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Phoenix

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Editor's Note

Behind this issue lies a stack of emails, rewritten drafts, and magazine sketches that have helped it arrive to the form it exists today. And as its editor on this occasion, I have simply had the pleasure of watching it all unfold.

The journey has been long but entirely worth it. Originating from the imagination of H. G. Wells, this issue continues *Phoenix*'s vision as a publication representing the scope of art and reflection at the College to another generation of students. This time in a digital format.

Ultimately, Phoenix stands to represent something else. It is an outpouring of creative expression, fixed together from the basement office of a scientific institution – a metaphor for how the arts finds a place and a home to thrive, even within the sciences.

This issue features a short story that delves into the consciousness of its protagonist, and poetry that captures the constancy of the world around us. An essay that reflects on the ethics of violence on the theatre stage,

and a photography series that reflects on the art form itself. It is an eclectic collection that reveals the diversity of expression found amongst the student body.

There is a theme of introspection runs alongside these pieces that hopes to reflect a role that *Phoenix* occupies at the College: a way to look inwards, to understand ourselves, and investigate the world with the same rigour and passion as we would in our day-to-day as students. I hope you find this thread present in your read, amongst others you find for yourself.

But first, thank you for reading thus far.

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IF YOU COULD SEE ALL THE WAY THROUGH YOUR HEAD

daniel hesk

and there are two flies buzzing about the . . . lampshade. The Italian still has his head poked out the window and I think, his bald patch is just going to get redder and redder and the sound of him scratching at it will make me want to kill something. He shouts a few words to someone in the street below. I can't really make out what he's saying, but the tone of it sounds pretty pathetic. I leave the room without making a noise.

In the hallway there's still stacks of newspapers all lined up against the wall. I've never gone through them, but there's this one second closest to the stairs, the top headline of which reads 'PEACE AT LAST'. Somebody's torn the corner off, so I can't tell the date. I give the stack a little kick when I pass by, to keep it neat. The headline on the stack beside it reads 'THREE CARRIAGES DERAILED', and that won't happen until tomorrow.

Find myself now swamped by the tidal sunlight of the street, and the Italian's head's still sticking out of the second-floor window. He doesn't see me, he's busy shouting down to this girl in the café across the street, who only smiles and pulls her hat lower over her eyes. I laugh a little. He won't tell me his real name, or maybe he did and won't again because he's offended that I forgot. I just call him The Italian, or Rocco, or sometimes Dino Buzzati because he's always on the lookout for imaginary antagonists who might make his life more interesting. His accent's from Milan, which I thought meant he'd be rich, but apparently he's as dirt-poor as the rest of us. Still, he chews with his mouth closed and doesn't dodge the rent, so it could be a lot worse. I remember certain incidents. There's a rumour of rain in the air.

*We are, every one of us,
beyond redemption.*

Click my heels, metaphorically. What in God's name am I doing? This is a question I ask myself on a regular basis, across large and small spans of rolling time. Today, the answer is simple. I will go to see Howard in his house on the waterfront; we will read *Letters from Petrograd* together; I will wait with my usual grace and patience for the world to end. We walk such brittle paths to salvation. Lacking any other outlet for this energy gathering in

my stomach I start to whistle, echoes of it ringing down the harbour-dropping alleys in my van. Imagine it. Three Carriages Derailed. The screeching of metal and the spray of violent, tangerine sparks. Emergency sirens in some lot far distant starting up their hollow, aching song. Evening thing. Seabirds are matching the pitch of my whistles, and seabirds are shitting on tourists. Past the harbour the cloud-cliff is mountainous. Waves make weird noises against the quay. Howard leans against a lamppost, failing to light a cigarette in the stiff naval breeze.

For some reason he's only got matches, so I move up wordlessly and light it for him. He breathes smoke to the left of my head and says, "What are you doing here?"

I tilt my head. "It's Wednesday. Where else would I be?"

His lips form a black, unappealing little line. "You'll be delighted to learn that today's Thursday. You missed me yesterday."

I think, well fuck. "Sorry, you know I'm sorry. I was wrapped up in helping with—"

"Sure. Apology accepted, it's not an issue. I have to go, though."

He looks over my shoulder and I turn to watch the woman who strides so confidently across the bright, bright flagstones towards us. Immense sunglasses and a patterned yellow sundress, and she looks better and smarter than me, and God I hope it starts to rain as soon as they walk off together. Grant me that, at least. I turn back to Howard, smile and say, "Of course. See you next week." And I leave before he can commit to a non-committal response. Cry havoc. Today the answer is growing more complicated. I will buy a bottle of wine and drink it with Rocco, see if he's got any good conversation in him; if not I will go to the bar and see who's new; if no one, I'll take a walk along the cliffs after dusk and suck in the whole foaming nightness.

If I could go invisible, the first thing I'd do would involve two mirrors.

Evil men in the landscape of sheds over the patio wall. We can hear them muttering, arguing while we sip cheap red and feel the rain begin. The Italian has strong opinions about literature. He writes poems but won't show them to me. I ask what he does for a living and he replies something like, "I catch thieves, commission." The rain smells like wine. We move inside, and can't hear any more cruelties drifting over the air. Dino asks me when I'm going to move away. I tell him that I've always lived in this house, for hundreds of years I've lived here, and I'll stay here until the seven seals are opened. Every day is exactly identical to the last. I ask him if he's read *Letters from Petrograd*. He says he found it disappointing. I go to the bar without him.

I'm saving up sentences from this month, the month before Howard will die. Not from the freight cars tomorrow, no; it'll be an aneurysm in a couple of weeks. While he's shaving. He'll scratch himself when his legs buckle; from the red slash across his neck we'll think at first that he's made a very stupid decision. We'll mumble about how we should have seen this coming and how the signs were all there and how someone should've done something, and then the coroner will tell us that a dam just burst in his brain and we'll all be relieved, in multiple senses of the word. Right now I'm framing internally random snatches of things he's said to me this month. Fragments, scraps. Meaningless, not unlike most things we ever said to each other. The sentences will be a comfort in a few years when I remember them, and a comfort again when I stop bothering. There's a little satisfaction in realising you no longer care about something that once meant the world to you. You can pretend for a while that it's the same thing as growing up.

You'll be delighted to learn that today's Thursday.

When I get to the bar it's already clogged with no one better than drunks and criminals. Worse, a few of them are even writers. I stay on the wine but start mixing stronger and weaker things into it. May my spirit scorch the ground when it flees. Here, I'm drunk enough now, I can start addressing you directly. Maybe you'd like to hear about *Letters from Petrograd*. It's my favourite book, if that hadn't been made clear. It's about this woman who, thanks to some obscure legal technicality, finds herself married to an Olympic-class ocean liner. She's forbidden from leaving the ship for

more than seven hours at a time, so she spends most of her life on voyages between Southampton and New York, whiling away the weeks with a vast and transient cast of secondary characters. Over time, though, she gains influence aboard the ship, eventually fomenting a mutiny, and I leap up from my lonely table and escape into the pale evening. Down the street. Down other streets. Running to the edge of time, the edge of town, hoping it's not too late to watch.

There's a bridge that passes high above the tracks where they run through the western gully. My hands gripped on its iron railing, keep the rust-touch stationary, avoid splintering. The old woman is humming. Les Champs-Élysées. She's been up here twenty minutes, same reason as me. We don't speak. I just stare at the scrub and slate and scree sloping down to the railway. I wonder if it will all go afire. The clouds are swirling, the clouds are swirling like ravenous insects but the rain for now has abated. The ballast is dark. The rails look slippery.

At the gully's far end the tracks disappear into a tunnel. I stare at it, sable maw, and its blackness seems to multiply. The old woman falls silent. Sparks, Howard, Three Carriages Derailed. From out of some mytho-industrial ghost story. From sad and frightening depths. From the nameless dark of the tunnel's mouth the thousand-ton screeching begins.

Grief? Grief is different. It's alien. It's like the bottom of the ocean.

I live like someone who's been misdiagnosed many times before. I live like the sun will certainly rise tomorrow. Like the sun. Know myself. Know me. Live forever. Dig your own grave. Complain about everything. Die in the washroom. Pray for rain. What shall we do with a drunken sailor? There are two flies buzzing about the lampshade.

Oblivion wakes...



It's True, It's True, It's True
Photo by Breach Theatre

VIOLENCE ON STAGE: *guilty pleasure or ethical challenge?*

cate goldwater breheny

Exploring Tim Crouch's play *The Author* and Breach Theatre's 2018 *It's True, It's True, It's True* to understand how these plays operate on their audiences and prompt timely reflections on our response to staged violence.

