHINE

A reengineering by Ian Truelove and a machine of 'brown-study works'.

Do beginnings really start out worse than endings? Let's see.

I think that we need to consider the effects of both beginnings and endings on ourselves. If we don't take the time to consider both the start and the end, I'm not certain we can understand either.

Some rules to consider at the beginning:

1. We are responsible for our own actions.
2. People often make negative statements in reaction to acts we perform.
3. Not everything has to be about us.
4. This is not a rivalry between two people.
5. "YOU DID IT" is not a valid argument.

Every story begins the same. You meet your hero, or a person who will become your hero. You see their greatest triumphs. They show you the same affection and pity they would give to their friends. You begin to know the best things about them and their abilities. Maybe you even fall in love with them and want to marry them.

One of the main things we think about when we imagine the journey of a great hero is what they were like on the day that made them. Or, at the very least, the week before. What were they like the week before the day that made them?

The way we answer that question, from what I've heard in the world, is to first build your life around personal relationships. There is not going to be a better love and relationship for you on earth than the one you build with your future hero. You need to build a life around them in order to have a wonderful relationship with them. I haven't heard that in this world, though: I have heard it in another world.

Each might be faulty, but here we have two artists' universes building and binding in front of our eyes, juxtaposing a soul-crushing rage and grief with an androgynous smile. The results are disturbing and at the same time arousing. But which is which? Who is who? Which world is this world and which world is 'another' world? Are our lovers' universes parallel, or is one contained within the other? Contemplate this radical imagery for a moment: the relationship is a black hole with two human souls passing through it.

If all the stories do not contradict each other then, by definition, there are no contradictions. But why is this necessary? If all the stories about relationships contain logical contradictions, then you cannot deny the plausibility of the entire set of stories. As mentioned above, if there are no contradictions then what you are dealing with is a lie that gets repeated over and over again. My lie is about the day I first met my hero, one week after the day that made him. We shared coffee.

At first it tasted of beans, dried fruit, and raspberries. It was mild, and it was complex but pleasant. When I took a little bite into this coffee, I came to realise how fantastic it was. The faint bitterness wasn't great at first, but when you tasted how good it really was, it all came out with the sip. I was so happy that I couldn't bring myself to consume more coffee and the hunger lingered for the rest of the day. When the cravings hit, I would try anything and everything. When I craved coffee, I craved my hero. I craved eternity.

"I didn't want to think that... but it really is.", I said.

"It's like a coffin!", said my hero.

We shared another look. Finally, he nodded, shoulders heaving, and spoke.

"It is real. I'm not really sure what to think."

"And that's the best you can do?", I asked.

I opened my arms, keeping the object of my desire close. We heard the muted crackle of the flames, the trickling and swirling, and the final, faint creak of the spirit binding the two of us together. My hero, my partner, my soul-mate, looked down at the flame and said, "I thought you'd like it." I felt my heart cramp.

The colour had changed, like a sunset across the horizon. Its distinct, indigo hue has become smoky and subdued with age, moving from a rich purple to a low light, an olive-green hue. Its beauty was like a vibrant painted face, like a tattoo artwork on the insides of the wrists, like honey-coloured wisps hanging from an angel's wings. The shimmering orange skin of the flame was more than enough to accentuate the complexion of my hero's face.

Night after night I kept looking at my love. Day after day we looked out into the world together. On the broad roads we felt the spring breeze, and the familiar trees and bushes all lined up. I had had a sense of dread for weeks, but it was no longer there. I smiled. I wanted to explore. When we arrived at the spot where the stones of the highest room were laid, we saw the stilt bridge with the dozens of hand-pipes that linked part of the tower to the rest of it, and we could easily hear the kung-fu sounds. We sat down at the bridge and breathed. I took out a camera and captured myself and my lover, my hero, my eternal flame.

I dreamt about it, and then it was real. It was my dream ending, and my reality beginning. The beginning was better than the ending.

The following story is a reengineering of words by Alan Dunn by an artificial intelligence machine enslaved by the human Ian Truelove.

I was sat on the sofas in our Fine Art studio waiting for Hillary, a student, who – after three years of artistic experience – still gave me headaches. The messy attacks she and her friends regularly inflicted on themselves had left me with a lot to deal with. I would say things to this student like, *“Yes, take a room with wooden furniture.”* and, *“Yes, it is also a public building that needs cleaning, but if you want it to feel like a modern Bauhaus, you need to say that you’re in a private Bauhaus”.* Hillary would look at me with a blank expression which would slowly morph into a look of vague malice. *“Create a stairwell with solid granite stairs, looking outside at the city’s Grand Boulevard! Feel relaxed in the presence of a painting! Perhaps imagine a wooden carriage full of cyclists!”*, I would suggest. *“Try to listen to another party piece with one piano in the middle. Critically reflect on all of this, please, I’d really rather pass you than fail you. I’m on your side!”*, I would passionately express, never quite sure if I was really helping. Instead of following my faux-wise advice she would delve into old Delia Smith cooking shows and create nonsensical vernacular artworks filled with even more bee noises than an industrial hive. I would have to listen to all these ‘fun antics’ week after week, gently weeping inside whilst smiling on the outside. Hillary’s misplaced notion of Delia Smith had led to her becoming possessed by the demons of despair. Having an embarrassing image of her friend Cynthia leaked on the Internet hadn’t helped matters.

Cynthia had had some success in the development of her studio practice when she had subverted the North American anime Blu-ray release of Tenchi Muyo, in which all the seven girls (except Dr Albedo) were replaced by men via a crude Adobe After Effects montage effect. Cynthia’s attempts at themed web comics had been less successful, but all that seemed irrelevant now that she had tragically gone viral.

Stung by sharp words about her ‘illustrations’ in a soul-destroying studio critique, Cynthia had firmly committed to experimental filmmaking, largely because her favourite tutor felt film had more potential for her, and she desperately wanted his approval. In the final act of her next film, ‘Ice Cream for Crows’, Cynthia had cynically cut together footage from a 1970s iced-cream delivery service promotional film, and it was this development of her art practice that had inadvertently led to her unfortunate exposure online.

