

TRYING TO COPE WITH THINGS THAT

trying to cope with things that aren't human

AREN'T HUMAN

part 1

(PART ONE)

**Alex Pearl
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cell project space

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edited by Ian Brown

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INTRODUCTION

This book is part of the exhibition *Trying To Cope With Things That Aren't Human (Part One)* and consists of artworks that operate in a publishable form. These works have been commissioned or selected with a particular focus on how we relate to the theme, as it is embedded within both a sense of the everyday and implicit within artistic practices. Storytelling, as a mechanism of relaying our understanding of our particular situation or culture, plays a prominent part within the work present, whether in a direct diaristic or cathartic way or through the possibilities of invention and fantasy. Fundamentally though, whatever the form of the work, image or text etc, or methodology used, the works all express a friction between ability and function and it is this which is possibly the most compelling component of the theme involved.

The *invented world* could be defined between functional or physical artifacts, such as tools (from a hammer to a computer), further design, where the form or details of such functional items are developed, altered or argued and fictional works, such as literature. Often the *natural world* could be considered the antitheses of all this, where we often hear ourselves 'escaping to' or find ourselves *in nature* 'getting away from it all'. This escape from the man-made to the *naturally* developed provides us with a particular position to sit between. The exhibition also seeks to explore how, from a contemporary position, we feel about The Enlightenment's provocation of man over nature and notions of deductive reasoning compared to the untamed and imaginative associations of Romanticism.

Here we are, struggling to deal with the things around us, unable to completely understand how technology works but simultaneously unable to truly understand the beauty of nature. We remain confused but still standing: between the things that we have made and the things that we have not, what could be called the *invented world* and the *natural world*.

We struggle to understand the natural world without ourselves in it, so we turn away to the security of the invented world, the one that we have created. As much as enduring a wilderness, the most minor of domestic tasks can become a difficult exercise in personal maintenance and survival.

To the extent that it discusses difference, this exhibition also tries to find the common ground or indeed the threshold between our inability to cope with the things that we have created, to make our lives easier, and our struggle to relate to the wonders of the natural world. We find it equally as difficult to comprehend the beauty of a vast landscape as we do the best way to use a computer, or indeed how it works. It is maybe only right that both the *invented world* and the *natural world* could also be equally and simultaneously called *non-human*. There is not a dichotomy but a fluid relationship between technologies and nature, which judders and jerks all the time, rubbing up against one another. Indeed technology has allowed more of us to have access to the natural world, and in many ways, but our own obsessions with our ability to invent also often distracts us and allow us to ignore it.

Equally, natural sciences provide us with clear ways in which we can develop our technological tools. The production of art in itself has been affected by these opposites, allowing a relationship to form. This can be seen in recent examples of artists producing work during residencies in locations such as the Antarctic. Is this how we see/define ourselves - between the two? Or do we indeed define ourselves by the struggle to deal with them? Is it this struggle - the trying and the coping - that makes us human?

Ian Brown

PAUL ROONEY

LETTERS THAT ROT INTO MULCH

As the sun rises on the lake's edge, as the squirrels nervously scamper around looking for a safe place to gorge their morning nuts, as the dew on the reed tips slowly evaporates in the shivering early light, one will usually issue another grotesque silent scream in welcome to a further day of torment. But one's misery is not caused by the sky, the lake, the greater environs or its inhabitants. No. I will attempt to describe the true reason for the unceasing rage that one feels.