Is the representation of an act of violence the same as an act of violence itself? Tim Crouch's 2009 play *The Author* (Author) and Breach Theatre's 2018 *It's True, It's True, It's True* (IT) both represent violence: attempts to cause emotional, physical, or sexual harm to another person. As plays, representing violence on stage necessarily recreates some (if not all) of the dynamics of looking at images of violence. There is a grey area around whether someone is really being hurt for our viewing pleasure.

In The Author, the boundaries between performer and spectator are fundamentally blurred.

Mass media, from television to social media, make the representation of violence a pressing ethical question today. These plays are interested in representing violence in a mass-media age where their audiences are regularly exposed to images of violence. Sidestepping philosophical questions about what violence is, or might be, these plays encourage their audiences to understand represented violence as both capable of emotional affect and connected to real violence. The plays invite their audience to ethically reflect on their responses to images of violence.

The Author is a unique play by Tim Crouch (who

also directed and acted), who is deeply interested in participatory theatre, where the audience is actively involved in the performance. In *The Author*, the boundaries between performer and spectator are fundamentally blurred. The actors sit with the audience and chat to them before the performance begins and they stand up from their seats to perform. Actors tell the audience an increasingly uncomfortable story about a (fictional) ultraviolent play they were involved in, and how that violence begins to bleed over into their lives outside of the theatre. The play builds to its climax with detailed descriptions of acts of physical and sexual violence.

It's True, It's True, It's True, meanwhile, takes on a historical subject with relevance to the modern day, restaging the 1612 trial of Agostino Tassi for the rape of Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi. Breach Theatre, an award-winning theatre company focusing on reengaging with historic stories, put three female actors on stage who constantly swap roles to play Artemisia, Tassi, and the Judge in turn. *It's True, It's True, It's True* is a piece of verbatim-ish theatre: it is based on the court transcripts from 1612, but the theatre company has modernised and rewritten parts of the script. Again, this is a play centred on showing violence in complex ways, asking the audience to observe scenes of coercive control and physical violence, while focusing the play on testimony rather than staged action.

The Author stages concerns around the ubiquity of violent imagery on the internet. It does not physically

stage violence – there is ‘no stage area’ (Author 15) on which to stage it. The characters, instead, describe acts of violence to audience members, recreating in some way for theatre the detached horror of watching violence unfold on screen. Much of the violence described is in fact viewed online: “we all watched a mobile phone film of some soldiers taking it in turns to rape a prisoner.” (Author 33). Similarly, Tim describes finding pornography online as ‘a couple of clicks before bed!’ (Author 54). ‘A couple of clicks’ reveals the ease of finding images of violence online, showing Tim’s disconnect from what he’s watching while also being literally true. All he has done is click. *The Author* stages violence the audience can easily, detachedly access right before them through their screens.

It's True, It's True, It's True, meanwhile, stages the courtroom with reference to stories of violence shared online. The play was devised across the peak of the #MeToo movement (British Council Arts 01:38-01:42). Billy Barrett, director and co-writer, explained “we were very much deliberately engaging with [#MeToo]” (British Council Arts 01:38-01:49). The #MeToo movement focused on people sharing their stories of sexual harassment and abuse online using that hashtag to highlight the prevalence of sexual violence.

To produce emotional impact, these plays act as works of in-yer-face theatre.

The play depicts the original 1612 rape trial, based on modern televised and liveblogged courtrooms. In a review of the filmed 2020 production, the theatre scholar and critic Aleks Sierz calls it a ‘documentary-style re-enactment’ (*It's True*), using a TV genre to highlight how it fits into a broadcast media paradigm. Sophie Steer, who played Artemisia’s rapist Tassi in the 2020 production, modelled her performance on the televised testimony of Brett Kavanaugh, a US lawyer accused of sexual assault (*It's True*, 23:30-23:37). Using modern language further brings the play into 2020 and the social media age. Ellice Stevens, who has played Artemisia and is a co-writer, explains ‘we allowed modern voices to come through’ (*It's True*, 11:23-11:31). Just as it would not be possible in court, the play does not stage Artemisia’s rape, although it does stage moments of physical violence. The play represents violence filtered through courtroom drama and testimony, mirroring how this happens today via TV and social media.

These plays challenge what it means to stage violence when media representations of violence are all around their audiences. Theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann argues: ‘[the] separation of the event from the perception of the event, precisely through the mediation of the news

about it, leads to an erosion of the act of communication’ (184). He suggests that when we learn about events solely through the media, we become disconnected from the emotional impact of these events and images. Lehmann goes on to argue that theatre is well-placed to reject this affect stripping by creating a politics of perception’ (185), where theatre ‘make[s] visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception’ (186). This suggests theatre can stage violence to enable audiences to recognise and reflect on the real violence it represents, creating an ‘ethico-political’ (Lehmann 186) experience. Helena Grehan argues theatre can do this by creating ambivalence, ‘a form of radical unsettlement... [which] keeps spectators engaged with each other, with the work, and with responsibility and therefore in an ethical process’ (22). Ambivalence is an audience experience of affective uncertainty, where they are invited to engage with their ethical and personal responsibility. These plays generate ambivalence in staging violence to create emotional response, rather than emotional disconnect, and blurring representation and reality, unsettling their audiences to prime them for ethical reflection.

To produce emotional impact, these plays act as works of in-yer-face theatre. Sierz originally developed the term to refer to 1990s British playwrights creating visually shocking plays – with images of rape, murder and cannibalism, to cite some of the tamer examples (*In-Yer-Face* 4). However, Sierz defines in-yer-face theatre at its most general as “a theatre of sensation ... touching nerves and provoking alarm” (*In-Yer-Face* 4). These plays get in our faces to create emotional impact.

The Author creates emotional intensity by inviting the audience to imagine acts of violence based on the cast’s descriptions. One example is Vic’s account of beating Adrian: ‘He clings to me and I start to kick him off me. I’m convinced my life is in danger and so I start to kick him. You know? I don’t stop to think. Do you understand?’ (Author 51). The rhetorical questions invite the audience to imagine the emotional experience of assaulting someone. There is an assumption they do, somehow, know what this must feel like. Wendy Hubbard, a theatre scholar, described the effect this had when attending the 2009 production at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs (dirs. Tim Crouch, a smith, Karl James): ‘We wait to be told what we will make happen next in the claustrophobic privacy of our heads.’ (27). *The Author* creates affect by weaponising the audience’s imaginations against them, making them complicit in the images of violence they ‘make happen’.

‘Stage directions direct the actor to look ‘everyone in the audience individually in the eye’ (IT 42).

It's True, It's True, It's True stages its key violent scene – Artemisia's torture – to determine the truth of her testimony, to create emotional intensity. A 'paint bucket' (*IT*, 38) non-mimetically represents thumbscrews. Artemisia is stripped 'to her underwear' (*IT*, 38) by the Judge: as she plunges her hands into the bucket, this 'splash[es] paint over her body' (*IT*, 40). The paint contaminates her body, visually representing her loss of bodily autonomy. The 2020 filmed production's stark, grey set makes the gold paint on Artemisia's hands visually striking, drawing the audience's gaze to the violence done to her hands (see Figure 1).

Critic Hannah Greenstreet, reviewing the 2019 Edinburgh Showcase production, which made similar staging choices, identifies 'Artemisia's hands, dripping with gold paint [...] curled into claws of pain' as one of five central affective visual images in the play. Afterwards, Artemisia is left alone on stage. She repeats 'It is true' (*IT*, 42-49) over a hundred times. Stage directions direct the actor to look 'everyone in the audience individually in the eye' (*IT* 42). This aims to bring the audience into this moment, asking them to look Artemisia in the eye as she asserts the truth of the act of violence she experienced. It mirrors how she is asked to testify again, 'but this time, look [Tassi] in the eye' (*IT* 36). This reiterates the idea of eye contact as signifying honesty, but also as an act of violence in compelling her to face her rapist again and holding her to impossible standards of belief, including testimony under torture. The play invites the audience to engage with Artemisia's pain affectively as they see and feel the impact of violence on her body.

Audience members cannot retreat into the anonymity of a disinterested spectator.

