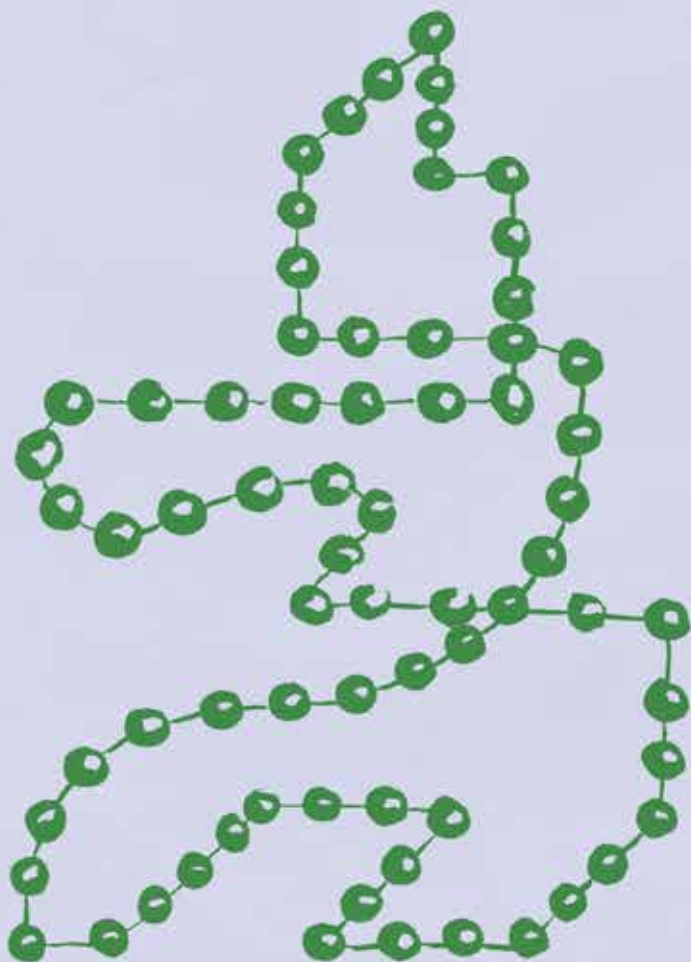
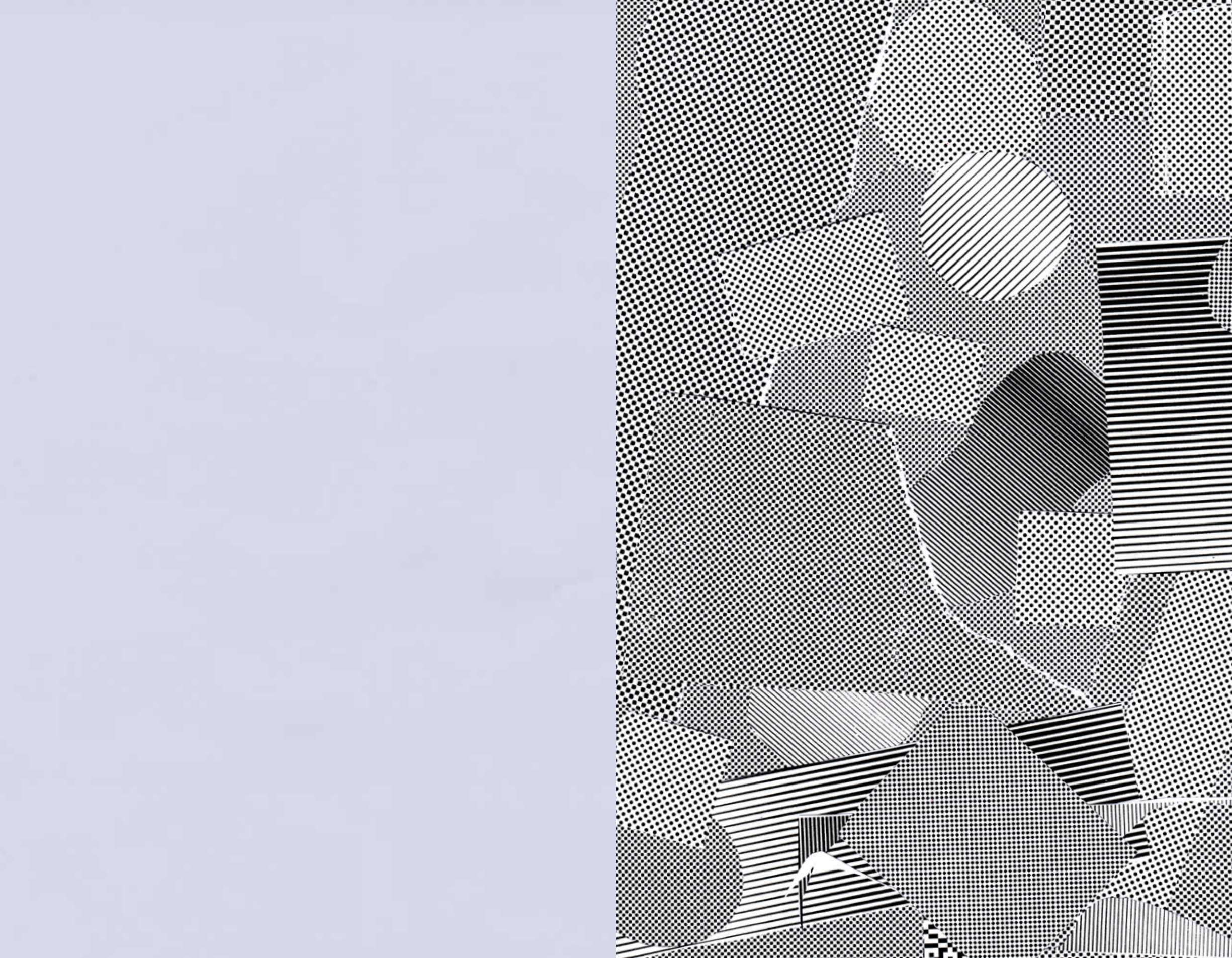


COUNTERFLOWS
ON PAPER





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COUNTERFLOWS ON PAPER 2023

Counterflows is back amongst us. This will be the third Counterflows On Paper, the Counterflows zine which we started during those strange days of the pandemic. We originally devised the zine as a way to creatively engage with artistic practices and music outside of the realm of live music, but over time we've realised it's now a key part of the festival. To us, music never exists in a vacuum, and how it touches, inspires and is informed by other aspects of life, art and culture is at the heart of what we do.

Working closely in response to this year's festival and its underlying themes, Joel White and Helen Charman have done a sterling job pulling together a selection of thought-provoking pieces, spilling into prose, poetry, cultural criticism, art and more. To celebrate the triumphant extension of the festival onto ink we hope you will join us on the Sunday, where we will host another small publishers fair and present workshops and discussions by artists we love who bridge the gap between worlds on the page and in the ear.

- Alasdair Campbell and Fielding Hope

INTRODUCTION

At one point in *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed*, Laura Poitras' documentary about the artist, photographer and AIDS/HIV and opioid addiction activist Nan Goldin, the conversation turns to Goldin's photographs of new wave and gay subculture in New York at the turn of the 1970s, most famously collected in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. The film avoids hagiography, showing us a Goldin who is bristling, 'difficult', and aware of her own celebrity whilst still allowing for moments of profound reflexivity and reflection, a certain cautious swagger. Considering the photographs in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, she says something offhand like, 'I just want people to be proud to have been in the work'.

What does it mean to be 'in' the work? Different things, presumably, for artists and their subjects. And what would it mean to make art that people are proud to be in? These questions might seem wrongly phrased to those more used to the formal structures of academic enquiry, or the rigidity of traditional boundaries between the artist and the work, or the artist and the spectator, reader, or listener. Rather than the clarity of separation, this third edition of *Counterflows On Paper* seeks to complicate such boundaries and divisions, to implicate people in the work. It also seeks, like the wider *Counterflows* festival of which it is part, a certain haphazardness, with the kinds of connection and potential that come through a loss of rigidity.

The pieces collected here are full of new potential. Each contributor was, as in previous years, given free rein to write in whatever way they chose, the results diverging and cohering in all kinds of ways we will let you uncover yourselves. One thread worth pointing to throughout is the body, flexing and unfurling across the six pieces. Sarah Lasoye's poems find us tearing muscles, taking deep breaths and shaking out the spine: 'like you do with wet linens'. We find such movement taken up in Lílí Ní Dhomhnaill's essay

on Lucrecia Martel, sound as a vessel and the ways in which bodies are 'connected in ways that aren't immediately visible, or even logical'. Simone White's piece rips through the heart of things—Pope.L, swagger, Chief Keef, Future, heartbreak, Hortense Spillers—asking: 'How does trap, as a hybrid form of rap and R&B, operate in the field of intimacy to regulate and create ideas of black social life in heartbreaking ways?' We then turn to a deeply affecting text by Mira Mattar, in which the massacre of Palestinians in Jenin on the 26th January 2023 determines limits on writing, thought, and the body itself. A freewheeling interview with Hannah Read and Max Syedtollan follows, connecting clown noses, bike horns and the vagaries of putting on cheap, weird gigs in Glasgow. Carrying the DIY thread, Andy Abbott's piece takes us to that great threshold of the body: the palette, thinking about post-industrial cities and towns like Bradford, Todmorden and Nelson where both natural wine and DIY arts are 'likely to be too rough, unfiltered, gnarly, full of impurities, perhaps even a bit funny smelling'. River Ellen MacAskill's speculative abolitionist history of a 2038 'dancing plague' refracts the out-of-control body through the prism of the (imagined) academy, flailing limbs evading capture.

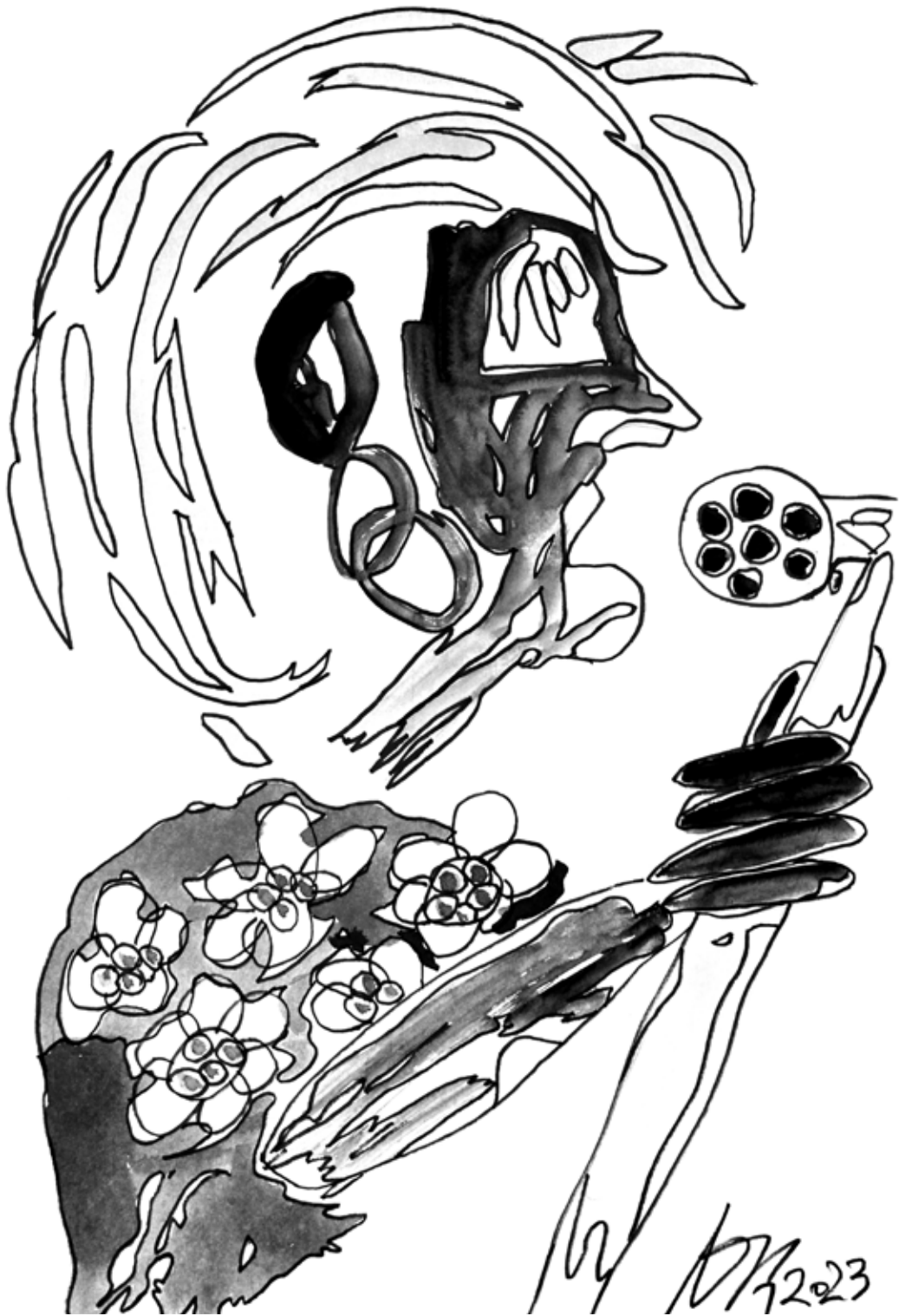
A big expanse of topics and methods, but *Counterflows* has always had little truck with prescriptive notions of scale. We hope you enjoy the pieces in this collection, and the festival itself.