I am, one is, a tree. Or one is known as a tree. To separate oneself and those like oneself from the plenitude of God's creation, which is not particularly necessary I would argue but is insisted upon, one has this name. A word very suited to what it describes, a word that is somehow wanly pointing, cowering, thinly bare. At mere mention of this word one's anger flows through one like the insipid sap that courses to one's branch tips. The other trees that populate this small wood may feel the same fury as myself at being a tree, the same anguish at their horrible fate. One cannot tell. For all I know I am the only tree in the world that is sentient. Whether one is alone or a small part of a legion, it does not change the basic problem. One is still a tree. Ah yes, sentience. Indeed I am more than sentient, I have a consciousness. This is the real problem. One must first sway imperceptivity to get the phloem juices flowing around one's tinder dry imaginative faculties. That is much better. Ah yes. There it is. It has appeared in my mind: the image of one's bitter ire. I can see a skeletal, malformed wooden pole, with smaller, malformed, gangling lumber sticks sprouting from it in various disordered directions. There are some flappy yellow sprouts at various points along the sticks; a lot of these have moulted and are lying on the ground. So there you have it. As a conscious being one is able to conjure in one's mind an image of oneself, of one's physical body at least. And if that were not abhorrent enough, one then thinks of the emaciated and contemptibly worthless mind that is conjuring that loathsome image, the feeble sensibility that haunts this clutter of stupidly jutting timber, and one's anger easily reaches a pressure fit to burst one's bark. The seething strain pokes one's leaves out like the limbs on an inflated rubber pig. One's mind, like one's body, merely rustles; it can do no more than occasionally mentally tremble in the languorous breeze of its own quivering shame. One could say that one's mind and body are eminently suited. A millisecond of distraction from suffering could be triggered by a feeling of perverse pride in being an exemplar in the age old quest to achieve a unity of form and content. But then the hypothetical millisecond moves on, and at the start of the next millisecond the reality returns to greet one, a hideous rictus on its face.

There is something one has forgotten. As well as the sky, the lake, the rest, there is also Franz. He is the postman. He leaves letters at one's base, letters which eventually rot into mulch with the fallen leaves. One does not know if the letters are addressed to oneself. But it is nice that he brings them. He also chats to one, for which one is less grateful. Franz loves nature generally, it appears, but has an overwhelming love of trees in particular. He talks at great length about how magnificent trees are. This does not aid one's pain. One never speaks to him, because one has assessed that this may either frighten him or encourage him in his misguided enthusiasms. So one is silent. Franz invariably says that he is busy. Apart from the letter posting he organises wildlife treks and translates Polish contemporary poetry into English and weaves blankets in the traditional Welsh style and dives for pearls and grows rare mushrooms and rustles deer and has a large part in the town's amateur dramatic society's production of Saint Joan and he also sings. He mentioned one day that he had murdered the schoolteacher over by the lumber mill, that the murder was blamed on witches and old Mrs Ewart was lynched for it. Even at moments like these, one chooses to remain silent. One suspects Franz is not really a postman.

One is not angry at Franz, at the rising sun, the cold blue sky mirrored in the calm lake, the hungry breakfasting squirrels. How they conduct themselves, how they come to terms in their own minds with what they are, this all matters little. One has no choice but to endure their company, day in, day out, night in and of course, inevitably, night out. One endures the entire scene, the natural situation, which varies but little – it does vary, the general environment, one will admit that, there's night and day, it goes dark and then gets light again, there's that of course, differing cloud formations, degrees of lake water ripple, the positioning and number of scurrying vermin, the stories Franz tells. In a charitable mood, if such a mood were ever achievable, one could say that these nuances could be diverting, that they could deflect one from the constant agony for another of those hypothetical milliseconds of distraction. For that instant one may feel reassured that nothing is the same all the time, that things could get better, or that the world is an almost enjoyable cascade of varying sensations. But then in the latter half of that same millisecond one is revolted by this incorrigible instability, the meaningless plurality of pointlessness. One's outer bark practically curls at the horror.

The last dream I had, or the last dream that was different amongst all the other dreams about death that one always has, involved Franz hacking my trunk down and carting it off to his shack at the west edge of the lake. So, yes, this dream was

also about death. But what was different was that Franz chopped the trunk up into logs, then carved each log into the bust of a different early baroque composer: Jacques Champion, Alfonso Fontanelli, Alan Badger, Giovanni Bassano, Peter Philips, Hieronymus Praetorius, many, many different composers. And one's mind did not die; it stayed alive inside the wood and possessed all these miniature heads. So when Franz took them to the school gates to sell them, and when each bust was then taken to the home of the child who had bought it, oneself, of course, went with them all, and I lived in all of these homes at one and the same time happily forever and it never ended and everything was forever beautiful and I myself was happy for all time.