Having built emotional intensity, the plays unsettle the audience's emotions to aim to create ambivalence, by blurring the audience's boundaries between represented and real violence, theatre and real life. To this end, *The Author* uses participatory theatre: before the play starts, the actors chat to the audience and stage directions claim there is 'no sense and every sense of a play beginning' (*Author* 14). This oxymoron highlights the blurring of the play space and real life. The characters are named after and based on the actors, who likewise invite audience members to share their names. Underscores in the playtext represent 'the names of any numbers of audience members' (*Author* 15) the cast have elicited. Helen Freshwater, a theatre scholar who attended the 2009 premiere, observed 'the spectator is actively encouraged to name and represent themselves as an individual' (407). Audience members cannot retreat into the anonymity of a disinterested spectator but are almost forced to bring their real selves to the theatre. This blurring between the audience member role and their real life, and the actor's character and real life, act to invite audience members to confront representations of violence in real life, outside the theatre.

It's True, It's True, It's True meanwhile blurs the boundary between representation and reality as a piece of verbatim-ish theatre. The play's introductory prologue, delivered in voiceover, describes the trial transcripts the play is based on, concluding 'everything that follows is true' (*IT* 1). This is itself a challenging statement as it is revealed to be literally untrue. The play uses modernised language rather than following the transcripts verbatim, such as 'she's absolutely gagging for it' (*IT* 12), and represents parts of the trial non-mimetically, with tableaux of Artemisia's paintings coming to life. The prologue is also delivered by Tassi, Artemisia's rapist, who is revealed to be lying to the Judge throughout the trial. The single line 'everything that follows is true' (*IT* 1) blurs



Figure 1: *It's True, It's True, It's True*
Photo by Breach Theatre

the idea of what is true in the play. Similarly, Barrett has described the play's title as operating on multiple levels: questioning of the meaning of truth in the courtroom or for verbatim-ish theatre, but also expressing solidarity for victims of sexual assault (British Council Arts, 00:52-01:02). The play troubles the relationship between the truth and what is represented on stage, while making claims of historical truth, to unsettle the audience.

In creating Grehan's concept of ambivalence by representing violence to emotional affect, while troubling boundaries between theatrical violence and real violence, these plays act ethically. Grehan is clear that ambivalence works to engage the audience 'in an ethical process' (22). These plays encourage the audience to reflect ethically on their experience of ambivalence around staged violence. The audience is invited to spectate as an ethical version of Jacques Rancière's emancipated spectator, an 'active interpreter, who develops their own translation in order to appropriate the 'story' and make it their own story' (17). These plays ask their audiences ethical questions around the ambivalence they experience at staged violence, demanding of the audience that they make their own ethical story to answer them.

It's True, It's True, It's True questions the audience by situating them as the jury deciding on the truth of Artemisia's testimony. The play's 2018 staging puts the actor being cross-examined centre stage, facing the audience. When Artemisia's paintings are used as evidence, the audience is invited to look at them and decide whether Artemisia's Susanna is inviting the Elders' gaze. Artemisia asks them to 'look at her face in my one' (*IT* 14) and decide. Similarly, after Tassi lashes out in anger on stage, he turns to the audience to apologise, stating 'I honor all of you and I bow before you' (*IT* 31). The phrasing 'all of you' implies the audience also need to be appeased and convinced. Furthermore, Artemisia's rape is not represented on stage. The audience is placed in the same situation as the jury of a rape trial: they must decide based on the testimony – and represented violence – before them. The play sets the audience up to reflect on the ethical stance they wish to take in deciding on the truth of the play's events.

These plays do not offer an easy answer to the question of how to understand the role of staged violence in our ethical reflections.

The Author meanwhile questions the audience by trying to make them feel ethically complicit in the violence represented in the play. As Hubbard observes, the actors 'ask for permission to 'go on' and to extend descriptions

of gang-rapes and executions, usually securing a tacit, disorientated complicity' (23). For example, Tim bombards the audience with questions, asking for permission to continue relating a sexual fantasy: 'Is this okay? Is it okay if I carry on? Do you want me to stop? Do you? Do you?' (*Author* 20). The repetition of what is, essentially, the same question, creates this 'disorientated complicity' (Hubbard 23) – the repetition cows the audience into allowing Tim to continue. Crouch, who wrote, directed, and played Tim, noted that he would continue even if audience members did ask him to stop: 'At many times people called on me to stop... But that is not the play I have written. The play carries on' ('The Author: Response' 417). In offering audience members a false choice – even if they say 'no', the play will carry on – the play intends to induce an ethically unsettling complicity in audience members. The play does, allegedly, offer a real ethical choice to audience members: they can walk out. Crouch felt that one way he discharged his ethical responsibility onto audience members was by 'plant[ing] an audience member walking out, to suggest to the audience that they can do likewise' ('The Author: Response' 417). However, there is a strong taboo around walking out of the theatre (especially in a small venue), so this is perhaps more likely to induce further guilt and complicity in audience members. This is even described in a letter Crouch received from an audience member, who 'out of a misplaced sense of politeness... remained rooted to [their] seat' ('The Author: Response' 418). These false choices intend to challenge the audience with uncomfortable ethical feelings of complicity, and invite their reflections on those feelings.

To conclude, *It's True, It's True, It's True*, and *The Author* are plays interested in staging violence for an audience saturated in media images. The plays create intense emotion and trouble the boundaries between reality and representation to generate an unsettling ethical ambivalence. They pose ethical questions to their audiences, to invite them to reflect ethically on the ambivalence these plays create around represented violence. These plays do not offer an easy answer to the question of how to understand the role of staged violence in our ethical reflections – but they offer plenty of food for thought.

Bibliography



on dramsoc's original production:



Mohammad Majlisi speaks to writer/director Oli Keene and producer Liberty Wright about queerness, drama, and the creative process.

I first heard of Pecs in December when a script development workshop was announced. The play piqued my interest because of how pertinent it is to modern British attitudes towards trans and non-binary people, especially trans women. Knowing Imperial, and butting heads with a lot of different people with somewhat concerning views, I knew a play that juxtaposed the primarily conservative attitudes of the university was bound to turn heads.

Pecs is based on the real-life events of the 1993 Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MWMF), a trans-exclusionary lesbian festival. They garnered controversy for the booking of Tribe 8 – an alternative queercore punk band known for their antics on stage, such as performing topless, wearing bondage gear and strap-on dildos. Their lyrical content was also a source of contention as they focused on taboo topics such as transgender issues, sadomasochism and sexual assault. Several of the band's key members, including frontman Lynn Breedlove would later come out as transgender.

- I definitely intended for it [the play] to be activism. I think it started out more being for people who are already in the community, and then it became less that way, as I realised that it would have to be for the audience that we have at Imperial. But it started out being more about reflecting from within the queer community about how we're failing members of our community, because in the 90s and now, there are still so many otherwise completely enlightened individuals who have trans-exclusionary politics.

What I wanted to do was turn back the clock just a little bit to the 90s, to show people today how not long ago, we were so much more wrong than we are now. And we're still very wrong, but we were crazy. Because I was starting to research about this period, and what lesbians were talking about. Today in the lesbian community, it's very normal to own a dildo, to use a dildo in the bedroom, and I had no idea that back then it was a contentious thing, something frowned upon by a lot of lesbians. And so, I was really interested in that, and along with that, there were all kinds of other [similar] ideas... but they're all connected in being part of this wider web of TERF [Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist] rhetoric.

- The play started as being about dismantling that within the community, saying, look, you can see how backwards all these things were, well, all of the views that some people hold today are just as backwards as then so you need to re-evaluate. That's what it was, activism for queer people. Now it's activism for queer people and non-queer people, because I kind of realised that so much of the play was inaccessible for anyone who isn't in the community, and that was another opportunity to change those minds as well. So, yes, always activism, just the focus has changed slightly over time.
- └ This is something that we do need to do, because it's such a great opportunity for people within the society. What also struck me when I read it, was how many of the same conversations we're still having now. And I just think it's just so important that we can do that... [are we a] society if we can't? Society globally, and also a society as DramSoc, we are able to do this stuff, and I think it's a fantastic opportunity.

We also discussed how transphobia has become more rampant in society.

- Yeah, it just feels like we've been in the step back for a long time. I think that I'm not worried about the whole trajectory, I feel like our generation understands, and I think that part of why we're seeing such a reversing of the progress that we've made is actually because our generation gets it.
- └ They can see themselves losing their grip.
- And so they feel the need to put all these things in place... it saddens me a lot, and I like doing things like this, not even because it's activism and I want to change people's minds, but because it's helpful to work through and think about it, to have the time to sit at a laptop and think about these things for extended periods of time is really helpful. And being able to, now, come together with other people who are going through similar aligned experiences in some way, I can already feel how healing it's going to be, and I'm really excited to share this with other people.