This year the Zine has been edited collectively by Joel White and Helen Charman, who wrote the first piece for the first *Counterflows* Zine back in 2021. It is illustrated throughout with specially commissioned portraits of artists from this year's festival done by a host of artists at the brilliant charity Project Ability. The design and layout is by Oliver Pitt.

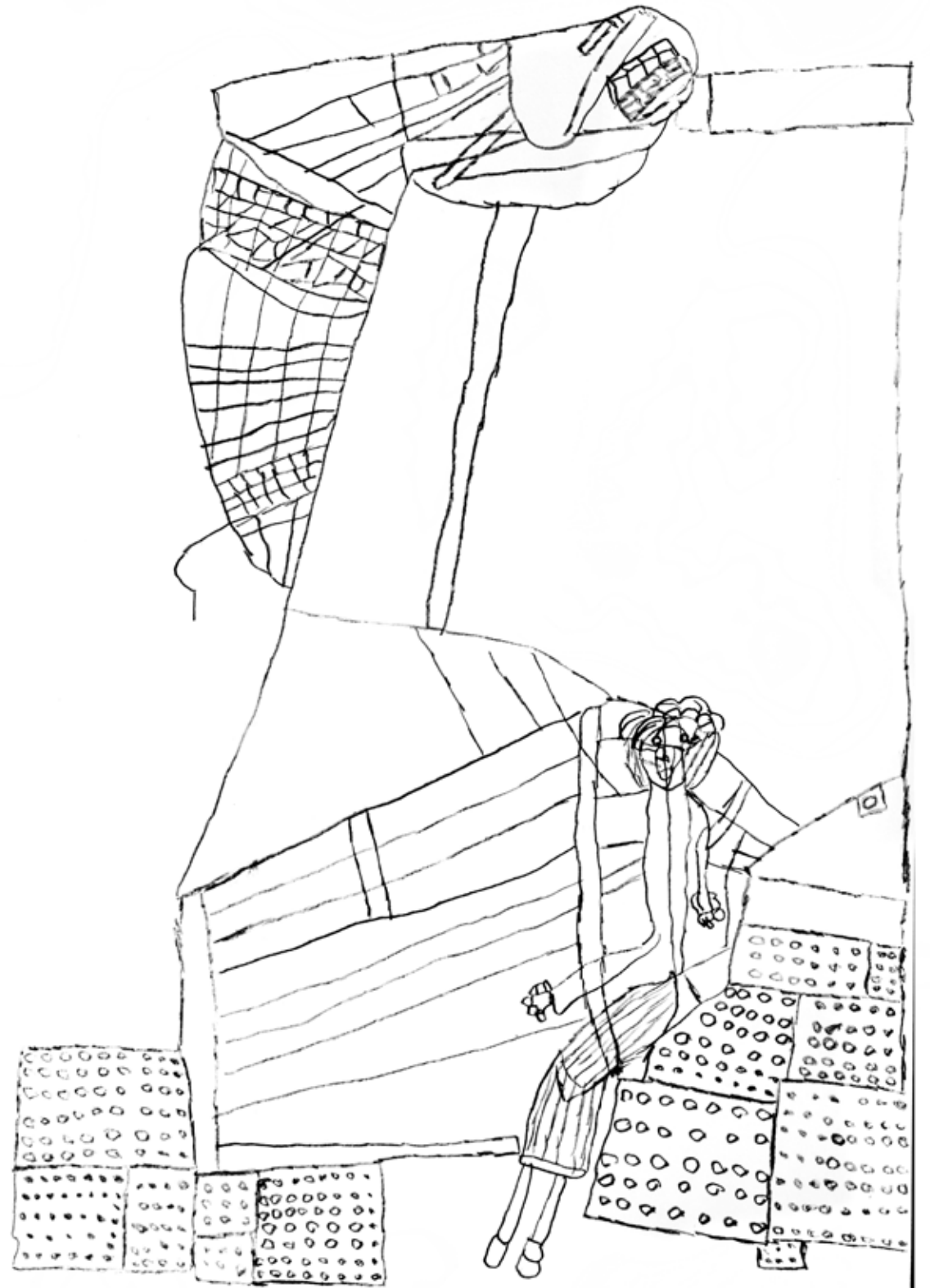
- Joel White and Helen Charman



Fred Moten by Cameron Morgan



Maggie Nicols by Cameron Morgan



Nour Mobarak by Roddy Woods

THREE POEMS

Sarah Lasoye

Show me where, on the body

I can't do that, but I can say it feels like a plane in the sky going down. Always, I end up looking just past your left shoulder - pinned to the low flying threat. I'm sorry. I've been thinking about focus for as long as I can remember, and yet. This is the second time I've stepped out and into the downpour. This is the third time I've gotten a bus in the wrong direction. I know I've torn at least four muscles trying to look back at you. I'm trying not to get distracted. I'm trying to have some integrity. I'm trying to make my attention meet yours. I'm sorry to ask, but could you point me to the injury? I'll take a hot iron to each wound and then I'll try again.

Good company

I had not thought in words for so long. I called on friends who let me litter pick scraps of feeling and call the pile 'work' or at least 'practice'. I circle the mug stains they leave on the counter every morning. The cold drawn up from the floorboards through my feet is a kind of rooting, but there are others. Take the deepest breath you've taken all day. Instead of alive, say ravenous. Imagine this - here on earth, you are crowded into the backseat of a car. You are together and so you defeat capacity. The car becomes whatever you choose to share. It spills over with bodies, wet and luminous, red-blooded embroidery. Imagine this - you take your left hand out of the window and to the ground. You scoop up every white road marker from the concrete. They grow light, ribboning up and into the air like reverse confetti. Together, you near the horizon. The open flame of every occasion, and in such good company.

Slingshot

Meticulously, I'll untangle the bones from the net. I'll open up my left hip, knead the soles of my feet, shake out my spine like you do with wet linens. I won't ask for advice. I'll wrestle what I need out of whosoever's hands and we'll grapple for it on the floor. If you find me alone and thrashing in a room you walk into, keep walking. I will never again manicure a thought. I'll develop a new work titled 'how to ring in each new moment' or 'improvisations on ceremony'. I'll be lucky. I'll bump into good people I thought I'd never see again. I'll spring right out of a bad feeling like a last minute outfit change. My margin for error has always been the page - let it remain so. I'll hang from its ledge, watch as a shoe unfastens and drops into the black. I'll keep making room for the mistake of myself. I'll keep letting you all lantern me through the dark. I'll pull myself back like a slingshot and let love fly! And soon, all my best ideas will germinate.



LUCRECIA MARTEL'S PRINCIPLE OF IMMERSION; OR, TRYING TO REMEMBER SOMETHING BESIDE A SWIMMING POOL

Lilí Ní Dhomhnaill

Any object totally or partially immersed in a fluid or liquid is buoyed up by a force equal to the weight of the fluid displaced by the object. More simply: when a body is submerged in liquid, the liquid it displaces is equal in volume to the body submerged. Lucrecia Martel's swimming pools have led me to think about Archimedes. Whenever I do that (which isn't very often, admittedly) I hear my mom's voice in my head. *Má thiontar corp ar leacht ar bith, samhlaítear dúinn go gcailleann sé a meáchan.* That's Archimedes' Principle of Displacement as my mom used to recite it to me. I thought she had picked it up from a teacher, but when I texted her about the exact wording, it turned out that she had it at one remove: it was my dad who learnt it by heart in school. The words as he remembered them stuck in my mom's head, and now the rhythm of her reciting them has stuck in mine. We retain these sounds whether we want to or not: they don't really belong to us, but they're there somewhere. Perhaps it's too obvious to point this out, but I find it fascinating and more than a little disturbing. Why is most of the school German I remember from a song about *The Simpsons*? Why do I sometimes hear a translation exercise from primary school in my head? *Cheap sé go bhfaca sé taibhse:* he thought he saw a ghost. We don't always get to choose what sticks.

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In *Pescados* (2010), we hear the fishes' voices before we see them. Drowsy, singsong, created by 'folktronica' star

Juana Molina, they speak over each other in a rush. A throng of brightly coloured carp appears, their wide mouths opening and closing as they wriggle upwards, swimming over each other, apparently imploring something of the camera. When they breach the surface they make ripples, so that the border between air and water is agitated and glittery. Their twangy, comic chorus is mesmerising and mostly unintelligible; the voices blend into each other and into the dreamy synth that accompanies them. Subtitles offer a partial interpretation. *Rodabamos por la ruta.*¹ The fish are recounting a dream, or a memory. *Todos eramos un auto...* the text reads again. *Ruedas... / ...plástico, faros, eramos un auto.*² These fish dreamt together; or, at least, there is a dream, or memory of being a car, and these fish are articulating it. It's absurd but it works. Sound can be speculative, science fictional even, because it is not bound by the same laws of space and perspective that images are. The voices can dissolve strangely into each other in a way that images of the bodies speaking can't, without becoming abstract or fanciful. The sound of their melded voices is what makes it credible that they might also have dreamt collectively, that there is a reality that hums in all these fishy heads at once.

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Lucrecia Martel has a trick that she uses to explain what sound means to her—in her films, and in the world.³ She takes a large glass vessel, cuboid in shape, a

drinking glass or a vase maybe. Face down on the rim she places a smartphone displaying a fluorescent blue screen, which fills the glass with blue light. She asks you to imagine that the vessel is a swimming pool, and that you are submerged under the blue screen of the water's surface. Water is an elastic medium, she continues. If you are under this surface, even if your eyes are closed your body will perceive the vibrations of objects moving in the water. If someone jumps in suddenly, for example, or if something swims below me, you will sense the altering pressure of water being displaced around you.

Then she turns the cube on its side, so that the blue screen glows not downwards but out towards the onlookers. Now it's a cinema. In the cinema, she says, the spectator is immersed or submerged (she uses the two words interchangeably) in a volume of air. Soundwaves move out into this cube, displacing, vibrating, and generating pressure on the bodies in the audience. Sound, for Martel, is the material in which the spectator is submerged: you can close your eyes and stop seeing the film, but you can't stop hearing it. Even if you couldn't hear, or you managed to block your ears completely, you would perceive something of the strong bass notes on the surface of your skin. For Martel, the image on screen is a slice, both painfully explicit and painfully finite, of a much larger, deeper universe. Sound gives the possibility of submerging the viewer in everything that is outside the image, in that world that is missing from what we see. All films, since the first 'talkies', have been in 3D.