One is quite capable of moving oneself around; one could bend branches down, even lift things up, dip one's top sticks in the lake. Whatever took one's fancy, one could do, apart from getting up and walking around on one's roots; it is unlikely one could do that. But the truth is that one is literally paralysed by self-loathing. One has never moved an inch, breeze sway apart of course. The mere thought of the futility of deliberate physical movement sends a surge of acidic sap-sick through one's lower root nodules. So one must remain in one's default static attitude of flailing armed alarm, further burying one's roots into the writhing earth, further marinating one's mind in its own pure-strength hate-juice. Every second of life one trembles, not with the wind on one's leaves, but with the never-ending unbearable yearning to burst into flames and die.

Here comes Franz.

There is a small amount of rippling on the lake.

Today, I am somehow not sure if Franz is real or in my mind. A cloud up there has formed into a slightly unusual shape.

The squirrels are having a lie down.

Is that an axe?

ANNIKA STRÖM



I left records at a museum shop in Paris where I had performed but never heard from them and didn't get my records back

I sent dvds of my films to a German curator but never got the dvds back

I applied for a teaching job in Finland but never got my material back

I showed my films in Bangkok but never got my films back

I sent documentation to a stipend in Germany but never got my files back

I was asked to send images of my text work to an Italian collector but never heard from her again and never got the images back

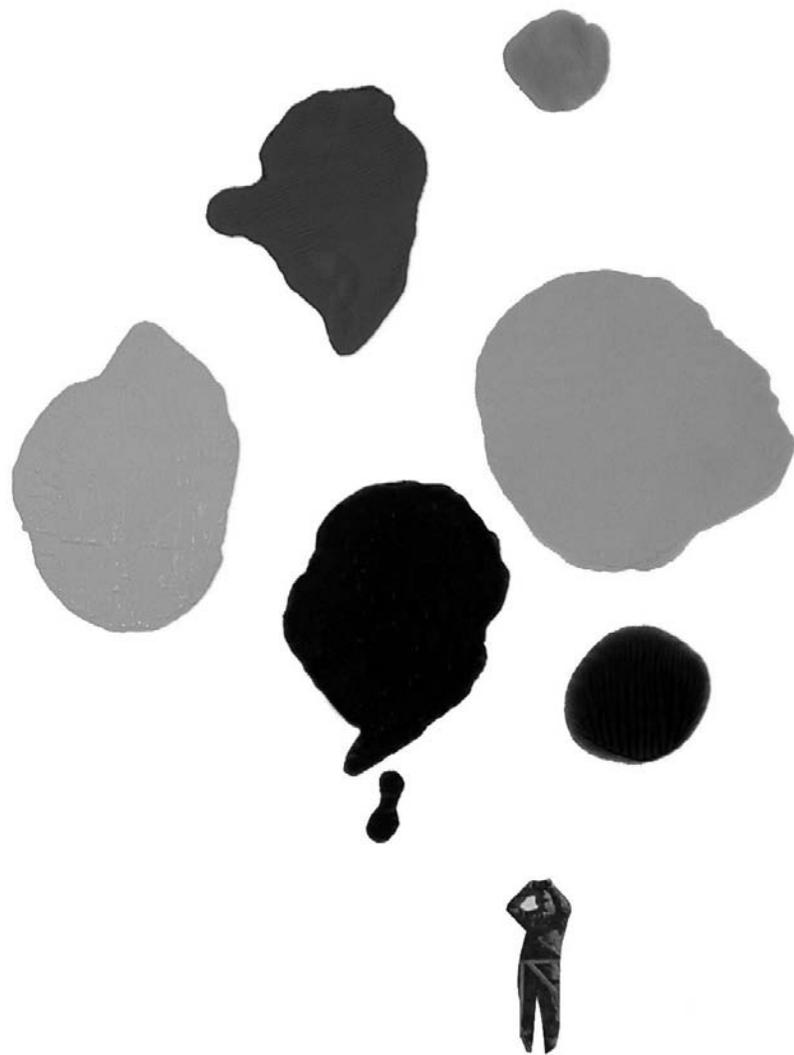
I gave books to an art bookstore in Stockholm but they didn't sell any and I never got my books back