“Crystal is ready! The Crystal ice-cream delivery service is the best place to go for ice-cream!”, squeaked the semi-professional narrator. *“Whether you prefer the sweet, creamy taste of fresh custard or if you prefer the crunch of candied almonds, our mouth-watering ice-cream selection is sure to satisfy all tastes! The taste of our ice-cream is so distinctive that you’ll be sure to find the perfect treat right away!”*, purred the unsettlingly colloquial voice-over man. *“Keep an eye on our Ice Cream advertisements for special offers and discounts, which we’ll apply on any orders placed before the final date!”* The dialogue was ironic in an obvious sort of way, but when Cynthia’s thoroughly decent but disturbingly contorted torso flashed up on screen momentarily, the juxtaposition was both mildly effective and entirely inappropriate. Cynthia’s fatal error was to upload the film to her YouTube channel. A Boston-based ‘mash-up’ artist called &Duzt\$ had taken Cynthia’s video and, with help from some open-source audio manipulation software, had constructed a cruel mockery of the poor girl. &Duzt\$ had appropriated an obscure drum and bass track and overdubbed

it with a heavily processed treatment of the ice-cream man's narration. He was made to scream, *"Layers of cream, sugary toppings and indulgent toppings"* as Cynthia's innocent awkwardness was mocked over and over and over again.

Hillary arrived. *"Hahahaha, I'm depressed..."*, she said. *"Why not take a look at what's on offer?"*, I said back. *"It's so cold inside the warehouse. If I make someone cry from being so cold, it will always put me at ease... even if it's the adults I love"*, she laughed. Baffled, but not showing it, I decided to change tack. I launched into a monologue about an avant-garde film I had half-watched about fifteen years ago.

"You should watch 'The World is Gonna Have It – You're Welcome'. This film is about a scientist who is dying of ichthyosis. He is in one of the most prestigious establishments of medicine, the St. Louis University Hospital – let's call it 'the building'. The doctor in charge of him is a brilliant doctor, a gentile devout Protestant. He becomes angry when the doctor tries to make him drink a case of alcohol as an experimental cure for his ichthyosis. 'This is blasphemous!' he says to the doctor, 'you will never cure me of the disease which God created in me!'" Hillary looked interested. I went on. *"In his fury he starts throwing dishes at the wall and starts speaking violently to the doctor. But the doctor can never utter such vulgar language without angering the patient..."* Hillary interrupted. *"What do you want from me?"* she asked. Jolted out of my zone of proximal bluster, I paused and tried to think. After what seemed like an age but was probably only a few seconds I said, *"I just want you to respond."*

The following story is a reengineering of words by George Evans by an artificial intelligence machine enslaved by the human Ian Truelove.

A man on a horse was on the edge of the cliff, looking over to the wasteland. The horse's eyes were bloodshot from the sheer weight of the man. A great number of whooshes, clattering, rumbling, snapping and belches rang out over the landscape. A horse on the edge of the land with a man at the end of his tether.

"Turn to point in the direction of cover – when I say", a ghost said in the man's head. A window appeared in his mind's eye, revealing his own room as if it was really there. The room was white, with blue hues all around, and beautiful grey stone flooring at the far end, extending to almost the roof line.

"Good", the man on the horse said, a smile stretching from cheek to cheek. Suddenly he heard a crack and felt a sharp pain in his right cheek.

His crimson coat was drenched in his blood. With a struggle, his body was tossed onto the ground, causing him to yell. Clenching his face, he looked up.

A masked woman raised a ruined whip in her right hand to swing. This time, the impact was stronger.

He couldn't see his assailant clearly through her mask, but the blood on his clothes seemed to drip off. Even though the blood started to turn red, it never became green. The attacker pulled on the two ropes made from metal plates on her waist and continuously used her broken whip to violently try to pry the mess. It was as though there was nothing in front of her.

He drew a little beam of light in front of his eyes and the light flooded his body and transformed him into a beast.

He took a deep breath and quickly reached for his knife. He thought that it should be able to kill this devil. He drew the dagger and took the standard technique from his book of fighting.

Without even looking at the technique's requirements, the she-devil moved under the knife and stabbed at his neck.

With one small pull of the knife, the attacker's head disappeared as blood splattered everywhere, but her figure disappeared too. There was no trace of her golden coloured soul.

A fox dashed after him with its gorgeous eyes, right on time. How wonderful it was that he didn't have to find the fox: he just knew it was the right choice. But it was too late. The fox had already jumped onto his head. It was a crash that rocked the valley, rattling rocks and paving the way for thousands of birds to soar through the sky. He was breathless.

He arrived back in his village. When he got to his home, he had to wash so fast that his face almost tripped. There was blood splattered across the floor from where the fox had jumped, and the devil had whipped.

The rider sat upon the broad grey slab before him, the door at his feet. There, black with dust, the mountains yawned, as if making a pale promise to remoteness.

Here the rider parted his heart. Here the world was worth fighting for. Here was where heroes would live forever, fighting for the good and the true. Here, men would forget, dreams would slip away. Here was home, the place of enduring.

Among the embers, he felt the power burn. Power did that to men, the rider thought. It was a power he had wished to see if he could. If they were strong enough to ride the world to its death and rend it into silver, then they were strong enough. He was strong enough. He was home and the devil was dead.

ONE MAN QUEUE

One-act Play by Habib Mohana

ACT ONE

SCENE I

It is an icy morning in the city of the London; a plainly dressed young applicant stands before a closed white ornate window of a white elegant building. The filled-out application dangles from his hand as he stands on the yellow line drawn in front of the closed window. The window looks like a dealing window of an office. A single-track road passes before the white building and at the back of the applicant, about two hundred yards away passes a busy motorway. A green lawn stretches between the white building and the motorway. The motorway is partially visible. There is a dew-drenched cement bench and a hydrant a few yards from him. The applicant stands erect and alert, his puffy eyes locked on the white window. There is only a trickle of traffic on the motorway.

After a long and grueling wait, comes a janitor who is sweeping along the single-track road and whistling his favourite tune.

THE JANITOR: (Shoving the applicant rudely) Move aside, are you deaf? Move away from the yellow line, I've to sweep the place.

THE APPLICANT: I can't move away from the line as I don't want to lose the first place on the line.

THE JANITOR: But there is no one here other than you.

THE APPLICANT: Doesn't matter.

THE JANITOR: But I've to sweep the place.

THE APPLICANT: OK. (He lifts his one foot and then the other and the janitor sweep the place under his feet.)
What time is it?

THE JANITOR: I don't keep a watch. By the way does time matter?

THE APPLICANT: Yes.

THE JANITOR: For me time has no value. I start my work in the morning and stop in the evening. I measure time with the length of the road I sweep. I think people of the ancient times were so damned right. In their life big landmarks of time like morning, noon, afternoon, evening and night mattered not the small units of time.