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It is difficult, says Martel, to remember that on earth we are also submerged in air (although this is easier to keep in mind for those with respiratory conditions like Martel, and arguably easier for all of us after three years of shaping our lives around an airborne virus). The sound in a Martel film doesn't make air more

obvious, exactly, but it does give the impression that the bodies being filmed are moving in a thick, dense material, and that they are connected in ways that aren't immediately visible, or even logical. It's the sound that draws me back to her films, to hear again its darkly comic critique of the Argentinian bourgeois, and especially, the violence on which this society is predicated. Her more recent work sounds this critique the loudest—listen, for example, to the ridiculous high-pitched squeak of genteel kisses between two eighteenth century colonial officers greeting each other on a break from torturing a silent indigenous man in *Zama* (2017)—but it has been there from the beginning. *La Ciénaga* (2001) feels like a thriller from the outset even though, on one level, in the iconic opening scene nothing untoward seems to be happening. A group of white adults lie silent on chairs beside a swimming pool, which is an opaque, grimy green. Thunder cracks in the distance, water drips, cicadas whine, wind blows through leaves in the forest to make a dense, damp buzz. A woman, moving unsteadily, sloshes blood red wine and ice cubes into glasses. The ice in her shaking glass tinkles excruciatingly and then is joined by the agonizing scrape of metal chairs scrape on the patio tiles as the people reorganise their chairs before sitting down again. The image might look normal, but the sound is spine-tingling.

Watching this sequence again, I realise that the scene is intercut with two situations happening nearby. Inside the house, two figures lie on a bed. A young indigenous woman, Isabel, tries to nap while a white girl, Momi, whispers prayers of gratitude to God for 'giving her' Isabel who, it turns out, is her nanny, with whom she is infatuated. Out in the forest a group of boys (including Momi's brother) and their viciously barking dogs are play-hunting with a real rifle. All this, and what stays in my mind is the piercing sound of the ice cubes, trilling out an alarm that cuts across the noise of the forest. Noise: 'the irregular and constant

fabric of sounding that fluctuates through any given and situated present'.⁴ The way this fabric overlaps between all three situations makes it impossible to avoid the fact that the stagnant torpor of this wealthy family exists in the same present, the same body of air, as the pillage of the forest around them, and the dispossession of the indigenous people who work for them.

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Martel's concept of sonic immersion has always been associated with immersion in language, and specifically in orally relayed stories.⁵ This isn't some dodgy obsession with oral culture as a return to a purer pre-colonial past, but rather as a complex, messy performance that is implicated in the viciously unequal worlds (both psychological and material) that humans make for themselves. A third of the way through *La Ciénaga* (known in English as *The Swamp*) Momi jumps into the swimming pool, still so cloudy with dirt that she disappears once under the surface. She and her brother have been messing around, horseplaying, but when she jumps into the pool the tone shifts suddenly. Her siblings and cousins stop what they're doing and line up at the edge to wait for her to come up again, watching comically loud bubbles float to the surface. The forest's buzz gets louder, but there are also sounds that suggest being underwater: cavernous echoing, and a vague clunking that gives a sense of depth. In the next shot the children are lounging poolside, reproducing the tableau their parents made at the start of the film. They listen as another sister tells a casually gruesome urban legend of the kind children often tell each other: someone's cousin takes home a stray dog, but she when comes downstairs the next morning there is blood everywhere and her cats have disappeared. The dog, it turns out, is not a dog at all but a hideous 'rata africana' with two rows of teeth.⁶ Speech, in this film, is an immersive, social tissue: it surrounds those that listen, drawing them into an inherited

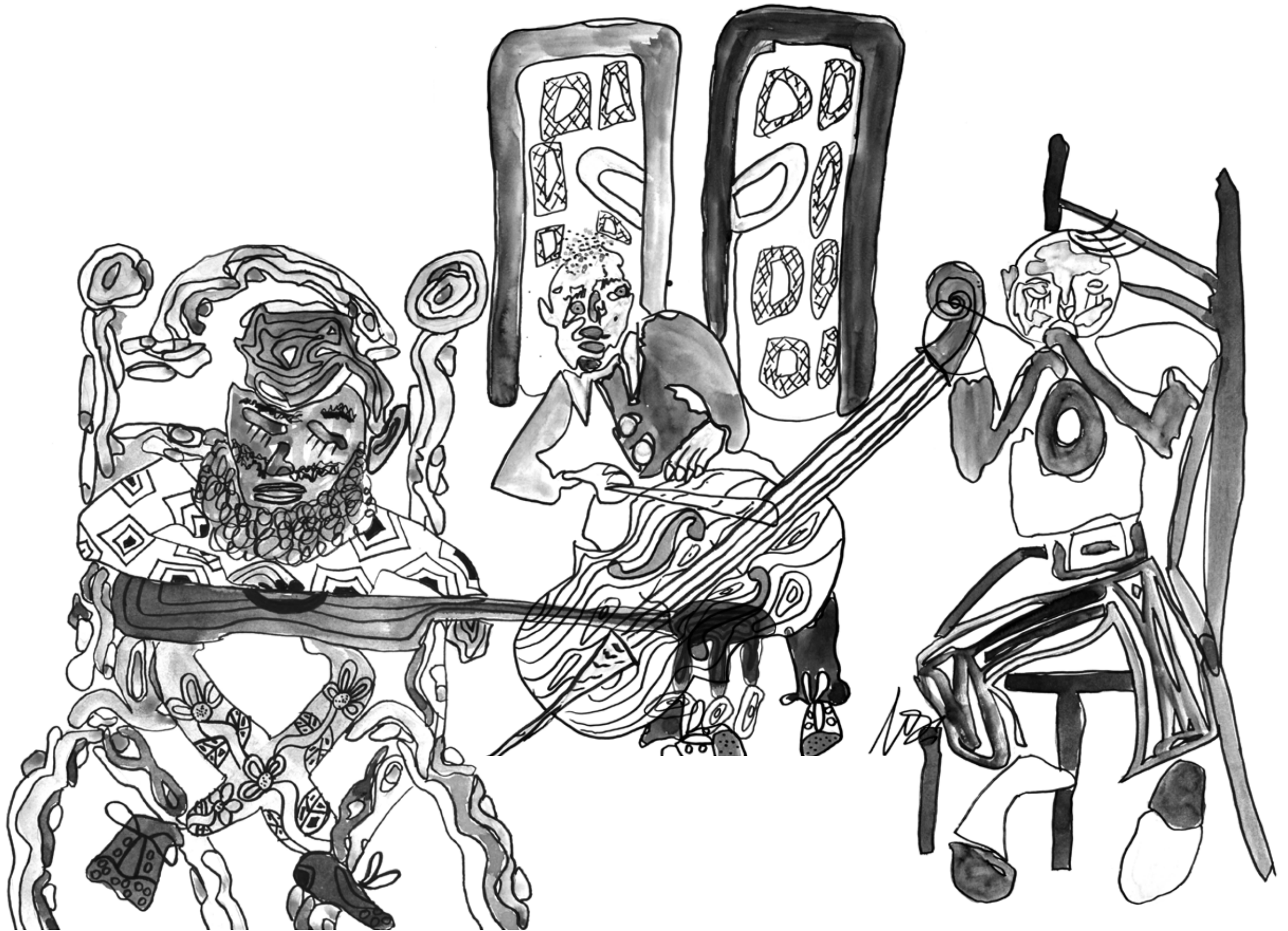
(and in this case, xenophobic) understanding of reality.

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The erasure of its own violent past is essential to the mechanisms of colonialism, but in Martel's films (and, again, in the world) this history is not in fact gone but dissolved in the murky air of the present. Martel had a strict, Catholic, Eurocentric education; she knows that what we learn, and therefore what we must unlearn, comes to us socially, messily, and often by way of institutions whose existence is predicated on upholding a certain version of events. In *La Niña Santa* ('The Holy Girl', 2004), a mother and daughter recline at the edge of a noisy hotel pool. The girl reciting prayers rapidly under her breath. When the woman gets into the pool, once again, the sound quality changes. Background noise disappears, and all we hear is faint splashing of the water that the woman displaces as she walks around, waist deep, watched silently by a man who is staying in the hotel. She touches her ear—which seems to be irritating her—and gets out of the water, at which point other sounds fade in again. Frustrated, she returns to her daughter, who is still reciting prayers and speaks louder when her mother returns. '*Porqué te hacen estudiar eso de memoria? ¿No hay algo más útil para hacer?*' Her daughter continues praying. '*Amalia. Amalia, te estoy hablando. ¡Amalia!*' '*Mamá, no grites. Lo aprendí porque me gusta,*' the girl replies, before getting back to her prayers. '*No me hables así,*' says her mother. '*¿No quieres que te regale un romancero español? Son larguísimo.*'⁷ She starts to recite a romance—'*A cazar va el caballero, a cazar como solía, los perros lleva cansados*'—and then stops, perturbed that she can't remember the next line.⁸ The girl turns her head away on her deck chair and the camera focuses on her ear. We hear, with her, the watery sounds of the pool and her mother trying again to recite a Medieval ballad from the oral tradition of Spain, some 10,000 km away. The past echoes throughout the present in ways that we have learned not to see.

God knows what Archimedes would think of all this. Yes, I realise the science might not be watertight: air is 'compositionally / flippant', not displaced in the same straightforward way as liquid.⁹ But Martel's submersion is a metaphor, a kind of gadget (a word she likes) by which to understand the world, and to look again at the relationships between cause and effect. Sound cannot travel in a vacuum, so it constantly reminds us that we are surrounded by air. This, in turn, helps us to recall that bodies exert force on the world around them just by moving; that we are implicated in each other, and that we reverberate off other presents, and other ways of perceiving the present that we are immersed in now.

- ¹ We were driving down the road...
- ² We were all a car / wheels... / ... plastic, headlights, we were a car.
- ³ For a great example of this, see the last fifteen minutes of 'Lucrecia Martel (Spanish audio) - Masterclass #1', International Film Festival Rotterdam (11 June 2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKO0tBMlvZI&ab_channel=InternationalFilmFestivalRotterdam>. A version with English interpretation is available on the same YouTube channel.
- ⁴ Lisa Robertson, *Nilling* (Bookthug, 2012), p.57.
- ⁵ Martel talks extensively about this in 'Siete notas sobre el cine' directed by Francisco Gutierrez. Leandro Carbonetti, 'Lucrecia Martel - Siete notas sobre el cine (La Ciénaga)' (31 August 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33RTqD-QVQPE&t=195s&ab_channel=LeandroCarbonetti>
- ⁶ African rat.
- ⁷ Why do you have to learn that by heart, have you nothing better to do? / Amalia. Amalia, I'm talking to you. Amalia! / Don't shout, mom, I learned it because I like it. / Don't speak to me like that. Don't you want me to get you a book of Spanish ballads? They're really long.
- ⁸ A-hunting goes the knight, a-hunting like of old, the dogs are tired—.
- ⁹ Daisy Lafarge, *Understudies for Air* (Sad Press, 2017), no page number.



A Trio by Cameron Morgan

EXTRACT FROM *WARRING*, THE MESSAGE IS NOT DEATH/POSSIBLY FINAL NOTES ON TRAP¹

Simone White

a terrible racial loneliness is proposed by Pope.L's solo performances ... which speaks ... of the absolute banishment of black people from certain realms of sociosexual belonging. Which isn't to say that black people are outside or can be banished from gender, sex, or love. [...]. Pope.L's strapless pink tulle gown in *The Aunt Jenny Chronicles*, 1991 ("to me Aunt Jenny was sommmmmthing, foreign, inhuman, grotesque. ... Her sexuality scared me she was so alive. So alive, so ancient, so ..."), and his various prosthetic dicks that signify on the dickless, whether cis-female, trans man or anybody harboring delusions about the black man's penis, suggest that a reconstructed black sexuality might begin to situate itself within the adaptive power to project or throw one's actual experience of sex and gender onto precisely the most alienating frame. I mean to imagine a possibility nonidentical with drag, with this possible difference taken up in the [expression] of black love—that is, the material intimacies of black people, familial and otherwise—as entangled with the fear of being bewitched or consumed entirely by the hypersexualized and brutalized bodies of one another.