The cast is comprised solely of female/femme members. Rather than limiting the production, Oli and Liberty tell me it's been really liberating, especially when theatre as a whole has a link to queer maleness, with stereotypes such as the 'theatre gay'. Oli tells me about their past experiences as a queer, assigned-female-at-birth (AFAB) person and how Pecs is a welcome change:

- Yeah, I mean, I've been a theatre fan and a musical theatre fan for a long, long time and I had definitely experienced being the only queer AFAB person in those spaces before because... I think, especially in musical theatre, there really aren't that many queer AFAB people.
- └ I think from the tech side we have loads of queer people across DramSoc. The crew is still mostly men. We're getting there. It's improving. But I think that there's loads of queer people with loads of different identities all across theatre... But it's not necessarily reflected on stage. So, what we're performing and putting on doesn't actually reflect the huge diversity that is there.

We're moving, we've got a lot of stuff that's been written by people in the society. We always consider when we're picking plays, the ratios of the written cast, and if we can cast genderblind, accounting for our acting pool.

- *Pecs* is kind of an exception, I guess, because *Pecs* is more about pulling people into DramSoc's acting pool, who aren't normally there, if that makes sense. So, this is a play where we can't cast any cis men, right?

The setting forbids that, and it was something I was nervous about [when] proposing the play, but DramSoc had been very open to it, and I'm really excited because we're bringing lots of people to DramSoc. This is just about the most diverse production that DramSoc will have ever put on, and I'm really, really excited to be part of that.

- L Yeah, it's so exciting. And we've ended up with an all-non-male crew, as well, which is awesome.

MM *And how does that compare to the norm, because you mentioned it's mostly male dominated; how does it compare working in a typical production compared to now?*

- L Yeah, it's interesting. I think at DramSoc we have a pretty standard production schedule that we follow, regardless. So, it's been more normal than I thought it would be, but it's already feeling like there's a lot of room for discussion in how things are going to be done, and it's all feeling a lot more collaborative, which I'm really looking forward to. I think, especially if we can get the cast involved a bit in some of the production like decorating all the set, doing that together, I think it'll create a really nice community feel around this production.

As a writer, I was impressed that Oli wrote it all themselves. Oli explained the process behind writing the play:

- I am the sole writer, but I had lots of collaborators in terms of people who helped me by reading the script, giving me advice and thoughts, and that's been really, really helpful. The play would look very different without them, and I'm very, very grateful. These are people both in DramSoc and friends from home, as well. It's been a long time coming because I started researching for the play in May and started writing in June. So, there's been so many iterations, and people have been very helpful.

I found it quite difficult to write. I started out very, very afraid by the constraints of the casting pool at Imperial, and I wanted to make something that was as queer and trans as possible, and I wasn't sure how feasible it would be because although DramSoc is very queer, on the acting side it can be less queer. And so, I was wary from the beginning; there are so many ways to tell the story, and I was very overwhelmed by all of those possibilities and trying to gauge as well to what extent I needed to keep historical accuracy. I am doing the fictionalised version of real events, but I still need to honour the truth of those real events, so that I'm not misrepresenting what it was like to be queer or trans back then, and what the community at large was feeling at the time.

The play is also Liberty's first time as producer, a role that she has worked her way to through school and university. DramSoc is often looking for crew members, a role that is underappreciated, but essential.

- L I really wanted to try out loads of different roles so I could fill in where we needed people, and producing was something that I had in mind, and when Oli texted, asking, 'Do you want to produce this show?', and I was like, yes, I do! So here I am.

The main influence of *Pecs* is the book *Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl* by Andrea Lawlor, a book that began to make Oli consider the time period both the play and book are set in.

- I read it for the first time in lockdown in COVID, and it was funny because when I first read it, it didn't actually have that much of an impact on me. I read it very quickly. I was shut off from thinking about it too much, and I was doing like an EPQ (Extended Project Qualification) although my school didn't call it an EPQ, about gender philosophy, and I read it for that. I didn't really think about it in terms of myself, and then a year passed and I read it in the summer after first year of uni again, and it meant a very different thing because I'd gotten to a different place in terms of my own self-understanding, and I thought about it all the time, and I would just come back to it and read it every couple of months. I chose to read it again during second year exams, and that was when I decided that I wanted to write a play. It took me reading the book many times until I had enough self-knowledge and the desire to write a play because I didn't have that before, so it took all those things coming together for me to realise that I wanted to do this. It was a long time coming, something I've been thinking about in the back of my head for a long time.

The stuff that I read as research for the play was more primary sourced documents, usually magazines, journals, other publications from within the community about Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and Camp Trans. [*Camp Trans* was a music festival within the Michigan area created directly as a response to the MWMF]

The most important publication was a transsexual feminist magazine called *Trans Sisters*, and that was amazing. Some of my complete personal heroes were writing for that at the time, like Leslie Feinberg, who I really look up to. Finding those people was crazy, like reading an article that was about something for the play I was writing, and then seeing Alison Bechdel come up, who is someone who I've admired for a long time, just out of the blue, was so cool. That's when I started to realise that like, oh shit, it's all connected but we don't talk about it enough.

Pecs isn't a musical. However, it does feature a music set, with select tracks played by the cast from the discographies of Tribe 8, Le Tigre, and Sloppy Jane. The music choices are deliberate: Tribe 8 is chosen as they are the main inspiration behind the play. Oli expands:

- So, in the case of the Le Tigre one, it's because that song is the song that gave me the name of the show. Because there's a line that goes: "looks up and down, takes a good look at my pecs". And I thought that was such a clever lyric, and I loved it. And I thought that the perfect name for this band is *Pecs*, because boobs are funny, but also boobs aren't always boobs. And *Pecs* is, like, the perfect little, not just a trans-masc joke but also trans-joke because it's playing with lots of things. And given that Tribe 8 performed topless a lot of the time, one of the things they were talking about so much is how an AFAB body is, like, not just over-sexualised, but also a beautiful, free thing, and how it's just a boob, like, shut the fuck up, it's the same as a pec, really. Yeah. And so, *Pecs*.



Pecs was performed on 22nd-24th February 2024.

IN OTHER WATERS

Reflections on vitalism – how a game taught me that the Earth was alive.

oscar mitcham

I am the kind of person who really enjoyed *The Witness*. Its quiet world and slow pace managed to set a new, calmer baseline for what counts as exciting in a world where our demand for stimulus is increasingly high. That's why I was excited when I found out about *In Other Waters*. It was one of those games where I went to watch someone play it and stopped immediately – I wanted the experience for myself.

By that point, I had been a climate activist for a year or so, working on projects at my school and as part of national campaigns. There are lots of ways to try and change policy. We tend to see activism as lying on a scale from acceptable and status-quo-maintaining to radical and disruptive. I've wanted to do everything on that scale at some point. Since I am often part of the less disruptive actions, I have been learning how to hold two disparate goals in my



head: what I want to do, and what I would do. There is an important distinction between the better world I want to build, and the first steps I would really take to get there.

Sometimes I wake up and for a long moment convince myself that the Earth's crises can't really be a problem, that we've got it under control, and I've massively exaggerated how bad the situation we're in is. Those are in some ways my most hopeless moments, because afterwards I feel sick and sad and terrified, having noticed the scale of the crisis we're in. I hold strongly that people are generally good, but the scale of global boiling continually clashes with that belief.

Being a climate activist is not a position that sits well with my unconscious assumption that I am the main character of the universe: that if I do nothing wrong, the universe should leave me alone. None of us are main characters, but we each see the world from our individual perspective so it's something we assume without noticing.

The fact that I can wake up thinking everything's going to be alright is partially a consequence of the perspective I generally approach environmental issues from. My efforts may be futile, but I'd rather be a fool and try anyway than be sensible and give up.

In Other Waters is a game about exploring Gliese 667Cc, a real exoplanet with a chance of harbouring life. It has a minimal 2D art style, and descriptions of how the world looks are the written observations of Dr Ellery Vas.

There is life on Gliese 667Cc. There is a rich underwater ecosystem filled with undiscovered species. One scientist exploring them for a handful of days barely scratches the surface of the new plants, fungi, animals, and bacteria present. Ellery is extremely curious and asks a lot of questions, but they almost universally go unanswered – not for lack of effort, but because that's what science is like.

Except life on Gliese 667Cc is not quite undiscovered: against regulation, Baikal, a company looking for resources on exoplanets, has already attempted to exploit the planet's most advanced form of life, the Artificers, and in doing so nearly destroyed the ecosystems we learn about in the game.