THE APPLICANT: When does this office open?

THE JANITOR: Which office?

THE APPLICANT: This office. (He points his finger to the white closed window. Instead of answering the question, the janitor smirks and walks ahead sweeping the road.) I've an application to submit here. (He waves the application but the janitor moves ahead without answering the question.)

After a long time comes a gangly, scruffy and old guard. The guard plops down on the cement bench near the closed window. He pulls out an ancient pistol from the worn leather holster and starts cleaning it with the rag. Then with the same rag he cleans his shoes and then his face.

THE GUARD: (He suddenly springs to his feet and yells at the applicant) Applicant, stand on the line!

THE APPLICANT: (Apologetic) I'm standing on the line.

THE GUARD: (Angry) No, your feet are not exactly on the yellow line that's drawn on the ground. (The guard strikes him on the back with the grip of his pistol.)

THE APPLICANT: Ok, sir. (He looks down at his feet and instantly complies with the orders.)

THE GUARD: Look straight, focus on the window otherwise they'll think you're half -interested in the thing and you'll lose the chance.

THE APPLICANT: How will they see me through the closed window?

THE GUARD: I don't know, but I've a gut feeling that they can see us through the closed window. (Hooting, an ambulance whizzes past along the motorway, the applicant rubbernecks at the ambulance, the guard shouts at him.) Don't look backwards. Get closer to the window. Move ahead a little.

THE APPLICANT: Why? There's no need of moving ahead!

THE GUARD: Shortly, other applicants will be joining you, make room for them.

THE APPLICANT: But let them come first and then I can move forward.

THE GUARD: No, you've to move ahead, you've to follow the rule. (The applicant shuffles forward a few inches, grumbling.) Not too close, not too close, young man! Don't jump the queue. (He says angrily and the applicant moves a little backwards.) Good, that's fine. No matter where you are, always form a neat, orderly queue. Those who don't form neat orderly lines can't succeed in life.

The guard sits down on the bench and scribbles something in his soiled notebook for some time. He then thrusts it in the pocket in his trousers, strides to the applicant, and walks around him staring at him closely. He straightens

the saggy collar of the applicant's faded shirt, and smooths the shirt at his back. He takes out a half-burnt cigarette from his pocket, lights it, and takes a few drags. Then he spits it out, collects the butt and shoves it into his pocket.

THE APPLICANT: When would the window open?

THE GUARD: I don't know.

THE APPLICANT: I think I came early; can I go and have breakfast?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: Can I drink water from the hydrant?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: Can I pee against that wall?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: I'll be back in a minute.

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: Then where should I pee?

THE GUARD: What?

THE APPLICANT: How should I get rid of pee that has collected in my bladder?

THE GUARD: None of my business!

THE APPLICANT: How am I supposed to stand on this line with the pressure of urine building in my bladder?

THE GUARD: I'm only a guard, I'm not a doctor.

THE APPLICANT: My bladder is so full of urine that I can feel the taste of urine in my mouth.

THE GUARD: Well...How does it taste?

THE APPLICANT: Salty and pungent and bitter.

THE GUARD: Keep enjoying it.

THE APPLICANT: You think it's something to be enjoyed?

THE GUARD: Yes, when you've nothing else to do, then you can enjoy the taste of pee in your mouth.

THE APPLICANT: Can I pee standing on this line?

THE GUARD: No, it's so rude of you to say that, you've no respect for the law?

THE APPLICANT: I'll pee in a way that not one single tiny drop will fall on the line.

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: I'll move away a bit from the line and pee.

THE GUARD: No, once you've stepped on the line, you can't move away from it. Once you've joined the queue you can't leave it.

THE APPLICANT: But there's no queue.

THE GUARD: You're the queue.

THE APPLICANT: I'm only one man in the queue, if I break the queue, there's no one here to raise an objection.

THE GUARD: I'll object to it. Do you think I'm no one?

THE APPLICANT: I'm hungry.

THE GUARD: what should I do?

THE APPLICANT: Permit me to go and buy myself something to eat.

THE GUARD: You can't leave the line.

THE APPLICANT: Then you fetch me something to eat.

THE GUARD: I'm only a guard, I can't abandon my duty.

THE APPLICANT: Please get me something to eat, or I'll die.

THE GUARD: Death does not come so easily.

THE APPLICANT: I'm hungry.

THE GUARD: Stop thinking about hunger and soon hunger will not disturb you.

SCENE II

The sun is high up in the sky but the window stands closed. The guard strides away from the building to urinate. He returns to the applicant and thunders at him.

THE GUARD: Applicant! Stand on the line.

THE APPLICANT: I'm standing on the line.

THE GUARD: Your right boot is a little off the yellow line. Half an inch, I guess.

THE APPLICANT: Does it matter?

THE GUARD: Yes, a lot.

THE APPLICANT: Half an inch's measurement matters?

THE GUARD: Why not, accidents happen within half an inch's measurement. Half an inch can save you from a sure death; half an inch can kill you. Accidents happen due to the wrong measurements.

THE APPLICANT: No, accidents happen due to the wrong food people eat.

THE GUARD: A rule is rule. No rule is small or big, a rule is important and thus respectable.

THE APPLICANT: Even a defunct one?

THE GUARD: Yes, even a defunct rule is respectable. I sentence you to ponder about the importance of rule for one hour while I will sit on the bench and smoke a cigarette. And remember don't budge an inch from the line

and if you've an itch don't scratch otherwise you'll be showing irreverence to the law.

The guard spends some time smoking the cigarette, and then returns to the applicant.

THE APPLICANT: I think the clerk is not coming to the office today, therefore I should go. (He looks up at the sun.)

THE GUARD: Don't make lame excuses. You can't go.

THE APPLICANT: The clerk is not coming.

THE GUARD: You should not say that. You can't predict thing, can you? You must not talk, simply concentrate on the window and don't let your eyes stray from it. It can open any minute. Don't let wayward thoughts enter your mind. This is against the law.

THE APPLICANT: Who made this law?

THE GUARD: Young man, don't ask questions. Only rude people ask questions. It's not my duty to answer these questions. My duty is to get the applicants stand in a neat orderly queue. I love a neat orderly queue; there is nothing more beautiful, respectable and adorable in the world than a neat orderly queue. Your sense of beauty, I suppose, is in a nascent stage otherwise you'd have been enjoying the beauty of the simple orderly queue as I have been doing.

THE APPLICANT: I must go and buy myself something to eat. Would you please submit this application on my behalf?