— Simone White, 'Pope.L Walks Into a Room'²

Katherine McKittrick and Alexander Weheliye invited us in the essay '808's & Heartbreak' to consider how the sound of the Roland TR-808 means:

Love and sex are always knotted to broken hearts, because the throb of feeling good, from dome to foot, has a painful musicological history. The heart (muscle) and its narratives of loss and tenderness—tender losses—move to, stop with, pause on, slide across the boom of racial sexual violence. Heartbreak, then, is always part of the 808s Black circuitry, booming amplifying joy and pain, sunshine and rain. The thump, the boom, create shivering circuits of pleasure laced with damage, loss, sorrow.³

Although the term 'musicological history,' traced in this case through the music of Robert 'R' Kelly and Marvin Gaye among others, in itself suggests belief in cultural continuity that is in tension with my suggestion that trap music's appearance signals displacement of hegemonic historiographies of blackness, including that of black music, the idea of a 'painful musicological history' is foundational to the way I have come to understand the emotional paradox McKittrick and Weheliye bring forward as material truth. The truth is more vexed than they say in '808s & Heartbreak,' but only because their argument is in fact a moral one. 'My heart keeps breaking, over and over, every single day,' they write; the operative verbs are 'to navigate,' 'to provide succor'.⁴

Remember: 'double-edged'⁵ comes into the lexicon of black studies through Saidiya Hartman's withering investigation of the way feeling 'facilitated subjugation, domination and terror precisely by preying on the flesh, the heart, and the

soul'.⁶ In the humanist scene, which is the scene of racial slavery, the compression of desire and denial constitute the black subject as an excluded individual, who reflects back to power a splendid array of black feeling. Fred Moten's theorization of nonperformance requires 'double-edged' to express, in a precise but also fractal relation to Hartman's thought, blackness in a state of 'ensemblé' [political] abandon that looks like moral recklessness in that blackness refutes the primacy of the individuality it can only obtain as denial; Moten's black social person knows no privacy, no family that belongs to a single being.⁷ The proper form of black politics *is not grounded in self-interest* and has some fuck-it-ness to it, although fuck-it-ness has to and can be distinguished from nihilism.

I want to experimentally suspend my ongoing (paranoid) argument (with myself) regarding the question of whether the black radical tradition has embedded within it a historically contingent politics of desegregation (which has been displaced) in order to grant that 'desegregation' may *figuratively include* or 'image' not only the project of dismantling the Jim Crow regime but a wide range of abolitionist adventures, back to the first one. Such an image would make it possible to contemplate some forms of black living that can only be understood as willing entanglement with the violent stuff of which blackness is made — which I'm saying *is not* 'total rejection of [our] lot'.⁸ That is, grant the image of desegregation, its aura and gases, creates or releases conditions for imagining blackness in a highly complex and ambivalent relation *with itself as it's become* that is far less ... happy ... than is comfortable to admit. Indeed, I'm fascinated by the possibility of severing from improvement the nasty side of the double edge that is the core of Hartman's insights regarding black subjectivity. I want to deal with the hard bad space of living that is, symbolically, but not actually, severed by the blade that would cut any reconstituted future. Let's think about the radiation of *eternal*

denial, frustration and threat in and as community. Returning to McKittrick and Weheliye's 'shivering circuits of pleasure laced with damage, loss, sorrow,' I'm led to ask what happens to the heart when no relief or support (what I think is meant by social life) is available — ever? What if infinite heartbreak, dumb and excruciating pain that has no implied political or moral correlate, precisely because it is unintelligible within a framework that anticipates the cessation of black despair upon the eradication of the racial subjugation/social alienation that is its *cause*, is in a blindspot of the black radical tradition, unseen by it? What must be done with one who finds the truth of her living is here, who chooses this unintelligible blackness?

My heart keeps breaking, over and over every single day.

Heartbreak is the measure of my living time.

It remains useful to speak of trap in familiar musicological terms as an unacknowledged sixth stream of Rhythm & Blues, where such a formation proceeds in the aftermath of the merger of R&B and rap. As Nelson George, Dan Charnas and others have shown, the industrial and formal conflation of these previously distinct genres was not 'natural,' but an effect of struggle waged since the mid-1970s over the status of rap in the music industry and its social impact on the character of blackness expressed among black people as sound, style, language and commodity.⁹ The emergence of trap is, therefore, *partially* accounted for in a post-civil rights socio-history that contributes to settling the meaning of 'crossover,' a term that implies bounded and coherent *black* cultural life by positing its exterior.

What would have been settled is not only that many of trap's most popular performers, including Future, Lil' Baby, Lil Uzi Vert and Young Thug, are masters of R&B-type harmonizing such that they are

rappers who can be understood to croon, but also that such mastery proceeds from the carefully engineered crossover strategies practiced in the 1990s by figures such as Sean ‘Puffy’ Combs, Babyface and Clive Davis who positioned Boyz 2 Men, Mary J Blige and Whitney Houston along a continuum of ‘swagger’.¹⁰ Among the best songs of the pandemic era are Chief Keef’s (7-minutes long like disco!) ‘Late for Dinner,’ and Drake and Future’s ‘N 2 Deep’. The verbal subjects of ‘Late for Dinner’ and ‘N 2 Deep’ take part in the generic drama Amiri Baraka captured with the phrase ‘missed love,’ updated for the twenty-first century rap audience’s expectant desire for the conflation of erotic love, consumption and patriarchal humiliations. This powerful cocktail, following Patterson’s sense of ‘black intimate relations’ as a sociological descriptor of the play of normativity in patterns of black love, becomes a constitutive element of contemporary swagger, constituting also, therefore, the plane of desiring within which black love takes place.¹¹ Of course, sociology is not what I am looking at, which can and does, as da Silva teaches, reveal black subjectivity, but not blackness itself. This dialogue (with you, reader, and with this music) turns on the materiality of what is called swagger; how such a compound is and interacts with the composition of works. No one has put this better than Gertrude Stein: ‘The time of the composition is a natural thing and the time in the composition is a natural thing it is a natural thing and it is a contemporary thing’. One does not have judgment with respect to the surround, one encounters it; one moves within it; one’s *whole living form* is alert to its swim and glitter. So, the lyrical chorus of ‘Late for Dinner’: ‘my bitch I’m finna break up with her’; Future’s verse on ‘N 2 Deep’ consists of some discursively predictable statements about Future’s possession of bad bitches who fuck for APs.¹² Future is, more specifically, the undisputed champion of the contemporary panty-dropper, also known as the slow jam (hear, for example, ‘Promise U That’), a form that developed

simultaneously with rap.¹³ This even more specific link to vocal performances of ‘tall dark handsome’ masculine sexuality such as those of David Ruffin¹⁴ and Teddy Pen-dergrass leads me to ask, How does trap, as a hybrid form of *rap and R&B*, operate in the field of intimacy to regulate and create ideas of black social life in heart-breaking ways?

Consider Future’s 2016 ‘Lil Haiti Baby’ on *EVOL* (a title whose affinity with Miles Davis’ *Live-Evil* I have to leave for another discussion, how the palindromic problem migrates in a five-decade interval from one of presence/performance to one of mutual annihilation, something like that). Future’s croaked-out or ruined vocalizations—more singing than rhythmically talking with/over beats, as I have noted and will shortly bring into focus—narrates desire to cocoon inside the tortures of being an annointed capitalist. ‘Shivering circuits of pleasure,’ indeed, arising out of a nameless abyss ... the noun we have for the erotics of shattered expectation is heartbreak. There is no impossible-to-get commodity that the singer-rapper cannot effortlessly have – bad bitches, foreign cars, cash, drugs. He is addicted to satiating his desire for the impossible-to-get. This is *spending*; he wears himself out upon the desired object. Future throws his voice into a thrashing performance of what Michael Watkins argues is a pure instance of capitalist misbehavior through consumption, insofar as profligate spending of the life force is irrational *and* self-destructive under capitalist logics.¹⁵ He wails, barks knowledge of—never lets us forget as he demands with his voice that we join his addled revery, ‘shoot in broad day’ (or run away) and open our bodies for him—the erotic nature of the violent displacement of his person with and as desire for luxury things: *I just wanna go back to the Bentley store/I just wanna go back to the Lamb store/I just wanna buy another Rover though ...*

Future’s bracing cry for more, a cry that evokes edging and other practices of sexual masochism, brings to mind

Hortense Spillers’ 1982 essay ‘Interstices: A Small Drama of Words,’ where she undertakes a ‘survey’ of the literature of black women’s sexuality, famously finding (with signature dark humor) that ‘black women are the beached whales of the sexual universe, unvoiced, misseen, not doing, awaiting *their verb*’.¹⁶ (To navigate? To provide succor?) The essay predates Spillers’ groundbreaking ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book’ by several years, yet anticipates its endlessly fecund conclusions regarding the inapplicability of both ‘matriarchist’ values to black intimate relations and ‘the traditional symbolics of female gender’ to the experience of black women.¹⁷ ‘Interstices’ and ‘Mama’s Baby’ together sound a chord of black ungendering that leaves in its wake the requirement that theorizing black women’s sexuality must account for its *entanglement* with black masculinity, attending to the weave of their/our mutual negation. This corollary of black feminist thought is implicit everywhere within it, but especially at the horizon at which Spillers would arrive first in ‘Interstices,’ where she counters the totality of the ideological nought within which black sexuality is engulfed, named ‘chaos,’ with the ‘truer sexual self-image’ that it is possible to encounter in the art of ‘America’s black female vocalists’.¹⁸

Black women singing offer ‘a dramatic confrontation between ego and world that the vocalist herself embodies ...’:

...the principle elements involved in the human drama ... [are] compressed in the singer into a living body, insinuating itself through a material scene, and in that dance of motives, in which the motor behavior, the changes of countenance, the vocal dynamics, the calibration of gesture and nuance in relation to a formal object—the song itself—is a precise demonstration of the subject turning in fully conscious knowledge of her own resources. In this instance of being-for-self, it does not matter that the vocalist is ‘entertaining’ under American skies

because the woman, in her particular and vivid thereness, is [my emphasis] an unalterable and discrete moment of self-knowledge.¹⁹

So what I have ultimately to offer, in this zone of unforeseeable overlap between Spillers and contemporary rap music, which she finds ‘alienating and off-putting,’ leading to work in black studies that might be ‘crap,’ is a question about why Future needs to be scrutinized in this light.²⁰ Future’s musical representation of desire is widely understood among listeners as a meme that corresponds with black male sexual ‘toxicity’. Our common sense understanding of his performance, as well as its relation to a ‘truer’ expression of the sexuality (read, arrangement or order of intimacy) of one Navaydius Wilburn, demands scrutiny, if we are under the influence of Spillers about the ‘absolutely equal’ degree of negation that ‘female’ and ‘male’ undergo in the so-called world where ‘the collective and individual ‘I’ lapses into a cul-de-sac, falls into the great black hole of meaning’. Can we listen to Future and Spillers at the rim of where Spillers’ thinking arrives at the formulation of those last key sentences of ‘Mama’s Baby,’ where she sutures the fate of feminist reconstructive practice to the anti-patriarchal becoming of black men? Can I extend my recognition of Spillers’ call to black American men to explore, in and as performance, the possibilities within having been ‘*handed by*’ (oh her deft and twisty repetition of the worded ‘handed’ as she transmutes the abusive patriarchal connotation of gendered touching as a verb of possibility, ‘opportunity’), touched by, ‘the female within?’ To find this man whose singing ‘bears life against the could-be fateful gamble, against the odds of pulverization and murder, including [his] own,’ (228) to have *wagered* the possibility of his bodily end, this feminine failure, on the fulfilment of his desire, and found yet another abyss of denial? Found that the words for his love, his being her, are also the words for the endless heartbreak and combat that defines blackness as mortal?