In Other Waters is minimal graphically, so the sound and writing take on the role of showing us Gliese 667Cc. In doing so, they create an extremely compelling image of this world.

The shallows are the realm of the stalks. Together they form communities connected by a nuanced chemical language. These colonies even have relationships with the lively Spore Catchers which flit, camouflaged, among the stalks. In the deep ocean, great Brine Striders wander unhurriedly across the ocean floor. The unique collection of bioluminescent bacteria which each carries lights up in the darkness. Nearby, deep orreries cast their intricate, ever-changing veils over the seabed. In the even more hostile environment of the Bloom, the area contaminated by Baikal's experiments, life has adapted rapidly and effectively to the new habitat. Bivalve Bloomvanes wait in the silt banks until the toxic soup allows for a brief frenzy of feeding. Deep within the Bloom, great Emerald Bloomfins move cautiously, filtering the bacterial sludge for nutrients.

The game does not give explicit rewards for exploration. Much like *The Witness*, there is no fanfare and there are no tech trees to progress. Much like *The Witness*, *In Other Waters* was criticised for a lack of rewards and variation in gameplay. Unlike *The Witness*, *In Other Waters* uses this not only to set our expectations, but

to encourage us to use our imaginations and accept what we learn about the world as the reward.

In Other Waters asks us to be curious, and gives us space to marvel at the complexities of life. In fact, Gareth Damian Martin – the one-person studio behind the project – said that one of their goals for was to create a game about these moments of wonder.

I was absorbed by the small part of Gliese 667Cc we see in the game: I poured over Ellery's descriptions, marvelled at her sketches, and I was fascinated by how these species might live, feel, and communicate. The consequences of Baikal's recklessness may be small on the scale of a world, or even insignificant on the scale of a Galaxy, but I was still in awe of their impact.

In the end, however, the assemblages in *In Other Waters* are not real – the Earth and everything on it certainly are.

In Other Waters seems to come from a place of deep appreciation for the Earth and the inherent value of living things. What Gareth showed me was that there can be a reason to fight the planet's crises that isn't predicated on quantifications of lives lost or economic value destroyed. A reason to fight that acknowledges something that people closer to the Earth have known forever: that what we see around us is special, and infinitely deserving of curiosity.

As I was beginning this realisation and process of learning, which is still very much underway, 'Symbiosis', the final piece in *In Other Waters*' soundtrack was playing. This piece perfectly captures symbiosis, where life has mutually beneficial relationships with other life. Call and response forms the basis of the score. The melodies, which often have little sense of rhythm, are picked up by different voices and returned. 'Symbiosis' is the pinnacle of this: it gives the sense of the ecosystems we've seen so far, not just calling and responding, but harmonising in a way that is hard to quantify but obviously present. In contrast, the locations where Baikal has tried to exploit life have had their rhythms and melodies wrenched into bars. There is still life here and it still responds, but only to the jagged sounds of machinery. Where I heard beauty, Baikal heard something that could be made more efficient.

In Other Waters brought my attention to symbiosis not just on Gliese 667Cc, but on Earth too. To me, it is profoundly beautiful to begin to see all the ways that life exists only because it exists. This game forms a small part of everything I've engaged with to learn more about people and the climate crisis. It is special to me, because it allowed me to pause and reflect on the value of things.

Rivers are now being given legal personhood, and there is a growing movement to recognise ecocide as a crime under international law; yet legal changes alone will not create the mindset change required to save life on Earth. The Earth is a gift. Her oil and her wood are not made valuable when we extract them, but are gifts from the fish and the trees that made them. We've been trained well to think about the Earth as a mechanism, but assemblages of life exist at scales that reject this mechanistic view of the world. Traditional Western thinking may say how much money a rainforest is worth, but it struggles to discard that valuation and recognise it as a collection of beings. This static mindset was necessary to justify the genocide of indigenous people and erasure of cultures, which both formed a fundamental part of colonialism.

Despite our exploitation, the Earth remains, and she still has lessons to teach us. People who have that emotional connection to nature are better able to listen to her, and that's what *In Other Waters* opened me up to. It becomes impossible to regard the forest you grew up next to as only a resource for tourism and recreation, and it becomes obvious to see the mosses and trees as teachers, deserving life simply by being.

One problem with explanations of different ways of conceptualising the world is that they are either incredibly simple or extremely messy. There are some wonderful attempts at explanations of other perspectives by people with much more experience than me, such as Robin Wall Kimmerer and Amitav Ghosh. I have been fundamentally changed by learning about how different people think of the Earth and I can't recommend their works enough. It is always art that reveals different ideas – read a book or play a video game, I don't mind.

"There is no future without us imagining it first, that is what I learnt here. Gliese 667Cc was a test of our imaginations, of our ability to see things differently, to do things differently to the way things had always been done.

We needed to change our methods of study, our relationship to our surroundings, our understanding of communication, of sentience, of life. Each of those was an imaginative act, a leap we had to take to realise something new.

And yet, all those answers were already there, already present on our own planet, in our own time, we just needed to imagine them."

- A Study of Gliese 667Cc, Gareth Damian Martin

Dim the eastern lights.
 it bolts in kicked-up smoke –
 Mirage of soft and twisted, wily,
 drifting rope,

Silken chains in Western stitch.
 Despite the glimpse of former flames it runs
 in glittering sparks
 It's free
 They watch it wedding dust of strife
 And drawn-out raga pitch.

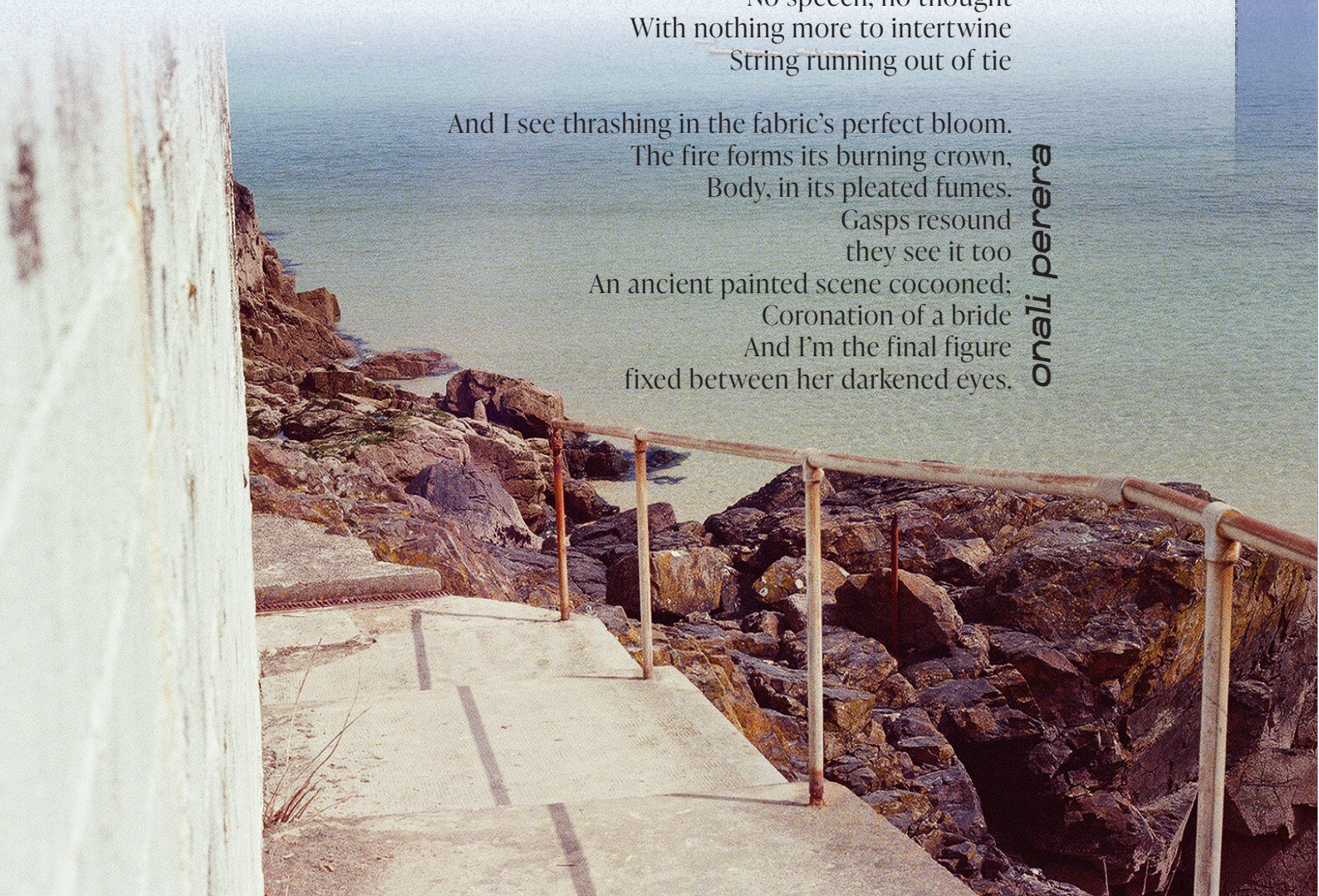
It feels more like a piece of me.
 A phantom fighting tensed-up string
 Wrists bound by heart
 Twists like my air
 The landscape sets my outline
 pleads to keep me there.