THE GUARD: You've an application? Beautiful! Let me have a peek at it. (He grabs the application from him and keeps staring at it for a long time.) What language is this?

THE APPLICANT: I don't know.

THE GUARD: Who wrote this application?

THE APPLICANT: A blind man.

THE GUARD: Why didn't you consult a sighted man?

THE APPLICANT: I did that but the sighted man would not understand my view point.

THE GUARD: What the application is about?

THE APPLICANT: What?

THE GUARD: What sort of help you want from the clerk when he opens the window?

THE APPLICANT: I'll ask him to allow me to stand on this line. (He stamps on the yellow line.)

THE GUARD: This is ludicrous! You're already standing on the line. Would the clerk's permission make any difference?

THE APPLICANT: I don't care.

THE GUARD: If you don't care, then you shouldn't have come here. You should have stayed at home.

THE APPLICANT: I was getting bored at home.

THE GUARD: You think now you're not getting bored?

THE APPLICANT: I'm getting bored.

THE GUARD: Then you should have stayed at home.

THE APPLICANT: But there is a difference between getting bored at your home and getting bored before a closed window.

THE GUARD: Which option is better?

THE APPLICANT: This boredom is better than the boredom of the house.

THE GUARD: Why?

THE APPLICANT: At my home no one could see me getting bored.

THE GUARD: But here, no one is interested in you, no one is interested in watching you getting bored.

THE APPLICANT: At least you are.

THE GUARD: Huh? Yes, no, no. I'm not. I'm only performing my duty. Who says I am interested in watching you?

THE APPLICANT: You're interested in watching me otherwise you'd not have been talking to me.

THE GUARD: I talk to you not because I'm interested in you but because it's my duty to get you stand in a neat orderly queue.

The sun had set, the road before the window is dimly lit while the motorway lights are shining brightly.

THE APPLICANT: Now the working hours are over, I think I should go home and come back tomorrow.

THE GUARD: No, you should not move from your place. When the clerk will be coming, you can't tell.

THE APPLICANT: I'll return tomorrow.

THE GUARD: No, leave your place and another applicant will move in and then it'll take weeks, months for you to reach this place where now you're standing.

THE APPLICANT: I'll come early.

THE GUARD: You're standing on the most prestigious and sought-after place, you're lucky that you found this place for free and without being nudged and shoved by anyone.

THE APPLICANT: I'm hungry.

THE GUARD: Young man, don't spurn this golden opportunity. This yellow line is the best line in the world and yellow is the best colour in the world. You're the luckiest man on the planet earth that you've been given the opportunity of standing on this line while other people are straying from this line. They don't know where they're heading.

THE APPLICANT: I need to pee.

THE GUARD: Standing on a line means order and movement means chaos.

THE APPLICANT: I need to rest.

THE GUARD: You're safe and in one piece due to this yellow line. There is peace and order on this line. . .Don't ever think of becoming part of that chaotic world which is replete with accidents and deaths and broken bones. (He gestures to the motorway that is thick with traffic. The sudden traffic noise enters the applicant's head, he becomes startled.)

THE APPLICANT: The traffic is getting so noisy.

THE GUARD: The traffic noise? It is in your head, you can listen to it if you want to and you can tune it out if you want to. Better to tune the traffic noise out, it's distracting for those who are born to achieve great things in their life. Don't look sideways and backwards.

THE APPLICANT: I'll not look sideways and backwards.

THE GUARD: Simply concentrate on the work in hand.

THE APPLICANT: I'm concentrating.

THE GUARD: Concentration is what you need, what we all need. You're facing the most beautiful window in the world. And you're the luckiest man in the world that you're standing on this line before this window. One day some big good is coming out of this window. You're standing on the most beautiful line before the most beautiful window in the entire world.

THE APPLICANT: You're right.

THE GUARD: There's no other line like this in the entire world.

THE APPLICANT: You're right.

The night has deepened and the traffic has thinned on the motorway.

THE GUARD: I'm going home but you don't go, or you'll lose your best spot in the queue. Maybe tomorrow the queue will be so long that it'll stretch across the road and I may have to block the road. Come tomorrow and you'll be unable to find a place in the queue. (He walks a few steps and then looks over the shoulder.) Remember, young man, they can see you through the closed window.

THE APPLICANT: Don't worry; I'll keep standing on the line.

THE GUARD: Great!

SCENE III

The next morning the janitor comes sweeping the road and singing his favourite tune, he pokes at the applicant

with the butt of his broom.

THE JANITOR: Make way for the janitor; I'm the king of all the janitors because I sweep the most prestigious road of the city.

THE APPLICANT: Why you hit me? I broke no rule!

THE JANITOR: You're breaking the rule when you deter a janitor from sweeping a road.

THE APPLICANT: But stepping away from the yellow line is also against the rule!

THE JANITOR: Who gave you this rule?

THE APPLICANT: The old guard.

THE JANITOR: But at this very moment you are living in the reign of this janitor, me.

THE APPLICANT: When would this window open?

THE JANITOR: This window? It's not my duty to tell you that.

THE APPLICANT: What is the time?

THE JANITOR: Forget about the time, time is not important. For me time is either day or night. Day means work and night means rest. (Sweeping the road he moves ahead and disappears.)

A little later, the guard reports for duty, he does not acknowledge the presence of the applicant. The guard sits down on the bench and goes through the ritual of cleaning the pistol, boots and face with the rag. Then he stands up and barks at the applicant.

THE GUARD: Applicant, stand on the line!

THE APPLICANT: I'm standing on the line.

THE GUARD: Stand erect, chest and shoulders up. It's your second day and still you haven't learnt how to stand on the line. Face the window, don't look sideways or backwards. Move a little forward, and make room for other applicants.

THE APPLICANT: Ok, sir. (He scratches his face.)

THE GUARD: Don't scratch your face. Standing on the line has some rules. You're not allowed to scratch, shuffle or fidget.

THE APPLICANT: Ok sir. When will the clerk be coming? (He shuffles the application.)

THE GUARD: I've no idea.

THE APPLICANT: Would this window ever open?

THE GUARD: I don't know. My duty is to keep the applicants in a neat orderly queue. (The applicant starts picking his teeth.) Who gave you the toothpick?

THE APPLICANT: No one.

THE GUARD: What? How it reached your hands?

THE APPLICANT: I picked it from the road.

THE GUARD: You don't need to pick your teeth. You have not eaten anything....