1 This title refers appreciatively to Jesse McCarthy's essay 'Notes on Trap,' first published in the journal *n+1*. <https://www.nplusonemag.com/issue-32/essays/notes-on-trap/>

2 Simone White, 'Pope.L Walks Into a Room', *Artforum International Magazine*, February 2020.

3 *Propter Nos* 2:1 (Fall 2017), 15.

4 34; 31-32.

5 'Moses and Windham were well aware [that] the discourse of humanism, at the very least was double-edged since the life and liberty they held in esteem were racial entitlements formerly denied them.' Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford, 1997: 5.

6 Ibid.

7 'The double edge of terror and enjoyment is doubled-edged.' Fred Moten, *The Universal Machine: consent not to be a single being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018: 104. And see Warring, where I engage, via Future's music, in a perverse experiment with nonperformance as a theorem of black behavior that rouses the 'disapprobation and outright hostility of ... abolitionists.' Fred Moten, 'Erotics of Fugitivity,' *Stolen Life: consent not to be a single being*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018: 246.

8 Gerald Mullin, quoted in Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983 [2000]: 169. Note that I am worrying, worried about, but not rejecting Denise Ferreira da Silva's 'figure' of blackness as 'the ongoing present of a common refusal.' *Unpayable Debt*, Cambridge: MIT/Sternberg Press, 2022: 106. It is the refusal I worry about, not the capacity of blackness to—here is a verb—'transduce' or 'distort the interpretive effect of the determinative tools that assembled it.' (da Silva 2022, 154).

9 See Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*. New York: Penguin, 1988; Dan Charnas, *The Big Payback: The History of the Business of Hip-Hop*. New York: New American Library, 2010.

10 Detailed accounts of these strategies are provided by George, Robert J. Patterson, *Destructive Desires: Rhythm and Blues Culture and the Politics of Racial Equality*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019, and regarding 'swagger,' Kalefa Sanneh, *Major Labels: A Popular History of Music in Seven Genres*. New York, Penguin, 2022: 123-124.

11 Patterson, 2-3.

12 AP refers to the luxury watch brand Audemire Piguet. If you need a translation, this has to do with the question of whether intimacy can be achieved within celebrity, to which Future and Drake answer no.

13 'The slow jam, as a form, was really born in the seventies thanks to balladeers like [Teddy] Pendergrass and others' (Sanneh 102).

14 I recall the introduction of David Ruffin's leggy and moving solo performance of the Temptation's hit 'My Girl' in the film *Summer of Soul* <https://vimeo.com/571577973>

15 Email correspondence with author.

16 *Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003: 152-175;153. The essay includes Spillers' fascinating discussion of 'clean' (sociological) and 'dirty' (toasts and boasts in the 'people's oral poetry' – pretty close to rap music in terms of genres of language/writing) accounts of black women's sexual agency, where she concludes that the black woman 'flunks' the key test of desirability in the former and is consistently obliterated in an unwinnable contest of hypersexuality with her black male partners in the latter: 'the prerogatives of sexuality are refused her because the concept of sexuality originates in, stays with, the dominative mode of culture and its elaborate strategies of thought and expression' (157).

17 *Black White and in Color*, 203-229; 228.

18 'Interstices', 165.

19 Ibid.

20 Keith D. Leonard, 'First Questions: The Mission of Africana Studies: An Interview with Hortense Spillers'. *Callaloo* 30: 4 (Fall 2007) 1050-1068; 1063. I am not currently aware of any modification of this view.



On Yee Lo by John McNaught

26 JANUARY 2023

Mira Mattar

Yes, I feel a great urgency pressing upon me from all sides.
Yes, I have been using my preventer.
No, not for the prescribed amounts.
No, more.
Yes, significantly more.
Yes, the blue one too.
No, for more than the prescribed amounts.
Yes, it's worse at night.
No, I can't find the rhythm of my breath.
Yes, I feel trapped.
Yes, I make sure to look at the sky every morning.
Yes, I am lucky to live on a hill.
Yes, even when there is no dramatic colour, everything is washed with colour.
Yes, everything.
Yes, I think paying close attention to all things we encounter within and beyond ourselves and inside the fluctuating fantasy that maintains the difference between the two does make life more interesting.
No, I like winter.
Yes, damp makes it worse.
Yes, but I am very strict with how long it's on for.
No, I can't catch the wave that carries me out, that undoes the self-world binary.
No, she gave me more time.
Yes, I had more time for the essay too.
No, I don't have enough paid work at the moment.
Yes, I am 'better off' than most people of the world.
No, I don't think it is necessary or possible to say there is a line, or draw a line or lines between the sea, earth, sky, air.

No, I don't think it is necessary or possible to say there is a line, or draw a line or lines between 'core' and 'periphery'.
Yes, they form each other.
Yes, I wrote it down when Stuart Hall said 'I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea'.
Yes, I feel it when the bereaved of Jenin are abandoned by the world.
No, it was on 26 January 2023.
Yes, I feel trapped.
No, I am not really trapped.
No, it was 10 people.
No, the tenth succumbed – in the bizarre phraseology of media outlets – to his wounds, on 29 January 2023.
Yes, 24 years old.
No, one of the founders of the Jenin Brigade.
Yes, armed resistance.
No, this is isn't what I meant to write.
Yes, a poem, or something fun.
Yes, Omar Al Saadi.
Yes, I differentiate between pleasure and hedonism, but it's not a moral differentiation.
Yes, pleasure is more pleasurable to me than hedonism.
Yes, it gets to a point where I want to dance not talk.
Yes, it makes me feel nervous to be listened to.
Yes, probably.
Yes, I'm sure that is one of the reasons I like writing.
Yes, I think enthusiasm is a neglected energy.
No, I don't want to be loved for my silences.
No, I don't want to be loved for hiding.
No, even if it were possible, I don't want total revelation.

Yes, I'm frustrated.
Yes, it feels like having no rhythm.
No, I don't trust charming people.
No, I don't trust smooth talkers.
No, I don't trust didactic poems.
Yes, it hurts to realise a teacher you admire is cruel.
Yes, I've seen a liberating pedagogy.
No, seeing the sun rise after staying up all night doesn't depress me anymore.
No, I feel less pretty now but much happier.
Yes, it's about quietening the ego.
Yes, it's about love.
No, not romance.
No, happiness has nothing to do with feeling good.
Yes, I think it's important to stay up all night at least a few times in a year.
No, that's not my line.
No, I don't remember.
Yes, the oldest was 61.
Yes, Magda Obaid.
No, in her home.
Yes, the head and neck.
No, I don't look at the pictures, but I remember them anyway.
Yes, hospitals said all the shots were to the head and chest.
Yes, to kill.
No, they entered the camp in trucks disguised as commercial vehicles.
Yes, they fired tear gas into a paediatric unit.
Yes, they stopped ambulances reaching injured people.
Yes, again.
No, not a synagogue.
No, an illegal settlement.
Yes, Neve Yaavoc in East Jerusalem.

Yes, he shot and killed 7 settlers.
Yes, Israeli Knesset members praised the massacre in Jenin.
Yes, Almog Cohen – Israeli politician, former cop and regional coordinator of far right party Otzma Yehudit – tweeted 'keep killing them'.
Yes, I feel a great urgency pressing upon me from all sides.
Yes, I enjoy my life.
Yes, I wrote them down.
Yes, Magda Obaid, 61.
Yes, Abdullah al-Ghoul, 18.
Yes, Mutassem Abu al-Hassan, 40.
Yes, Waseem al-Ja's, 22.
Yes, Mohammad Soboh, 30.
Yes, Saeb Zreiqi, 24.
Yes, Izz al-din Salahat, 22.
Yes, Nour al-Din Ghneim, 25 and Mohammad Ghneim, 28.
Yes – brothers.
Yes, I see the eyes of the boys we met in Al Khalil when I look in the mirror.
Yes, I see their eyes in the eyes of the kids I teach.
Yes, it is incredible to see a child acquiring the power of language.
Yes, I have been.
Yes, it stopped being a metaphor.
Yes, it stopped being a dream.
No, I have not been to Gaza.
No, Memphis.
Yes, Palestine is indivisible.
No, I do not dream of nations.
Yes, my centre of gravity shifted.
No, nothing is essential.
No, official culture and its museums, its mausoleums tells us Africa is in one room and Asia is in another.

No, official culture and its museums, its mausoleums tells us that Hellenistic 'culture' influenced Buddhist 'culture' in Taxila, but not that the latter in any way entered into the former.

Yes, I worry about the tendency for the rhythm of words arranged pleasingly to detract from the meaning of them.

Yes, it's a kind of seduction.

No, I want to write with no authority.

Yes, I'm frustrated.

No, I don't fear the void.

Yes, I feel I must urgently change my life.

Yes, they train the American police.

Yes, we have to deepen our engagement with specific histories.

Yes, this will bring forth new positions.

No, never pure.

Yes, I have a sense of humour.

Yes, the most beautiful sunrises.

Note: I was going to write about the sonic rhythms of Amman reverberating in my kitchen in south London but I could not stop thinking about the Jenin massacre.



Judith Hamann / RON-PON

Maggie Nicols / DJ Travella by Jonathan McKinstry

YOU CAN ..MAKE FRIENDS WITHIN YOUR HALF-HOUR SLOT':

Max Syedtollan and Hannah Read in conversation

This is an extract from a recorded discussion between Hannah Read (aka Boosterhooch / Han) and Max Syedtollan (FKA as Horse Whisperer). Both are playing this year's Counterflows Festival and have been key parts of the Glasgow DIY / Experimental scene for some time. They currently put on events under the names Events Research Programme and Permanent Holiday respectively. Hannah and Max responded to a few prompts and questions we sent. The interview took place at Max's studio in Bridgeton and was transcribed by Christopher Law, then edited by Joel. A longer version will be available at the Counterflows website after the festival.

What are you doing for Counterflows?

M: I'm doing this thing with Music Space. It's sort of a youth outreach thing. Until three days ago, I didn't know who was going to be in it. I think it's a ten-piece or eight-piece youth band, and the piece is called 'Movable Feast' because it's happening on Easter Sunday. The idea is that it's meant to be the music for a new end-of-winter festival, that I'll try to workshop with the kids, to see what kind of stuff they would see as being important to that. And then maybe that will get brought into the piece somehow.

H: How many sessions are you gonna go with them?

M: I think it's about four or five. It should be enough. It's been quite interesting writing it, because I've consciously tried to write something that is accessible to various levels of musical quote-unquote 'training'. So there's a sort of power chord version, and then there's a notated version, and then there's a sort of in-between version, and then there's a version that's

just saying, like, 'improve on this drum'. So it's got different entry points. I think that will be quite interesting. It's all very unknown to me still. I haven't really met the group, I'm meeting them today. I think it will be fun. What are you planning for your set? I seem to recall you were planning a sort of no-holds-barred thing...

H: [Laughs] Yeah, I guess it's quite interesting for me that I've been asked to DJ because sometimes I've tried to have different monikers for when I'm DJing [Boosterhooch] and performing [Han]. And the performance-y stuff seems a little more... if not Counterflows-standard then Counterflows-adjacent. I'm not saying that I should've been booked for my live stuff for Counterflows, but it feels more like that vibe. Whereas my DJing, I think, to me feels like that vibe but not to the people who book me somehow, if that makes any sense. So I'm actually very glad to have been booked to DJ at it because maybe that's where my strength lies slightly more.

And it's fun to think about crowds; I think when I'm DJing, I definitely try and think about who I'm playing to, and react when they're there, so I'm quite looking forward to the Counterflows crowd. I've got some really horrific clunky breakbeat stuff which I think is incredible, that I'm gonna play. [Laughs] I'm always trying to play some weird shit that I found on YouTube as well as... I distinctly want people to have a good time and dance. You know, sometimes people try to antagonise people, which I think is fine! But that is not what I'm trying to do when I DJ. The set actually came about from the mixtape that I made: Fielding [at Counterflows] heard the mixtape that I made for [NTS DJ and producer] Finn, which was called *what*



Max Syedtollan (top) and Hannah Read aka Boosterhooch by Doreen Kay

kind of music do u play? because I hate that question. So I try to answer it in a sonic form.