Bangles clatter
 Fabric coughing colour
 Fingers reaching for its gaps;
 The ends of breath,
 Patch-worked with black,
 It's drawing through
 No speech, no thought
 With nothing more to intertwine
 String running out of tie

And I see thrashing in the fabric's perfect bloom.
 The fire forms its burning crown,
 Body, in its pleated fumes.
 Gasps resound
 they see it too
 An ancient painted scene cocooned;
 Coronation of a bride
 And I'm the final figure
 fixed between her darkened eyes.

BRIDAL DRESS

onali perera



silhouettes dan cornell

Used to see myself
as a silhouette
with fire inside.

'Noumenon':

Called it a soul.
does this idealise
the vanity of self?
Looked at others &
questioned their contents.
Does that outline
breathe through art,
sing without mimicry,
dance to no one?

Imagine every spirit
sewn together
by light on a canvas.

such a strange painting
We would all become.



The Father isn't a template for The Son

julian ting

high tide

A life in the palm of a hand,
a hand the perfect precious size
to leave fleshy red witnesses.
My boy unspoiled by
umbra or noon.
Life's freckled fabric draped over,
206 fragile frail bones.
How many will I break?

I want to protect him!
Near me, he breathes it in
nicotine, gin, saltines.
So pale, so young, so mine.

I taught him to laugh,
I taught him to catch
My mistakes drip, thick like drunken breath,
each one overwrites his boyhood.
Fear has made a trampoline of his skin.

We made a new milestone,
marked salty in tears
from leather and wood.
I don't want to.
But I'm my father's son.
And he'll be mine.



low tide

When I die,
I'll remember my son,
know it's just this boy playing
Halloween tucked in larger clothing.
(Flicker joy, food, warmth.)

He'll have a family to eat 'round.
He'll have a family to beat 'round.

A curdled and sour echo,
sung in misplaced voices and locked doors.
I can't tell him, but after words vanish, I'll
hum:

*"When the dirt rots
and you're grey and on dialysis,
when you rub your calluses, remorseful
how your children have forgot your name,
there's little use of a belt and a cane.*

*Paradise is a shore punctuated
by past father-mistakes, loose grains of sand
But a new life in the palm of a new hand—
a journey, a promise still to be made.
Wake up and step out of the shade."*

unheard

Through medium an exile travels
 a suffocating stillness, like amniotic fluid, perhaps
 how vacuum sealing the deepest space would feel
 as if 'twere the substance of dreams
 Black shoulders of death pushing stars apart,
 so no hand may touch, nor lovers' words
 pierce through where silence affords
 no respite, no solace, no flares to quench.

Yet within the vacuum, something stirs
 in the walls of a womb long withered
 and dead before fire was lit below clouds overhead.
 A fire bright, cold, under a million eyes
 Burning with the angel of night's downy gaze -
 She'll light upon us in five billion years
 when our fire finally fades,
 or in five days, or tomorrow;
 or in another beat of heart the sword may fall
 to penetrate our skull, as bones are frayed
 hanging for long 'neath her ever-teary eye;
 teary for that mortal plight sharpens the blade
 But never now; in this forever present
 where the sound calls out,
 Now! Now! Let be!

The medium quivers, small and subtle it quells
 with ripples, one first breath that wonders
 whence came the sound
 By what hand it folds? Whose will to blame?

Un-heard, as ripples recede and soothe again.

Spring alighted; leading the sound hand in hand,
 through all nights, days, vapidly and void
 after countless counts turn pale then shatter
 and blent into a continuum of eternity's fur
 There lies something else. The sound did not know
 before Else calls to it,
 Let be! Now! Now!
 from the wall - one feather of the angel,
 until it's reached; suddenly there are many
 in a vast expanse call out:
 Now! Now! Let be!

francesa weng

Feathers that confine them, within their hives,
contour the endometrium; not one but plenty
For a corpse calls for numerous deaths
With them, sound mingles in ecstatic sea
that billows into symphony, in unison they cry:
Now! Now! Let be!

They part, not wholly, for echoes remain,
remnants of Else sound carries within
some taken away, though it cannot hear
Summer arrives and sound bids adieu,
Elses counter, from each feather and pore
of vacuum's abyss, from all of all,
How an eternal farewell starts else in an isentropic cage
all histories untold there lies ahead, all but
"you, after all, you, forlorn"
Death bids adieu and afterlives respond.

*And then it heard the angel
The angel was always here*

what is special about this day?

sophie pointon

Goose-footing down pavements,

Making the city spin underneath me,

Same old tracks stepping in past footsteps,

Jobs are neatly folded into briefcases,

Bones are being eaten by traffic's vibrations,

Nose is stuffed with train's breath.

Sky feels like a hand cupping my face when I breathe open air again.

Lips move,

Neurons fire,

Tendons stretch while laughter bubbles, sugar-like, on the turn
Of a coin.

I drum the palms of my hands on a table and marvel at the cleanness of the sound –

I reflect screens in my eyes –

I cross floors like strumming guitar strings –

I feel voices jumbling together in my head –

I talk to someone I've never talked to before –

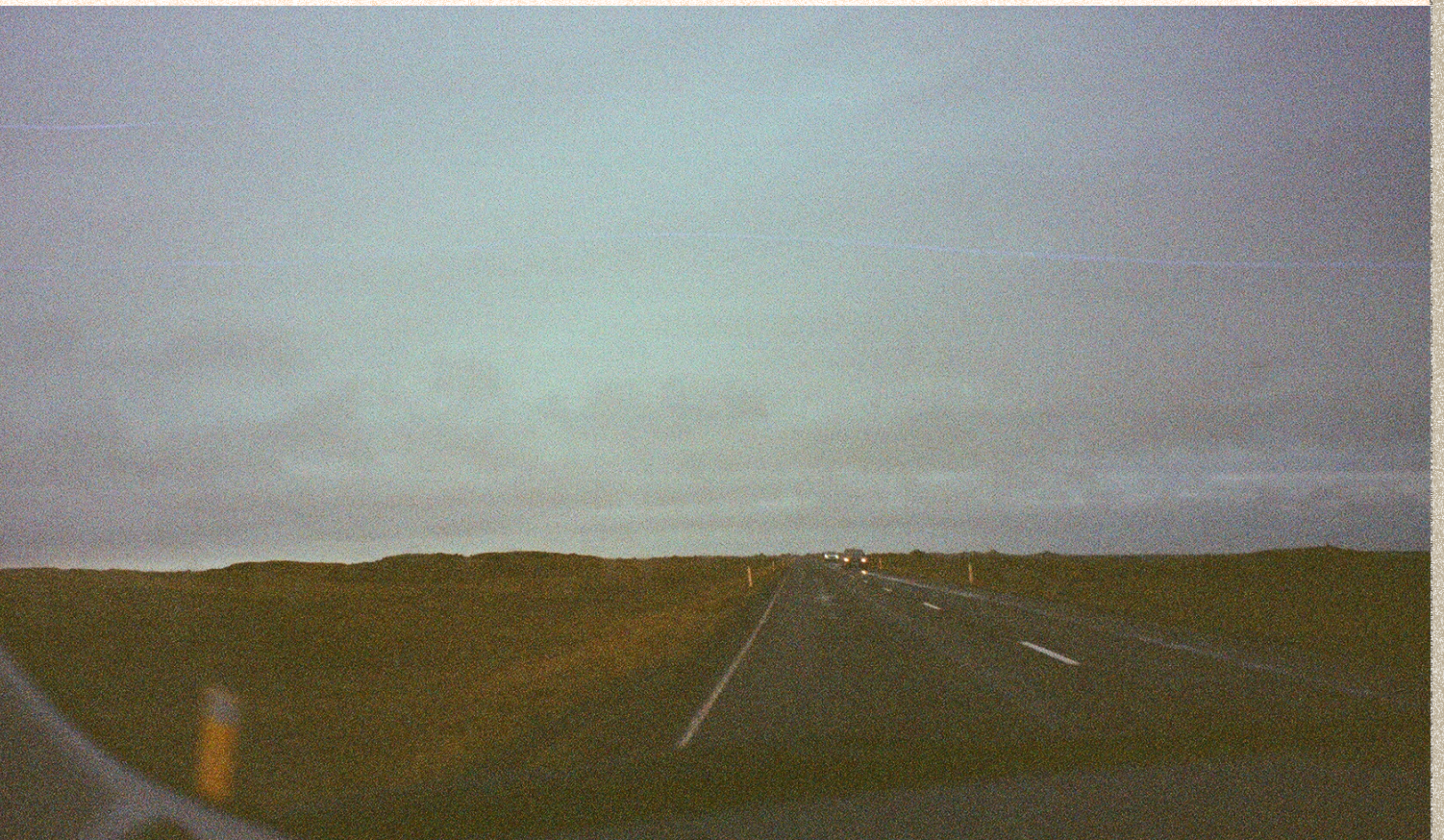
(This is a back memory:
Tsunami moon crashed through ashy clouds,
Sparks spiralled and echoed a hundred times,
Light bulbs bloomed into sunflowers
And Time curled around and dozed in all the corners.)