THE APPLICANT: Picking teeth with the toothpick gives the feeling as if I have eaten food.

THE GUARD: You're not allowed to pick your teeth while standing on the line. When the queue is over, then you can use toothpick.

THE APPLICANT: But when will the queue be over? (He throws the toothpick down and crushes it with the toe of his boot.)

THE GUARD: Have no idea.

THE APPLICANT: Have you ever seen the clerk?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: Did you ever see this widow open?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: How can you keep on doing your duty before this window and you've never seen the clerk or the window open?

THE GUARD: My duty is to keep the applicants in order and not to meddle in the affairs of the office.

THE APPLICANT: Have you ever been inside this office?

THE GUARD: No.

THE APPLICANT: How long have been serving here?

THE GUARD: Several years.

THE APPLICANT: How much do they pay you?

THE GUARD: Pay? They don't give me any salary.

THE APPLICANT: Then why you come here to perform your duty?

THE GUARD: I like the ambience of my office.

THE APPLICANT: What is so special about your office....err this place? This place is like other....

THE GUARD: No, every place is different. Every place has its own aura, smell and melody. There are no two places in the world that are exactly alike.

THE APPLICANT: If this window will never open then why I am standing here? (He turns around to move away.)

THE GUARD: No, don't go. It can open anytime.

THE APPLICANT: I'm wasting my time.

THE GUARD: Everybody is squandering their time. It's better to squander time in front of one of your favourite places than squandering it wandering about along other places.

THE APPLICANT: But waiting here will not pay us....

THE GUARD: I don't wait to be paid. I wait for the sake of waiting.

THE APPLICANT: Let's go and wait before some other office, some other window...

THE GUARD: Would it make any difference? What if the window you're talking about does not open either? I'm twice your age, throughout my long, dull life I've seen many windows and many lines. But I found out that this window and this line are better than other windows and lines.

THE APPLICANT: You can stay here, I'm going. (He lifts his right foot from the line to move)

THE GUARD: I warn you young man, one step from the line and I'll shoot you. (The guard trains his gun on him.)

THE APPLICANT: Why would you shoot me?

THE GUARD: Because it's my duty.

THE APPLICANT: Who assigned you this duty?

THE GUARD: No one.

THE APPLICANT: Please let me go. (He lifts his foot to move.)

THE GUARD: No, I can't.

THE APPLICANT: You've no right to curtail my freedom of movement.

THE GUARD: You came here of your own accord but you can't leave without my permission.

THE APPLICANT: Ok, I'll not go home but you go home.

THE GUARD: Why should I go home?

THE APPLICANT: Because you look tired.

THE GUARD: I'm not tired and I'll not go home. I'll sit on this bench and watch you so that you may not skedaddle.

THE APPLICANT: I'll not skedaddle. I promise.

THE GUARD: No. I don't trust you.

THE APPLICANT: This merciless cold will kill you.

THE GUARD: No, I'll sit here and watch you. (He sits down on the bench.)

THE APPLICANT: I'm tired, can I sit down, here on this line? (He points to the yellow line.)

THE GUARD: No, this is not allowed. Ever saw someone sitting on yellow lines that are drawn before offices?

THE APPLICANT: No.

THE GUARD: Then why do you ask for such stupid favours?

THE APPLICANT: I feel exhausted, I've cramps in my legs, what should I do?

THE GUARD: None of my business.

Tiredness is visible on the applicant's face and body. He bends a little and then he kneels and after some time he stumbles to the ground. The guard trains his pistol on him and orders him to stand up but to no avail. He puts his pistol in his pocket and pulls him up. But as soon he removes his support the applicant falls down again. He again pulls him up but he again stumbles to the ground. Then the guard pulls out wooden staves from around the lawn and pulls up the applicant, and puts the staves around him. The applicant stands, his shoulder hunched, looking like a scarecrow.

The night has fallen, the single-track road is dimly lit while the motorway is bathed in roadside lights and sometimes a car zip passes on it. The applicant stands on the yellow line while the guard is perching on the bench, his gun pointed on the applicant. Late into the night the freezing fog fills the road up and the guard dozes off.

THE APPLICANT: (Raising his head slowly and speaking weakly) Hello, Sir, Sir, you can go home and rest, I'm feeling better now.

THE GUARD: (The guard wakes up and points his guns on the applicant.) Huh, who is there?

THE APPLICANT: I'm no enemy, I'm the applicant.

THE GUARD: Which applicant?

THE APPLICANT: The applicant with the application standing on the yellow line in front of the window.

THE GUARD: Ya, yes, yes, the applicant, the line, don't move from the line, your left foot is not on the line. (He drowsily points his gun at the applicant's feet. The applicant drags his left foot back on the line.)

THE APPLICANT: Damn it! Who drew this blasted line?

THE GUARD: No one can tell, but a line is a line. Once a line has been drawn, it should not be violated. Be it a yellow line or red one, a small one or a long one, a straight one or a crooked one. There's beauty and honour in standing on a line.

THE APPLICANT: Bullshit, what's the benefit of respecting a line?

THE GUARD: What's the benefit of not respecting it?

THE APPLICANT: We'll not see the benefit until we've violated the line.

THE GUARD: Are you certain about it?

THE APPLICANT: who drew this line?

THE GUARD: I don't know but whoever drew it, was a great man.

THE APPLICANT: How do you know that he was a great man?

THE GUARD: Because only a great can draw a line. The great men draw the line, the common men follow the line, or stand on the line and strong men guard the line. I have the gun, I'm a strong man and I'll protect it.

THE APPLICANT: It means I'm a common man. I'm born to stand on the line.

THE GUARD: (Pointing to the people moving in cars, trucks and buses along the motorway.) Someone drew the line for them, I mean built a road and now they're bound to follow the line or the road. Roads are lines, air routes are lines, railway lines are lines, canals are lines, rivers are lines. There are lines and lines. Some great man has to do this thing for the people or they'll not be able to reach their destination. Otherwise they will go astray. (He stamps his foot on the yellow line.) By taking a quick peek at the straightness and color of the line you can tell that the maker of this line was a great man.

THE APPLICANT: What if I don't respect this line?

THE GUARD: Well, if you don't respect this line then you'll have to respect another line. There're lines and lines, you can't go out of the web of lines. There are legal lines, traffic lines, social lines, religious lines and familial lines. There's no place in this world that doesn't have lines. It's better to respect the line that is close to you, with which you are familiar than...

THE APPLICANT: I'm tired, when can I move away from this yellow line?