M: It reminds me of something that Aya said, I think it was in *Wire* or something recently, that playing antagonistic sets to a club, she doesn't rate that because the sort of crowd that go to a club are often people who have just been working all week and are just wanting to have a good time. And so if you're being, like, 'fuck you' to them—I don't know, it's almost a betrayal of solidarity or something. Whereas if you're in a contemporary art space, she is more comfortable doing 'fuck you' gestures in that context, because it's just a different sort of social makeup of people that go there. Or the reason they go there isn't to unwind, it's maybe to be challenged or...

H: To be 'fuck you'-d at!

M: Maybe that leads onto that thing they said in the prompts: the thing of being on the border of music and art. Which, to be honest, is kind of a weird thing, because - I can see why someone would say that of our work - but I personally don't have much involvement with the art scene. I go to some openings but I'm not really that involved with it. Are you?

H: No, I kind of feel the same. There was a time when - I'm studying and working in the NHS now, but I did take a year out - when I did start to think about doing performance art. Maybe that's what happens when you take a year off work! [Laughs] I started to be like, 'oh, okay' and I applied for a couple of performance art-y type things but I felt definitely that I was approaching it, as opposed to being a part of it. I think, it's funny that there is a distinction, and I notice it myself a little bit with some of the people I book, who would define themselves as artists, and then the way that they approach music is as part of their practice. I don't have a practice. I don't know if that's a kind of distinction that artists versus non-artists make, if there's such a thing as artists ver-

sus non-artists. I don't know. But I think sometimes I can see it in people that they view every performance as forming their practice. As opposed to, like, 'oh yeah, I'm doing a gig'.

M: It's kind of interesting though, because the music 'scene,' quote-unquote—I don't know why we always feel the need to quote it because it does obviously exist, in some way—it reminds me of this thing I was reading of No Wave stuff recently, and just the general post-punk moment being where there were a lot of people who were formerly artists who, for whatever reasons, weren't getting exhibitions and stuff. And it's just way easier to put on a gig than it is to set up an exhibition, because you can book out a venue for, whatever, £50, even, if you were to go some places, and just do your thing. And you don't need to go through a gatekeeper or something. Music is a lot easier in that respect: you can just have an idea and then do it.

With the closure of The Admiral last month, Glasgow has lost another 'classic' venue and music space - what are your thoughts on the current state of venues and live music in the city?

M: Okay, I hope they don't use the word I'm gonna use here but it's the only word I can think of encapsulating it: the existence of something like a counterculture, what does that mean now, and what would that have meant when it began? It's obviously diversified and grown since whatever its genesis might have been, but it's easy to become sucked into a sort of niche where you're like, you know, 'we do techno,' 'we do experimental music'. Sixty years ago, all of these things would have been seen as countercultural and existing within one thing. I don't know, maybe that's an overly optimistic way of looking at it.

H: I don't know, I think sometimes for lay people it's still like that. It's like 'Oh, you like music'. You know, it can be any of those things.

M: Yeah, I suppose even with things closing down it increasingly feels that all those things are being forced together not just out of choice but out of a sort of lack as well.

H: This is something that came up for me a few years ago during one of these [times when] videographers from London come up and interview some DJs from Glasgow and think they've won the Pulitzer Prize or something. I can't remember who was saying it but it's something that's stuck with me and something that I regurgitate in these opportunities, that was: Glasgow is obviously big enough to support all these scenes. You've got the techno kids and the hip hop kids, and I don't know, the experimental kids. But it's also small enough that there's not just gonna be shit for you to do within that scene; you can't just exist socially within that scene. So you have to...you see the techno kids at the experimental nights and you see the experimental kids at the gabba nights and the gabba kids at the ambient nights. There is quite a lot of flow between scenes like that because people have to just go out to different things. ...I think that people trust each other's scenes or take an interest, and you can't just be closed. What made you start Permanent Holidays?

M: It was kind of from doing tours. I think the first tour I did was that Megabus tour in 2021. And then the next one was the one we did together. It's kind of amazing. You end up just meeting people through it, and someone's going to send you an email down the line: 'I'm coming to Glasgow now. D'you reckon you could set up a gig?' I think it was something like that where some friend that I had made over doing one of these tours was coming to town, and so I sort of agreed to set something up, and then I quite liked the experience of doing it so I did it again a few times. I don't really have much of a vision with it, it's just quite happenstance.

H: That's quite nice. I think I've shot myself in the foot a little bit by making ERP every month. I've now done one every

month for nearly a year, which is quite a lot of gigs to be putting on. I think now that it's a little bit established and there's the membership thing [ERP has a Patreon with members paying a monthly sub to get free access to all events] but now that there's a level of income, it could be fun to dish out the promoting duties to other people and say, 'Hey, I've got this budget, £350, it's under the ERP banner. Do you wanna do something this month?' I think I might start doing that with it.

M: Delegate.

H: Yeah, exactly. Build the Events Research Programme empire. I think I always find it 'fuck, fucking stressful, why do I do this?', panicky, beforehand, and then when I'm there I'm like 'everyone's so talented and I love my cool talented friends' and 'how nice is this?' and 'people have come to the gig'. That's nice. Even when no one comes I think 'this is great'.

M: Yeah, if loads of people come you can think 'Oh, this is a sell-out gig, this is the coolest thing in town'. And if no one goes, it's like 'This is the no audience underground. This is the fucking cutting edge'. I did one of the Permanent Holidays, it was this latter situation, and it kind of did feel ...there was something enjoyable about here's five people sitting watching poetry and improvised music on a Wednesday night and they know they're the only people who want to do that. And it was in the depths of winter as well. It is enjoyable, not necessarily profitable or even sustainable without, for example, your Patreon. Or I think my PhD funding is funding all this stuff.

H: [Laughs] No, totally. Sometimes there's nobody there, it's like 'Isn't this fucking special that ten of us are in the Flying Duck and someone's beating the shit out of an electric piano, how fucking amazing is this?' I think sometimes some of the performers can be like 'Oh, it's not that busy,' but I think some of the best performances I've seen are when people play to not very busy rooms and are especially

considerate of the people who are there.

M: Yeah, that's a good point and we definitely know all about that from our tour! [Laughs] But it is true, because I definitely feel that you do connect with who's there a little bit more. You're not seeing them as a sort of mass. You can...

H: ...Make friends within your half-hour slot. There was one in France that was relatively well-attended, the other three were a little sparse. But it was fun, who cares? We toured Europe!

What new stuff have you got coming up?

M: I seem to remember you were doing some sort of transhumanist or post-...

H: Yeah, the idea was that I kept going on this 'Institute of...' stuff [Following Han's debut 2022 album *The Institute of Ecoterrorism*], and do an 'Institute of Transhumanism'. I read a really interesting book called *To be a Machine*, by Mark O'Connell. It's very funny and very good. It's basically talking about all these people who work around Silicon Valley who don't want to die, and they're putting all their money and resources into not dying. So actually what Google spends billions on, all this weird shit. And the author himself was just cutting about like 'This person believes that in ten years we'll be able to upload our brains onto the internet. But he's a bit weird and always drunk'.

The book ties in with my NHS job stuff and working in healthcare. All of this eco-terrorism, transhumanism stuff. I don't know how, but to me it all spirals in and it's all the same thing. Me working in operating theatres is the same as me making songs about eating my possessions. I always describe myself as spiralling towards a place where all of these nodes meet. It does all feel interconnected.

M: Maybe your interest in making concept works about fictional institutions is a reflection of your being thoroughly institutionalised.

H: [Laughs] Yeah, exactly. You're probably not far wrong to be honest. I quite like that I have a job where I go into a hospital and I am part of a team that makes operations happen, because that feels like a concrete good use of my time. We can—I mean, one can—explore that a bit more, if it is a concrete good use of my time, or one's time.

M: I think objectively yes.

H: I'm just thinking in terms of David Graeber's *Bullshit Jobs* thing. Healthcare is one place where the work that you do generally needs to be done and it makes sense to be adequately remunerated for it. Whereas a lot of other jobs might just feel fucking bizarre. So to have that, as well as having music where I'm objectively like, 'this is a weird way to spend my time and make money': they balance each other out in a nice way. When I'm tired of healthcare, I'm like, 'isn't it funny that I get to roll around on the floor in a small Glasgow venue and get £30 for it?'

M: It sounds almost obscene when you put it like that. Like it's an almost shameful activity. Maybe that makes it easier, going back to this thing of humour. You're someone with many facets, so you can be serious in one context and not in another. I do find it quite annoying when... It is probably a product of funding application culture where people feel their art has to tick every box. I don't mean this in a reactionary sense of 'people shouldn't make political art,' but you can almost see that there's this sense of obligation to put a politicised...

H: World-changing.

M: Yeah, exactly. World-changing. That makes me think of the Glasgow Uni thing.

H: 'Glasgow University World Changers'.

M: It's fine for your art to not change the world and for it just to be something that happens between you and the people you know. I don't know. No, I'm just going to

fucking stick to that. People can hate on me if they don't like it. Don't @ me bro.

H: Yeah. I guess there is something to be said for having a day job or PhD funding. You don't have to make money off it, you don't have to become famous. I'm glad that I get a paycheck from the NHS and that means that I don't necessarily need music to be financially viable. There's always this kind of discussion about day jobs versus not-day jobs versus how much you should be paid. I don't know. I'm always like, 'Haha, I would DJ for a kick up the hole'. I would. I know that can't be the case for everyone.

What are you listening to?

M: I've not been listening to much recently. But I found a nice band called Cukor Bila Smert'. They're a Ukrainian, I guess, prog band from the eighties but they're really good. That's the first thing in a while I've listened to and been really excited by. Sometimes I do the thing of trying to listen to every new album that comes out every month, and it leaves me with this feeling of not liking music. So I feel the less I listen to music the more I enjoy it, in a way, which is probably a bit of a shame. Are you like that?

H: I can be like that sometimes. I definitely ebb and flow with it. Sometimes I'm like, time to read every single Bandcamp email I've been sent. Or I'll bookmark things, then I'll have a day when I go through all my Twitter bookmarks and listen to absolutely everything. Sometimes I'm hungry for it. But at the times when I'm not I won't bother looking, because I know I'll feel like there's too much music. Just too much. That's it.

[Recently though], I've mainly been listening to the intros to experimental 90s hardcore on YouTube.

M: Do you mean hardcore as in dance hardcore?

H: Yeah, dance hardcore. I don't know how but the YouTube algorithm has

improved. It's come back to its former glory. It dropped off for a while. It recommended some channel to me that had like three followers and was set up the day before. And it was full of '92 to '94 electronic hardcore music. And a lot of it just gets very breaks-y, very sames-y. But the intros are absolutely incredible. It's like some kind of melting synthesizer-y stuff. Or stuff where the speed's constantly changing and it's chopping about. I never usually sample stuff when I make music, I always just make it myself. But I feel keen to sample it and work with that stuff. Even just make a big mix of all the intros and weird fucking sounds. I love YouTube for finding that stuff. I love the YouTube dads uploading these old records, like this is one guy in his fucking flat ripping them...

M: Doing a sort of public service.

H: Yeah, it is a public service.

BORN TO REWILD: CULTIVATING AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS IN DIY AND LOW-INTERVENTION (AGRI)CULTURE

Andy Abbott

Like most people involved in the underground and Do-It-Yourself music scene, I dedicate a lot of my time to making, performing and organising music with little hope or intention of it becoming a 'commercial concern'. For me it's a full-time hobby, done for love-not-money usually subsidised by other forms of work or a dedication of the spare time I'm fortunate to have. In this way I contribute to what art historian Gregory Sholette has called the 'dark matter' of the cultural universe: the hidden mass of self-organised, amateur and informal artistic activity mostly invisible or unrecognized by the formal art world. I'm totally at ease with that state of affairs and appreciate the freedom of expression a non-professional pursuit affords me. It does, however, lead me to question now and again what exactly it is that I love about music and why I find it so compelling.