Static hiss, pen lying on the floor, its ink
dripping into drains, cheap tea tang
in the back of the throat, keyboards
being played, a hum against the back
of the teeth, vivid feel of familiar fabric
as I pull it closer, remembering and
forgetting entwined, ivy where it isn't
wanted, people argue, people forgive,
a handshake, a heartbeat, a pigeon
gets under my feet, imaginary smoke,
a musical starts playing, day fades..

Then the flat-palmed hands of the
pavement are lifting me home

And there's one more magic trick to
perform as consciousness melts and
drifts

Away.



IN CONVERSATION WITH: *francesca weng*

thariny suresh sits down
with the author of 'Idem'



T *I truly enjoyed your poem 'Idem': with every re-read, I had so much fun interpreting and re-interpreting your work! Could you tell us more about the story 'Idem' speaks about?*

F I tend to agree with 'The Death of the Author' – any explanations outside the poem seem redundant. I believe poetry arises at the exact moment when the text and the reader resonate, rather than being intrinsic to the text. Anyway, as a response to your question, the beetle in my poem would be such a story: A sound emerges from nothingness and travels through it until it approaches the walls (boundaries), where it encounters another sound from the wall, unaware at the time that it is its own echo; the echo reflects into more echoes until the entire space is filled with sounds. The first sound mistakes them as distinct others ("Elses") since it doesn't recognise them as its echoes. Sounds gradually "bid adieu" amidst this infinite layering and propagation; only then does the first sound realise that all the others are bidding adieu just like itself. I imagine it to be like "an everlasting death" as Marlowe wrote. Consequently, the sound realises that every "Else" is merely an image reflected back to it by the world around it.

Another experimental motive is that readers, when engaging with a piece of creative writing, receive echoes of their own encounters with the text, a concoction of the text and their self-experiences. This way, the form and content of this poem are unified, and the poem becomes a wall/mirror itself.

T *What other themes do you explore in your poetry? Do you feel some of these need more representation in writing?*

F Whilst trying to experiment with all sorts of themes, I often find myself stranded in motifs like war, loss (various forms of loss), objective reality, and some philosophical issues.

As for themes that I believe need more representation in writing, there are so many (people suffering avoidable sufferings always exist, don't they?). In any event, who am I to judge what literature needs in general? Though I hope not to write with achieving any particular effect as motivation.

T *I love the layers you build inside this poem and the structural analogue of reflective boundaries – creating a mirror through form. What inspired the narrative behind such a unique piece?*

F I wrote this for submission to [the Imperial poetry society's] 2023 anthology *Identity*, based on some primitive thoughts on identity and the self. The inspiration stems from the etyma of "identity," "idem." I suppose it might add a pinch of humour given that we are surrounded by people with diverse identities.

On a more personal note, identity has always felt like a cage, where my self, in this confined place, is corroded but at the same time solidified with each touch on the otherness of reality.

T *It's interesting you say that because I've always felt that we give pieces of ourselves away when we write, which can be both terrifying and freeing... I wonder if writing form has changed the way you view the world around you?*

F Fascinating question – words are somewhat like photons to me. If I were a mirror, my writing would be the world's virtual image.

T *Touché, and that's a very candid answer. Which brings me to my final question (because who doesn't love a literary recommendation) ... which poets or writers do you look up to and how have they influenced your writing?*

F Oh, the list would go on for a while (five billion years, yes). Although, the primary influences on my writing seem to be things unrelated to literature.

Poets/writers whose works I enjoy include Vicente Huidobro, Lucretius, Roberto Bolaño, Abbas Kiarostami, Samuel Beckett, Federico Garcia Lorca, Alfred Tennyson, Carl Sagan, Qu Yuan, Osip Mandelstam, Comte de Lautréamont, Cen Shen, Emil Cioran, Sarah Kane, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, George Orwell...