THE GUARD: Not until a new line has been drawn. We exchange one line with another line. We don't obliterate one line unless a new line has been drawn and painted. We need lines or we'll be lost in the wilderness of world. We're born to follow the lines, we are condemned to stand on the lines, follow the lines.

THE APPLICANT: I'm tired of this line. I want to move to another line, when will a new line be drawn?

THE GUARD: I don't know. Sometimes it takes a millennium, sometimes a century, sometimes a year, sometimes a month, sometimes a day and sometimes a minute. Every line, every ism, every system commenced with one man, and in the end they became popular movements. In the beginning every line, every ism, every system was like a grain of a fig or a spark, lying snug in the skull of a wise man and then they turned into doughty trees or roaring bonfires.

THE APPLICANT: Ok, I'll respect the sanctity of the line. I'll not budge away from this line. You're an old man and it's freezing cold out here. You can go home and rest.

THE GUARD: What if you fell down again?

THE APPLICANT: No. I'll not fall down again.

THE GUARD: Promise?

THE APPLICANT: Promise. These wooden staves will not allow me to collapse.

THE GUARD: What if you absconded?

THE APPLICANT: I'll not. I'll spend the night standing on the line.

THE GUARD: Why should I believe you?

THE APPLICANT: Well, because I'm a gentleman and all gentlemen honour their promises.

THE GUARD: (Takes off his overcoat and offers it to the applicant.) Take it; it'll save you from cold and rough weather.

THE APPLICANT: I don't need it.

THE GUARD: I don't need it either.

The guard puts the overcoat on the ground near the applicant. The guard leaves while the applicant stands on the yellow line. Late into the night the sleet hits the city and applicant stands on the line, shivering but braving the sleet, the overcoat at his feet.

SCENE IV

In the morning the guard reports back for duty, the applicant is standing on the same place. The guard cleans the pistol, boots and his face and nose with the soiled rag and then stuffs it in the pocket of the shirt. He walks around the applicant.

THE GUARD: How was your night?

THE APPLICANT: It was fantastic.

THE GUARD: I hope the cold did not trouble you.

THE APPLICANT: The cold does not trouble me.

THE GUARD: Move ahead a little, other people will be joining you, make room for them. (He pokes the pistol barrel in his back.)

THE APPLICANT: No one will join me. I'm sure, no one is foolish enough to join me.

THE GUARD: Only the fools will not join you. Had other people been wise enough then they would have joined you. Only the wise men respect the line.

THE APPLICANT: Only the fools respect the line.

THE GUARD: This is treasonous of you. I'll not tolerate such remarks in the future, I'm the guardian of this line, you say it again and you'll be a dead man. (He points the gun on the applicant. Uneasy silence ensues. The guard walks away, crooning a song.)

THE APPLICANT: You have a melodious voice. My father often sings this song.

THE GUARD: Only fools sing this song, your father must be a great fool. I don't know why I like you. I feel good in your company. I'm a bit harsh to you but still I like you.

THE APPLICANT: Please remove these staves, I don't need them.

THE GUARD: No, after some time you'll again feel weak and...

THE APPLICANT: I will not feel weak. I've told myself not to be weak.

THE GUARD: Good.

THE APPLICANT: I feel hungry, do you have something to eat?

THE GUARD: Let me check. (He fumbles in his pockets.) I've this cigarette butt.

THE APPLICANT: I'm hungry, will this help? (He accepts the cigarette.)

THE GUARD: I don't know but give it a try. (He lights the cigarette for him and the applicant takes deep pulls at it.) How do you feel?

THE GUARD: I feel great.

THE GUARD: Good.

THE APPLICANT: I feel my hunger going. (He takes more puffs from the cigarette.) My hunger is gone.

THE GUARD: Cigarette is good for hunger! We've solved a global problem.

THE APPLICANT: I've solved it, not you.

THE GUARD: But I gave you the cigarette.

THE APPLICANT: Ok. This discovery of global importance will have our names, yours and mine.

THE GUARD: (He strides to the bench and sits down on it.) When will the night fall?

THE APPLICANT: Why?

THE GUARD: Because then I can sneak away.

THE APPLICANT: You can sneak away now.

THE GUARD: I can't do that during my duty hours.

THE APPLICANT: Did you not sleep at night at home?

THE GUARD: I didn't go home.

THE APPLICANT: What? Where did you go then?

THE GUARD: Nowhere.

THE APPLICANT: What?

THE GUARD: I was here, all the time. Standing at some distance I kept watching you.

THE APPLICANT: Why?

THE GUARD: I was scared that you might run away.

THE APPLICANT: But I had promised not to run away.

THE GUARD: But you could change your mind.

THE APPLICANT: It means that the night before the last night you did not home either.

THE GUARD: Yes, I stayed here, and watched you from a distance. I was scared that you might run away.

The night falls and single-track road is dimly lit while the motorway is aglow with the lights.

THE GUARD: I'm going home, have this thing. You'll need it. (He extends the butt-end of the gun towards him)

I'm going.

THE APPLICANT: I don't believe you. You'll hide and watch me from a safe distance.

THE GUARD: Have this gun, you'll need it.

THE APPLICANT: I'll need it for what?

THE GUARD: You'll need it to kill your enemy.

THE APPLICANT: I don't have enemies.

THE GUARD: Then you might need it to kill yourself.

THE APPLICANT: Why would I kill myself? I don't hate myself.

THE GUARD: Sometimes your own self becomes your enemy and you need to kill yourself.

THE APPLICANT: One doesn't need a pistol to kill oneself.

THE GUARD: But this is the easier, cleaner, gentler and faster way to kill oneself.

THE APPLICANT: There're scores of other ways that are far easier, cleaner, gentler and faster than killing oneself by a pistol.

THE GUARD: For example?

THE APPLICANT: I'll not disclose my ideas to you; you can steal them and use them on yourself.

THE GUARD: I promise I'll not use them on myself.

THE APPLICANT: You might use on other people?

THE APPLICANT: Yes, no, I'll not use them on other people.

THE APPLICANT: If you'll neither use them on yourself nor on other people then what's use of telling them to you?

THE GUARD: I want to know about them just out of curiosity.

THE APPLICANT: Curiosity is a dangerous thing. Curious persons lead a miserable life.

THE GUARD: Ok, this is a gift from me, take it. (He shoves the pistol towards him.)

THE APPLICANT: I'll not take it.

THE GUARD: Why?