In the aftermath of the pandemic and the especially strict and unrelenting lockdowns we had in Bradford, I came to realise that what underpins my love of music, especially in its live form, is its capacity to form authentic connection - both to other people and to place. I had time and cause to dream about how this 'special power' of music could be harnessed towards building a brighter post-pandemic world, and to what other fields of practice it, in turn, might be connected. It perhaps wasn't entirely by coincidence that I was to link music with my other all-consuming spare-time passion - drinking natural wine. But before explaining why and how, perhaps

it is useful to provide some background as to how cultivating connections in the cultural undergrowth has become so important to me.

I was born in Tomintoul, a village of a few hundred people in the Highlands of Scotland. Here I was fortunate to be able to explore without restriction the fields, woods and wilds of the countryside and the surrounding moors, forming a deep and lasting connection with the landscape. Conversely, there weren't as many opportunities to make connections with people. On my first day of school, I was seated next to a boy who thought he was a dog. Rumour was that he had been thrown in a dog-pen from birth and so could only bark and swear, and that he lifted his leg on visiting cars. It wasn't soon after that my parents moved us to Derbyshire to be closer to civilization.

As the new kid in school I used hobbies as a way to connect with people: first through comics, drawing and computer games, and later through music. My friends and I had a shared love of larger-than-life bombastic stadium rock and metal—Queen, Led Zeppelin and Metallica—but soon after discovering the alternative rock and grunge of the early 90s this was replaced with a fetish for 'real' music that counteracted the manufactured posturing of pop and commercial rock. We formed allegiances and emotional bonds based on our belief



Donna Candy by Joseph Sharpe

that the punk and alternative culture we immersed ourselves in was more honest and authentic than mainstream entertainment. Naïve and wrongheaded as we were, this nevertheless led my friends and I to move to Leeds in 1999 to pursue dreams of doing music full-time in the big city which I had on good authority had a great DIY music scene – whatever that meant.

Leeds felt a million miles away from my rural roots and shortly after arriving I encountered a music scene that turned my world upside down. The grassroots music scene I had been part of in Matlock was generally accepted as a training pool for the ‘real’ music world: a first rung on the ladder to bigger and better things. Here instead was a music scene operating in very similar spaces—the tired function rooms of old working men’s clubs, community centres and rundown pubs—that embraced its small and intimate scale as a positive, essential quality. It operated by non-profit and non-hierarchical principles and proudly distanced itself from the mainstream music industry, refusing to be seen as a stepping-stone towards it. It even had its own bible in the free gig-listing fanzine ‘Cops and Robbers’.

Crucially, the music was beyond my wildest imagination. Some of it I was immediately floored by. I recall an especially jaw-dropping performance by LS6 skronk rock trio Bilge Pump at The Packhorse, and—in the function room of another Tetley’s boozier—an unforgettable energetic performance of sax-led post-hardcore by Chicago’s Sweep The Leg Johnny. Some of it I initially found too challenging but eventually came to appreciate. The long-form droney minimalism of Vibracathedral Orchestra, or the jazzy noise and free improv of the Termite Club gigs at The Adelphi were a bit too much for my developing palate to handle. Nevertheless, I learned that these moments of aesthetic rupture and (re)connection happened most intensely in small, unusual places and were often intimately shared only by a handful of

committed enthusiasts willing to go along for the ride.

These early experiences in Leeds opened my eyes to the fact that another (music) world was not just possible but already existed besides or beneath that of official culture – a parallel universe that I found more accessible and immediate than the hierarchical ‘ladder’ of the music industry with its many gatekeepers. It felt more real, honest, and less cultivated: a raw, unfiltered version of the alternative rock myth MTV had fed us as teenagers. It was wholly urban but, like the countryside that I had experienced as a child in Scotland, it was also a common ground that you could immerse yourself in as you liked – open, free, and non-judgmental.

Perhaps most importantly though, this hyper-local scene was part of an international network connecting venues, independent spaces, bands, labels, towns, and cities across the world from London, to Glasgow, to Ljubljana, Chicago and Tokyo. In contrast to the parochial, insular, and isolated notions of the ‘local’ I had carried with me from Derbyshire, here was a scene that was internationally minded and interdependent, whilst at the same time firmly and authentically embedded in place and community.

I set on a path to explore if, where and how this alternative reality existed in other spheres of cultural production and life. I immersed myself in socially engaged art and embedded practice; community activism, social movements, and autonomous politics; and alternative economics and community-led regeneration projects. I found, not unexpectedly, that non-capitalist ways of doing are most likely to be experimented with and take hold in places failed by capitalist development. This led me to explore a plethora of post-industrial towns and cities including Bradford, Biella in Northern Italy, Stoke-on-Trent, Wakefield, Luton, and Nelson in East Lancashire – all places facing real challenges and multiple forms of deprivation but, as a consequence, rich

in alternative culture and community-led activity. I saw that the creative ‘dark matter’ matter thrives in the margins and peripheries, emerging from the cracks of fractured post-industrial landscapes but also that these fragile terrains are at constant risk of being swallowed up or decimated by the uneven and violent shifts of neoliberal development.

* * *

Lately I’ve been thinking about how these creative ‘wild patches’—so vital to producing life-affirming, authentic, connective cultural experiences—might be protected or sustained. How might they continue to be appreciated and enjoyed whilst being conserved? Or tended to without being overcultivated? It’s tempting to believe that shining a light on the underground will lead to it becoming more widely appreciated and, by extension, sustainable. But exposure can be an unwelcome, even destructive, act for delicate ecosystems, especially in times when the dark forces of recuperation, co-optation and exploitation are never far away. So from where might we draw inspiration and expertise in a more considered and light-touch approach to (agri)culture?

I found an unusual pairing for DIY music in natural wine. These may at first glance appear as unlikely match, especially in the UK where wine is pretty much on par with jazz in denoting a middle-class and elitist form of cultural appreciation, and the tippie of choice at most DIY music gigs has historically been cheap cider, Buckfast and eight-packs of Double Dutch enjoyed from the ‘bag bar’. There is also no escaping the fact that the appearance of the natural wine bar, like the artisan coffee shop and organic fruit and veg co-operative before it, is a fair indicator of the gentrification of a once-affordable area or neighbourhood, and so often plays an active part in the displacement of community and DIY spaces or venues.

If we are able to look past this initial

discordance however, there is a productive alliance to be forged between those engaged in DIY culture and natural wine that could help forge a path towards a richer, better connected and more sustainable cultural landscape that can emerge from the wilds of our post-industrial towns and cities.

For the uninitiated or unfamiliar the natural wine movement is akin to the so-called ‘real ale revolution’: an enthusiastic network of growers, merchants and consumers who are committed to resuscitating a traditional form of product that has, through centuries of commercial development and industrial scale production, lost its roots. natural wine has no definitive method and is described more as an approach or philosophy. It tends, however, to be made without chemicals or pesticides and only minimal additives including yeasts and sulphites. It is often produced at small-scale on patches of land that had previously been written off as untenable, using rare or unusual grape varieties, and is accordingly authentically and irrevocably ‘of the terroir’.

The term ‘low intervention wine’ encapsulates the approach of many of the natural winemakers. They try to not force the grapes to create a predetermined end product but rather guide them through a spontaneous act of fermentation. Jonathan Nossiter describes in his book *Cultural Insurrection: A Manifesto for the Arts, Agriculture, and Natural Wine* the winemaking process as a type of structured improvisation:

If the music of a wine emerges from the biological and mineral life of the soil, the score is committed to paper by the grape. But the musicians, the interpreters, are the yeasts. In which case, the winegrower is the conductor, channeling and harmonizing the choral work of nature, especially attentive to the quirks of the artisan yeasts. (p. 148)

There are clear parallels to be drawn,

then, between natural winegrowers and musicians that experiment with spontaneous and collective forms of composition. Steve Nuttall who imports natural wine through his company Wayward Wines has described the producers he works with as ‘very similar types of characters’ to those he met as a musician, and some are even alumni from the DIY punk music scene. Moreover, like the international DIY underground, the Natural Wine movement is also a network of producers, consumers, individuals, and organisations that are ‘being the change they want to see in the world’ by building an alternative infrastructure that puts into practice a shared ethos and proves its viability as a way of doing otherwise. As Nossiter describes:

Instead of tackling the monster head-on, they’ve simply turned their backs on it, concentrating on the full cultural ramifications of *cultivating* the land... The cultural insurrection of natural winegrowers in particular is generating an aesthetic and social movement that isn’t oriented in a battle *against* the industrial standard but outside of it. (p. 144)

There’s a further parallel to be drawn here with socially engaged and embedded arts practitioners and organisations. For example, In-Situ in East Lancashire who are using methods of community co-production and slow, long-term approaches to embed art into the everyday of Pendle, a place where culture is often seen by the people who live there as being ‘for someone else’. Or Imaginary Wines: a wine shop, bar and project space in Todmorden, Calderdale, that aims to create a space for encounter between artists, creatives and people ‘interested in slower, more thoughtful ways of growing’ over a glass, or bottle, of natural wine.

For me the ‘added value’ that natural wine brings to the conversation about alternative and sustainable cultural forms can be found in the practical and con-

ceptual tools that allow us to appreciate their indelible connection to place. When thinking about the ephemeral and event-based nature of music and socially-engaged art—where we are often talking about transformative *moments*, and of experiences in temporary or nomadic spaces—a reminder about the importance of landscape, the terroir and the deep roots that sustain such practice is absolutely vital. Likewise, thinking of cultural production—even the informal and underground kind—as a form of ‘critical agriculture’ invites us to become more conscious of the affect we are having on the context in which we are acting, and by extension the duty of care we have to that place.

So, we may ask: what does a town, city or world built on DIY principles look like? Or: how might low-intervention approaches be applied at the level of urban planning and regeneration? I find these questions particularly pressing when as urbanites engaged in underground culture we are so often (unwitting) culprits in processes of regeneration and gentrification. It’s easy to feel paranoid and defeated, leading to cultural and social paralyses. In contrast, DIY musicians, embedded art practitioners and natural wine growers are, by their very will to get stuck in using the resources to hand, are proving that it is possible to make authentic transformative connections in the most unlikely of situations, and as such provide an alternative to the narrative of endless capitalist growth and the expropriation and displacement that entails.

I’d like to end by sharing one of the challenges I’ve encountered through this low intervention approach to culture, especially in the face of quick-win ‘leveling up’ funds and City of Culture awards that aim to instrumentalise culture as an economic driver to improve post-industrial towns like Bradford, Todmorden and Nelson. These are obstacles and impasses

that need to be overcome if we are to take advantage of this much-needed investment without ‘clearing’ or over cultivating the wilds that give our places character and allow authentic connections to occur.

The challenge stem from the unfortunate reality that the most direct authentic manifestation of a place—be it through music, art, or wine—is, for the majority, not going to be immediately palatable. It is likely to be too rough, unfiltered, gnarly, full of impurities, perhaps even a bit funny smelling. It may appear as unrefined, even uncultured, and likely to scare off anyone who isn’t willing to get their hands dirty or pick some bits out of their teeth. Trying to introduce new audiences to autonomous social centres and DIY venues like Bradford’s 1in12 Club, and even its younger hipper cousin Wharf Chambers in Leeds has always risked their not being taken seriously by those who consider themselves schooled in official culture.

At the other end of the scale, the true, unapologetic, and uncompromised expression of the terroir is likely to be too extreme for conventional tastes. In the same manner in which my initial reaction to seeing Gareth S Brown perform a set of bemasked power electronics as The Royal Librarian was disbelief-verging-on-anger, or a common response to a community-led art project like Jeanne van Heeswijk’s Homebaked is ‘it’s good but it’s not art’, Nossiter relays how his first taste of natural wine ‘both fascinated and sometimes repelled me ... some were so *out there*, furiously acidic or bitterly oxidized, that my pleasure was limited’. In such cases the most sincere gesture can be misinterpreted as deliberately contrived, conceited or elitist and scare off the very people it is intended for.