MEMORIES OF MYSELF

rolando charles

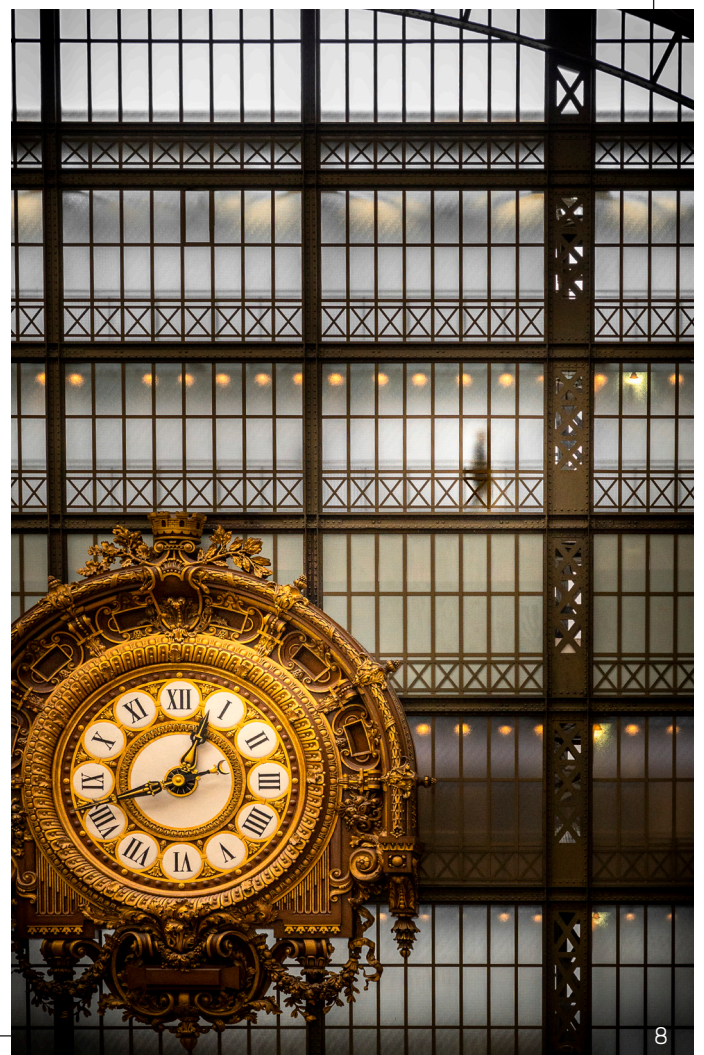


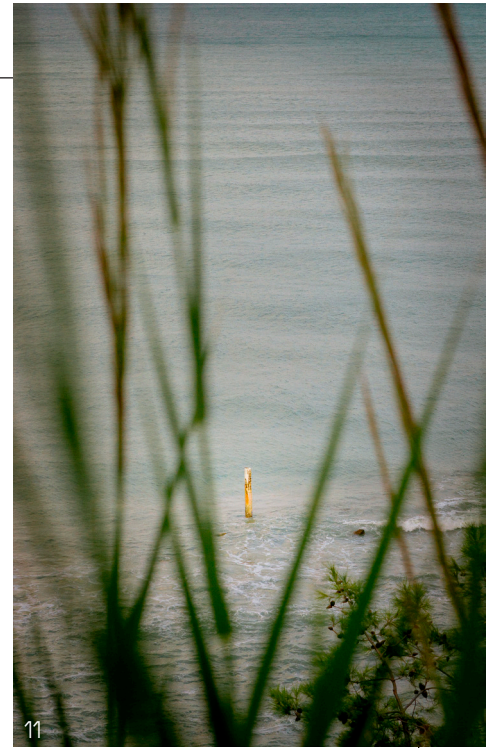
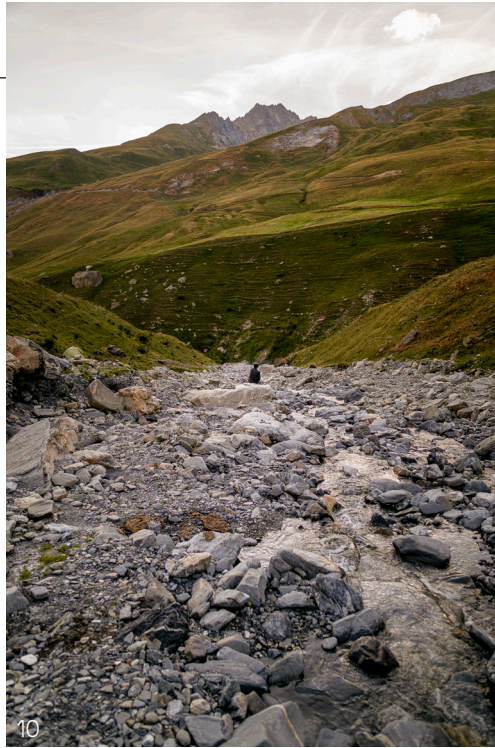
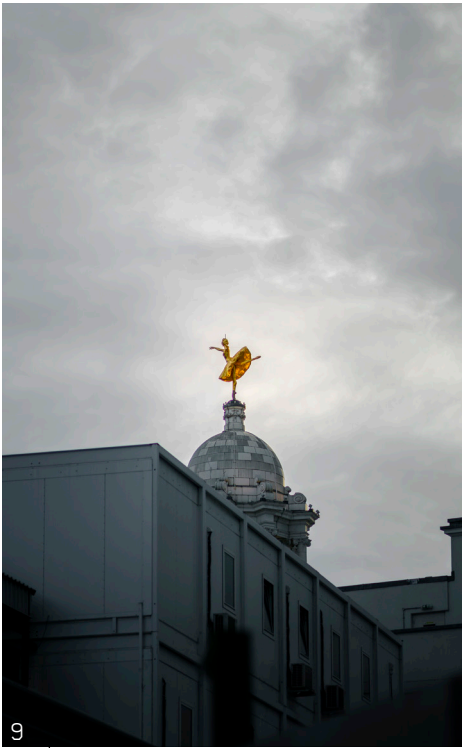


A series of photos is a true accomplishment. It is what every photographer ultimately wants to put together for a meaningful career. It's the definite form of the medium. A single image is merely a fleeting instant, captured arrogantly by the all-seeing photographer, while a series becomes a story, a glimpse into someone else's life, a moment of true and authentic sharing.

One should be proud and delighted to have had the opportunity to realise such a collection. And indeed I was ecstatic – for all but twenty minutes.

It came to me that, fundamentally, I was being asked the hardest series of questions: “How do you communicate something that can't be put into words? Something that can only be translated through the eyes?” Somehow, I had never been tasked with such a prompt, and the weight of it came upon me. “Show everyone what you feel, the projection of your humanity onto this reality.”





Naturally, I tried my best to find a meaningful compendium of images to show. Maybe a jaw-dropping commentary on today's society. A strikingly new narrative on social injustice. Or an affectionate portrayal of love, family, and friends. But everything to be shown has been a thousand times – and a thousand times better than I ever could.

You wake up a photographer: you have spent years taking photos on every possible occasion, spent thousands of hours learning new skills, to the effect you have garnered the appreciation of friends, family, employers, and strangers. Now you face the realisation that you have nothing to show for your so-called photography, nothing personal enough that can be called yours, and nothing universal enough that can be called art. The angst sets in, forcing you to confront headfirst what photography is, to you – to me.





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To most, I think photography is simply mnemonic: it helps us remember. It is intuitive to take pictures this way: recording reality, documenting the world around you, and keeping an account of places, events, and people you cross paths with. I believe that in pursuit of realism, we lose track of the feelings that made that reality memorable enough to take a picture of in the first place. Curiosity mixed with circumstance creates the impulse, the need to take a photo – but the photo itself is merely a vehicle of one's instinct, not the object in which it is manifest. And so, looking back at these pictures, which were taken on trips I enjoyed, back home, or with friends, I realise they are a memorandum of a feeling and not a mere record of reality. I noticed that the way I do photography is to try to portray not the moment itself but the projection of my feelings onto it.

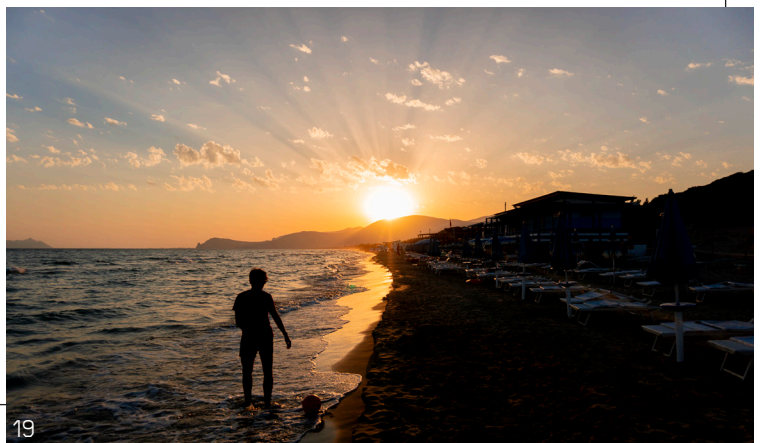
With this new view in mind, I set forth searching my library for those pictures that most vividly tell the story of my feelings. There is no aspiration of chronological order or geographical logic. All factual, objective aspects of these pictures are subject to the significance of the captured moment. I frame myself in the centre of them, and take my feelings as the true subject – now eternally captured on paper.



17



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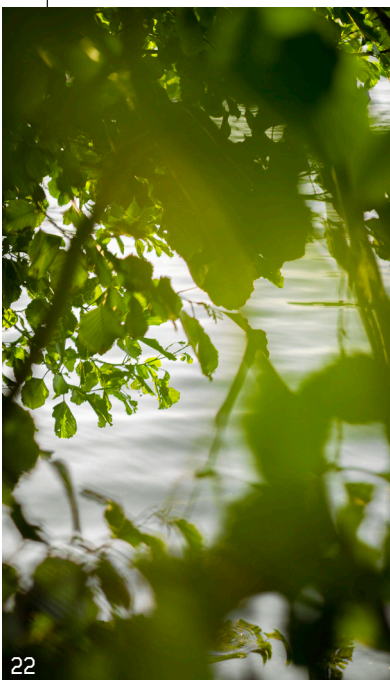
It is exclusively via photography that I can speak in complete sentences. No verbose interpretation can make the images more complete than they already are. No descriptions will be clearer than the described object itself. So I ask you, the viewer, to simply feel, to refrain from attempting to explain what they see.

On an unspecified evening in March, I completed my collection. What I thought at first was an egotistical journey through my lens, I now find to be an attempt to make my feelings known to others. Though this objective may never be reached, I hope a handful of people can find a few of these photographs strikingly familiar, to evoke feelings in them they thought were long lost. Then I will be satisfied, and my job as a photographer can be said to be complete.

*Rolando Charles,
Winter
2024*



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22



23



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rolando charles

MEMORIES OF MYSELF

- 1 January 2024
- 2 November 2023
- 3 August 2022
- 4 September 2023
- 5 January 2024
- 6 December 2021
- 7 'Joe' – March 2023
- 8 January 2024
- 9 March 2023
- 10 August 2022
- 11 'Self-portrait' – August 2023
- 12 August 2022
- 13 September 2023
- 14 August 2022
- 15 'Maybe we were wrong' – July 2021
- 16 'A narrow path' – August 2022
- 17 December 2021
- 18 'Sisyphus takes a rest' - September 2023
- 19 July 2020
- 20 July 2022
- 21 August 2022
- 22 'The desire to not exist' – July 2022
- 23 'To be better' – May 2022
- 24 'Godot' – March 2023

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