THE APPLICANT: Because the guns don't help in times of need. They don't kill. They misfire, they backfire, they explode, and they get jammed. They're not efficient tools for ending a life.

THE GUARD: But you need this thing until you have come up with something more efficient.

THE APPLICANT: No, I'll not take it. If ever I need to kill myself then I'll make my own weapon. I'll not rely on weapons that were invented by other peoples.

THE GUARD: Ok, I'm going, bye.

THE APPLICANT: I don't believe you. You'll hide and watch me from a safe distance.

THE GUARD: This time I'll go home. I'm not lying.

THE APPLICANT: Why should I believe you that you would go home this time round?

THE GUARD: Because I'm sure you'll not run away.

THE APPLICANT: How can you give this verdict about me?

THE GUARD: Because for two nights I watched you and you did not show any tendency of running away. (He tucks the pistol in the back pocket of the applicant's pant.) Young man you might need it. I'm going, Bye!
The guard disappears while the applicant stands on the line.

SCENE V

Next morning the applicant anxiously waits for the guard to show up but he does not.

THE APPLICANT: (Soliloquizing) Where the guard has gone? In this entire world, only he could understand me. He might be ill, he might have some work at his house. I'll respect the line as he had told me. (He dusts the yellow line with his cap, and then stands on the line.) This is a beautiful line. I'm hopeful the window will open today.

After a while a mechanical excavator approaches the building where the closed window is and the driver puts the toothed bucket of the excavator to the closed window.

THE APPLICANT: What are you doing, are you crazy?

THE DRIVER: I'm going to demolish the building.

THE APPLICANT: But I've to submit my application here, in this office.

THE DRIVER: Application?

THE APPLICANT: Yes, I've been standing here before this window, over the last several days.

THE DRIVER: Are you mad or what? This is no real window. (He jumps down from the driver's seat, scurries towards the window and taps on it.) A fake window, you see. No glass, the window is painted on. There is no actual office behind this dummy building.

THE APPLICANT: Who the heck are you to say so? You've no right to call a window real or fake. A window is a window.

THE DRIVER: Ok come and see it for yourself. It's only a facade. It was built about fifty years ago to conceal the derelict deserted houses.

THE APPLICANT: I don't need to, I can see it from here.

THE DRIVER: Ok, you'll see it in a minute, everything will become crystal clear. (He hops onto the driver's seat and aims the bucket of the mechanical excavator at the window.)

THE APPLICANT: Don't do it or I'll kill you. You can't touch it. (He pulls the pistol and aims it on the driver.)

THE DRIVER: I've the orders to do so. (He pulls out a piece of paper from his pocket and pushes it towards the

applicant. The applicant reads it.)

THE APPLICANT: Ok, demolish the entire building but not the window.

THE DRIVER: This is ridiculous! The window will go with the building. The window is part of the building and it has to go with the building.

THE APPLICANT: Do whatever you want but you can't destroy the window.

THE DRIVER: This is an impossibility. Why you like this window so much?

THE APPLICANT: Because I've to submit the application at this window.

THE DRIVER: What's the application about?

THE APPLICANT: I'll not tell you.

THE DRIVER: Can I have a look at your application, mate?

THE APPLICANT: Sure, get down here.

(The driver hops down from the driver's seat and the applicant hands the application to him, the driver stares at it for a while.)

THE DRIVER: What language is this? I can't see a word on this paper.

THE APPLICANT: The words have been washed away by rain, snow and sleet.

THE DRIVER: How are they supposed to read it?

THE APPLICANT: It's their concern, not mine. I've only to submit it, here, through this window. (He points to the window.)

THE DRIVER: You will submit a blank paper at this fake window? This is absurd!

THE APPLICANT: Everything is absurd.

THE DRIVER: You're wasting my time by holding me back...

THE APPLICANT: Everybody is wasting their time.

THE DRIVER: Let me finish my work or I'll report to police.

THE APPLICANT: Report to the police and I'll shoot you. (He points the gun on the driver.)

THE DRIVER: You can't do it.

THE APPLICANT: Yes, I can do it, I'm serious.

THE DRIVER: Ok, I'll not demolish this building. I'm going back. (He puts the excavator in reverse gear.)

THE APPLICANT: You can't go back either.

THE DRIVER: What?

THE APPLICANT: You can't leave this place.

THE DRIVER: Why? Are you mad or what?

THE APPLICANT: You can't leave because I need someone to talk to me. I've not talked to anyone for many hours.

THE DRIVER: You can't hold me against my will.

THE APPLICANT: There's no such thing as will.

THE DRIVER: This is against my personal liberty.

THE APPLICANT: There's no such thing as personal liberty.

THE DRIVER: I think you've come from a wilderness. You have no idea about will or personal liberty.

THE APPLICANT: I've never seen wilderness. I've never stepped outside this concrete jungle.

THE DRIVER: I think you've escaped from an asylum.

THE APPLICANT: Yes, if by asylum you mean this city or this country.

THE DRIVER: Let me go or I'll scream.

THE APPLICANT: Do whatever you want to but no one will come to your rescue. Give it a try.

THE DRIVER: Help! help, hey people listen to me. This mad fellow, here, is holding me hostage! He threatens to kill me! (He screams but no one takes heed of him)

THE APPLICANT: Do it again if you don't believe me.

THE DRIVER: (He shouts again but no one comes to his rescue.) It means I'm at your mercy.

THE APPLICANT: Yes.

THE DRIVER: How long will you be holding me, for a day, or a month or a year?

THE APPLICANT: Have no idea.

They remain silent for some time.

THE DRIVER: Ok, I'll stay with you but tell me how will we kill our time?

THE APPLICANT: We'll not kill time, time will kill us.

THE DRIVER: How long we're to wait before we land on the fishing hook of death.

THE APPLICANT: Ask death because, it will be he that will do the fishing.

Disappointed, the driver places his head on the steering wheel of his machine, sighing sadly. After some time he pushes a button and a song starts playing from the tape recorder placed in the excavator. The applicant bursts into dancing.

THE DRIVER: You're a good dancer.

THE APPLICANT: Yes I'm, I was a lead dancer in my college days.

THE DRIVER: Keep dancing. I love your dance. (He gets down from the driver seat and tries to sneak away.)

THE APPLICANT: Don't ever try to run, or I'll kill you. (He trains the pistol on him)

THE DRIVER: My wife will be waiting for me.

THE APPLICANT: Soon she'll stop waiting for you. She'll soon get another man and the life will go on. You're not the last fertile man of this blue planet of ours.