Compounding this conflict between authenticity and accessibility is the fact that our tastes and tolerances for the ‘natural’ have been corrupted by centuries of force-fed mass culture. Nossiter explains how what we today consider to

be ‘conventional wine’ bears little relation to what they drank in Roman times, in the same manner that the overproduced, manufactured products of the culture industry are a million miles away from folk art. Being met with ‘the real deal’ then can be an unpleasant shock and this dislocating capacity of aesthetic experience needs to be carefully managed if it is not to alienate audiences completely and scupper the opportunity for cultivating new connections.

One approach, and that favoured by the agents of gentrification, is a dressing-up, smoothing-out, filtering or watering-down of cultural expression to bring it more in line with everyday experience and make it more palatable. But this tactic of cultivation and compromise only serves to speed up the process of recuperation of the underground by the mainstream and as such the blanding out and standardisation of our once characterful towns and cities. In order to resist co-optation grassroots, DIY and underground culture has to retain its rough edges, its flaws and imperfections, its spikiness and be proudly singular and weird. In this case greater accessibility is achieved through a tactic of mediation and guidance, which entails time, patience and above all a foundation of trust. The role of promoters, festival organisers, curators, and sommeliers in this instance is to be a guide to creative dark matter and a co-explorer of the cultural undergrowth, creating a safe space, allowing time and supporting those who wish to take a journey into the tangled unknown. And through this building the collective capacity, and eventual desire, for the strange taste of the natural and the wilds from which it grows.

'I LOST CONTROL OF MY FEET': THE DANCING PLAGUE OF GERMISTON 2038

Ava West,
October 2050, University of Free Pollok,
from the 'Archiving the Transition' series



This paper investigates events that took place at the former HMP Glasgow in Germiston in Spring 2038. Through a summary of the historical and socio-political context, archival material, and interviews with two participants, I consider what we know, and what we don't, about this spontaneous episode of social contagion combined with strategic resistance.

A brief history of the dancing plague

Dancing plagues occurred in Europe in the early modern period, with notable outbreaks in Aachen in 1374 and Strasbourg in 1518. Groups of people danced uncontrollably in public for hours until the point of exhaustion, injury, or death. Authorities viewed the dancing as heretical behaviour. Musicians called upon to 'cure' the dancers had the reverse impact of encouraging more to join. Individuals seemed to enter an altered state of consciousness, losing all control of their bodies.¹

Robert Bartholomew writes that those afflicted 'acted like animals, and jumped, hopped, and leaped about. They hardly stopped, and some danced until they broke their ribs and subsequently died. Throughout, dancers screamed, laughed, or cried'.²

Some historians cite mass psychogenic illness as the cause, where people display unexplained symptoms that spread in an epidemic pattern, usually during eras of intense psychological distress.³ Other theories point to food poisoning by ergot

fungi or a curse sent by a saint.⁴ Prior to the 2030s, no outbreaks of the dancing plague had been recorded since the mid-17th century.

In 2035, an incident in Athens gained international attention in the midst of hospital staff strikes against pharmaceutical patents. A picket line became a full-blown display of dancing mania, with some striking dancers continuing in a fervour for four days, after which point they were forcibly dispersed.

One attendee brushed off implications that people in Glasgow deliberately mimicked the Greeks in a radio interview the day after the outbreak:

[Interviewer] How do you think the Athens incident impacted what happened here today?

[Attendee] 'We didn't copy them, if that's what you're asking. Why would we do this on purpose? People are injured, they're seriously unwell. Where are you reporting for anyway? I said I wasn't talking to press. Hey, Rach! Have you got any more bandages over there? Rach- [end of interview].⁵

No 21st century outbreaks so far have resulted in any fatalities.

Views from the ground: setting the scene

HMP Glasgow opened in 2028 and was the last traditional prison standing in Scotland by the time of the dancing plague. Within a few years of opening, the prison was overcrowded and un-



RON-PON and Rian Treanor by John Coccozza

derstaffed. The Scottish Prison Service struggled to fill roles as public opinion of incarceration became increasingly critical. The 'carbon neutral' building utilised so-called 'smart technology', with surveillance systems that tracked individuals and many locks automated by online security systems. This rendered it vulnerable to hacking.

Organisers of the prison strike of 2038 took advantage of these weaknesses. Complaints through formal channels and pressure from actions outside had failed to stop deaths in custody, food shortages, and medical neglect. Set to be the biggest uprising in a Scottish prison since Peterhead in 1987, residents prepared to fight back.⁶

On Monday 24th May, 2038, a fight broke out in Hall C between two prison guards and a prisoner. On Tuesday, the prisoners commenced their strike, a week earlier than planned. There were sit-ins in the outdoor exercise yard and an occupation of administrative offices. Three guards were held hostage, causing internal disagreement over tactics. Some wanted to kill the guards so they could flee, while others wanted to negotiate more liveable conditions for the remainder of their sentences.

Una, originally from Stornoway, was living in a newly squatted church in Royston. She was involved with FAGOTS (Feminists And Gays Organise to Transform Scotland), protesting all forms of detention and the use of forced labour on the frontlines of wildfires and floods as a punitive measure for convicted criminals.⁷ In their daily calls in the run-up to the strike, her boyfriend inside passed on information and demands from HMP Glasgow to be broadcast widely. She says:

The reformed criminal injustice system was just the old one but more efficient, more useful to the government, who were getting weaker by the day, making up laws to pacify us and then breaking them within hours. And

the nationalists took it, like, aye, this is what we wanted, isn't it?

Khalil, another key organiser of the strikes, was three years into a two-year sentence when they began. This was common, with bureaucratic backlogs making parole and subsequent release a pipedream, even for those on short term sentences. He says:

They packed us in, until you'd have four guys in one cell in bunk beds. Terrible for hygiene and privacy but great for us getting organised. The trick was making sure the rage got directed outwards at our conditions, not at each other.

Views from the ground: what really happened?

By Thursday, news had spread about the strike, and men took to the roof of the prison with banners. Police sent to break up the strike were unable to gain access to the building after the security system was hijacked. Over the weekend, supporters gathered in large numbers around the perimeter of the prison, clashing with police through the night.

On Sunday 30th, the dancing begun. Reports vary as to how and when. Khalil says he heard about the dancing before he could see it from his vantage point on the roof. It wasn't until it spread to inside the prison that he took it seriously:

Someone said the hippies with drums had started dancing. Earlier, folk had come down to do a noise demo so there was all sorts of fucking racket going on, kazooos, you name it. Then there was the teuchter music. I couldn't see much because of the angle of the wall cutting off my view. It took half an hour before guys came up saying, you have to see this. Dancing's started in the exercise yard.

Una was forming a human chain to protect the main gates at the time:

We were all standing around while a bus of newcomers poured in from the road. This commotion started. Everyone said after that it was the crusties, but I know it was Kenni, God rest their soul.⁸ When they started flailing about, I thought they were having a seizure, so I was shouting, 'Kenni man, what's going on?' Then a circle cleared and they were going for it, like in the middle of an eightsome reel. They looked ecstatic. People cheered. It all kicked off.

With a heatwave bringing temperatures to 39 degrees that weekend, dehydration and heatstroke were causes for concern; unfortunately, most medics sent to help were eventually infected themselves. In the evening, the gates opened,⁹ and reunions between prisoners and their loved ones created a surge of partner dancing between the hours of seven and eight. More musicians arrived, including fiddlers and one topless piper, the subject of the famous photograph by Rob Nnadi.¹⁰

When I ask Khalil and Una what it felt like to be infected, their memories are hazy. Una claims to have 'lost control' of her feet, saying there was 'nothing sexy about my moves'; while Khalil says it was like being picked up and shaken by the hand of God, 'if you believe in that kind of thing': 'I thought I'd be immune, to be honest. I thought deep down that they were all at it. Then I felt this niggles in my chest that spread to my whole body. I was powerless,' he says, with a shake of his head.

In their efforts to regain control, police and prison guards got caught up in the frenzy. A window of opportunity opened. Khalil says:

We were wary in case they were taking the piss, or trying to trick us. The longer it went on, the more we thought, they're helpless here, and we have numbers. Some of the guys in about it started to notice their weakness, and they kettled the cops.

There was one group who got pushed out after their batons and tasers were wrestled off them, writhing around like snakes. And the dancing screws, who'd been hiding in their office until the hysteria drew them out, got pushed back into the room with the hostages. Big Al C was supervising to make sure no one got killed, but by then even he was dancing.

The dancing continued until Monday morning, resulting in countless injuries.

Germiston's legacy: the dancing plague that freed them all

The newly independent Scottish government dissolved within two years of the events described, followed closely by Westminster. To call the late thirties a turbulent time politically would be an understatement, and I do not wish to overstate Germiston's impact on the Great Collapse, with so many global factors at play at the time. What we know is that the prison shut and stayed shut as a result, and none have opened since.¹¹

In the months following the dancing plague, former prisoners occupied the building while their supporters camped outside to defend the site. Inside, they organised radical health workshops focussed on anger, grief, and addiction recovery; upskilled each other in trades such as joinery, carpentry and plumbing as they fixed up the damage to ease the rest of their stay; and told the story of the prison through group writing and creative collaborations. By the end of 2038, the government abandoned efforts to reclaim the building and offered amnesty to those inside, in line with their demands. The remaining occupants vacated.

An act of arson burned the former prison to the ground in 2041, during community negotiations over its future. Some wanted it reopened as a centre for youth education, while others branded the structure 'irredeemable' and called for

its demolition.¹² The area has since been replanted with fruit-bearing trees and become an extended habitat for local deer and bird populations from the rewilded M8 woodland network.

Una assists with the anniversary celebrations of the dancing plague. Since the cleaning up of the land, locals have held an annual party, including a bonfire, ceilidh, and an infamous stamina dance-off, with people travelling from across the Central Belt to attend.¹³

Khalil, who has since retired to Dumfriesshire with his family to raise llamas, says:

I haven't been back there since the fights over what to do with the site. Why'd you want your kids running around in a place of violence like that? I won't claim to have struck the match that burned it down, but I'd have done it myself, happily.

With thanks to my interviewees and the New North Glasgow archives.

River Ellen MacAskill

- ¹ Waller, John (2009). "Dancing plagues and mass hysteria". *The Psychologist*. UK: British Psychological Society. 22.
- ² Bartholomew, Robert E. (2001). *Little green men, meowing nuns, and head-hunting panics*, McFarland.
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- ⁴ Midelfort, H. C. Erik (2000). *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany*. Stanford University Press.
- ⁵ Transcript from Red Radio morning show with Leo Z, 31st May 2038.
- ⁶ Takala, Eilidh (2028), *Scotland's Prison Movement Revisited* (Neptune Press).
- ⁷ See pamphlet, *After Prisons, Before Abolition: Punishment from the 20s to the 40s*, by the Lothian TJ Collective (2048).
- ⁸ Kenni Goodwin (1991-2048), long-time housing organiser remembered for their warmth, humour, and role in reviving the squatters movement following Scotland's secession from the UK.
- ⁹ Whether they were unlocked from the inside or broken down by the physical force of the dancers remains contested by eyewitnesses.
- ¹⁰ *A Piper* (2038), currently on display in the meeting room of the Riddrie Federal Assembly. He passed out minutes after the photo was taken.
- ¹¹ See the work of London's Tomorrow Collective for resources on evolving conflict resolution and accountability frameworks, and why we cannot become complacent in the post-prison world.
- ¹² As argued in the anonymous pamphlet, *Fire to all the old cages: Say no to renovation of HMP Glasgow* (2041).
- ¹³ Contact Una McLeod at PO Box 125, Possil Communications Office, for more information or to get involved.

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