THE DRIVER: You're so cruel.

THE APPLICANT: Everybody is cruel in his or her way. Every animal and bird is cruel in its own way.

THE DRIVER: Ok, don't shoot me, I'm not going.

THE APPLICANT: Great. (He puts the gun back in his pocket)

THE DRIVER: If I stay with you, what would I have to do?

THE APPLICANT: Nothing. You'll have to do nothing. The age of slavery has gone.

THE DRIVER: Ok, I'll stand with you, on the yellow line.

THE APPLICANT: No, you can't stand on this line, since I discovered this window and this line, only I have the right to stand on this line before this window. It's only my privilege to stand on this line. This line is my kingdom.

THE DRIVER: Ok, you get on my vehicle and sit with me. The seat is very comfortable.

THE APPLICANT: No, I'll not do it either. I'll never break the queue.

THE DRIVER: The Queue? Where is the queue?

THE APPLICANT: I am the queue.

THE DRIVER: You are a very stubborn man.

THE APPLICANT: Only stubborn men can discover new lines, new windows.

THE DRIVER: But your discovery will ruin you.

THE APPLICANT: One day everyone will face the ruination.

THE DRIVER: Ok ok, what's the benefit of standing before this window?

THE APPLICANT: Don't expect benefit from everything.

THE DRIVER: When would we end our vigil?

THE APPLICANT: We'll not end the vigil, the vigil will end us.

THE DRIVER: In the end what will happen to us?

THE APPLICANT: I don't know, no one knows.

THE DRIVER: What should I do with your dead body, if you die someday?

THE APPLICANT: Maybe you'll die before me.

THE DRIVER: You could also die before me.

THE APPLICANT: Bury me under this window, because I have discovered this window. I deserve to be buried under this window.

For several minutes the applicant stands on the line while the driver sits in the driver's seat and then without warning, the driver gets down from the seat and starts scrambling. The applicant aims the pistol at him, pulls the trigger while not moving one inch from the line. But there are no bullets in the magazine of the pistol and the

driver succeeds in escaping.

THE APPLICANT: (soliloquizing) He's so unlucky to escape the death. He has to die someday, it would have been better for him to be dead today. Who knows what will happen tomorrow? Maybe death is not available, tomorrow. One should not put hurdles in the way of death like that fool did.

SCENE VI

In the evening the guard returns, he plops down on the bench, cleans his boots and face with the rag and then he stables ahead towards the applicant.

THE APPLICANT: I thought you would not come. Where were you?

THE GUARD: I was at home but I got bored there. I missed you badly because only you can understand me. (He kicks the applicant at his shanks with the toe of his boot.) Stand on the line, focus on the window and don't look sideways or backwards.

THE APPLICANT: I too missed you. I met a driver, a moron, he wanted to demolish this beautiful window with this machine. (He points to the excavator.) I stopped him from doing so.

THE GUARD: Great, you are a brave man.

THE APPLICANT: I shot at him with this pistol but it was empty.

THE GUARD: Haha! Give the pistol back to me. (He takes the pistol from the applicant.) You have moved on the hierarchical rung, you've joined the list of the strong men, the guardian class, like me. You have improved. You have gone forth.

THE APPLICANT: I don't want to be part of the guardian class; I enjoy just being a queue-bystander.

THE GUARD: No, you've no choice but to be part of the guardian class.

THE APPLICANT: What if I don't want to?

THE GUARD: The consequences will be...

They hear a police car and a policeman appears on the scene.

THE POLICEMAN: I'm here to inform you that this place is to be demolished. (He points to the building and the window) Obey the orders or you'll be arrested and tried in the court.

THE GUARD: Ok, you can demolish them but give us another window, building and yellow line those should look exactly like these or...

THE POLICEMAN: Or what?

THE GUARD: We'll commit suicide.

THE POLICEMAN: This is preposterous! You want to lose your life for this fake window, this dummy building and this dirty faded line? (He stamps on the yellow line.)

THE GUARD: Yes, people have been losing their lives for buildings and windows and lines over the centuries.

THE POLICEMAN: How can I find you a building and a window and a yellow line like these ones? It's beyond my powers.

THE GUARD: But we love them. If you can't provide us with building, window and line like these ones then shift them to some other place and we'll move there.

THE POLICEMAN: Ok, we'll shift them to some other place but first you sit with me in that car. I promise your wish will be fulfilled.

THE GUARD: We'll not do it. Why should we trust you?

THE POLICEMAN: Because I represent constitution, state and rule of law.

THE GUARD: They can also lie.

THE POLICEMAN: You've a beautiful gun; can I have a look at it?

THE GUARD: No, this is a personal thing. What if you don't return it to me?

THE POLICEMAN: I promise that I'll return it to you.

THE GUARD: First you hand your gun to me then I'll give mine to you.

THE POLICEMAN: Ok, have it.

The policeman and the guard exchange their guns. The policeman sits down on the bench and stares at the pistol. Without warning the guard shoots the applicant dead.

THE POLICE MAN: Why you shot him dead?

THE GUARD: He was so lonely. Isn't this a good reason to kill someone?

THE POLICE MAN: Any reason can be a good reason for killing someone.

THE GUARD: Thank you for coming up with a logical reason or I'd have been condemning myself my entire life for murdering him.

THE POLICE MAN: Did you hate him?

THE GUARD: Not a bit, I liked him. He was a wonderful conversant.

THE POLICE MAN: Had you killed him out of hate or malice then I would have arrested you but now you can go.

THE GUARD: Where should I go?

THE POLICE MAN: Don't you have a home?

THE GUARD: I have but I feel bored there.

THE POLICE MAN: Did this young man also was feeling bored?

THE GUARD: Yes, he felt bored immensely. In this big world only I could understand him and I thought that

without me he would be lonely, so I took a merciful step and killed him.

THE POLICE MAN: Now give me my pistol.

THE GUARD: That I can't do.

THE POLICE MAN: Why?

THE GUARD: I like the crack of this pistol. It produces beautiful sound when it's fired.

THE POLICE MAN: Ok, but promise me one thing, you will not turn the gun on yourself.

THE GUARD: I'll not do it. Why would I turn the gun on myself?

THE POLICE MAN: Because you like the bang of the pistol firing. People, please go home, even though you feel bored there and don't even think about the pistol.

THE GUARD: Don't worry about me Mr. Policeman, I like only the crack of the pistol.

(They both walk away in different directions then a pistol shot rings and the policeman comes back running, passes before the closed window and is gone.)

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