I was recommended to send my work to a gallery in London but never heard from them and I didn't get my work back

I was asked to write a text for a book and get a good fee and the text was published but I didn't get any fee

My films were screened in New York but I didn't get my films back

I sent my films to a screening in Amsterdam but didn't receive any fee and I never got my films back



I listen to Michael Jackson in the store I am in. I remain, song after song.

I have so much to do. People call it being busy. I am so busy. Now, I have to write a list. I found a blank paper. At once I come up with 13 lines of all kinds of different things, which has to be done soon. I look at them. Five of them are already past their deadlines.

Four are to pay bills. One is health care, two are to remind me to send dvds and one is to fix the microphone. It makes me think about an organised artist I used to know: at the front of each line she added a circle and when she has solved something, she made a cross in that circle.

I decide to make a circle at the front of each line as well. I look at it. I couldn't stand her.

I make a cross in all the circles at once and then cross out each line until each line is unreadable.

A long walk. A long rapid walk. A rapid walk collecting my thoughts. Get my thoughts together. My head together. A long rapid walk to clear my head and get my thoughts together. A long rapid walk to get my head together and get all in place. A long fresh uplifting walk to get my thoughts together and get me focused. A long walk to get my self together and get my thoughts together. A long walk.



SONG ON RADIO

All right. At least I can get up. At least I can wash my hair. At least I can have clean hair. I can at least get up. At least I can get up from my bed. At least if nothing else, I can pay a bill. At least. I can at least get some clean clothes on and have clean hair, maybe I can at least be a bit thankful. At least I can wash my hair, wear clean clothes and get a letter posted and get a bill paid and at least get out of the bed. Maybe I can at least be grateful and put some make up on, wash my hair, wear clean clothes. I can at least get up and get my computer repaired and get a dvd burnt. I can at least wash my hair, wear clean clothes and fix my computer. I can at least be thankful for that and I can eat something healthy, and pay a bill and maybe I can read the news, be thankful, wear clean clothes, some makeup and be thankful. I am alive and I am thankful, at least. Maybe I can get up, get myself together and be thankful that at least I am alive, I have clean hair, wear clean clothes and that I got up.



IAN BROWN

WOLFGANG AND THE BIRDS

Wolf sits there, covered in blood, breathing heavily and taking in the air that clings to everything with a chilly haze. The birds arrive again and line up along the fallen tree.

When they had first opened the door to the hut, it had swung open quickly, creaking and shuddering as it sent a small plume of dust up into the air. I think they thought they had made a dramatic entrance, like in a western, but it was more like something akin to a daytime TV home makeover show. Johnny took in the details of the hut very quickly, moving between the kitchen space and the living area with an unnerving speed “I didn’t know you could get Artex¹ this far out” he murmured, quietly impressed.

The successful heavy metal band Wolfgang², fed up with the music industry and determined to change their lives for the better, had decided to pack up their van and head to the woods. Having spent 10 years grinding away at a career they no longer wanted they had felt no option other than to head into the wilderness to become woodsmen³.

In public Wolf had always been the exuberant frontman and the charismatic leader, to the fans and the press alike. Far from the loud excitable singer his public knew, he was quiet and contemplative. His considered and respectful approach to hunting had ensured the band had been able to eat since they arrived. His natural calmness and willingness to spend time observing and understanding the animals in the forest had turned him into a natural hunter. He had become very astute in recognising the marks that animals leave behind during their range of activities and had scratched facsimiles of these into the sides of the hut to help him remember them. The only piece of paper they had brought with them was a set list that was lying around in the back of the van. Geoff had found it when he was looking for batteries for the tuner and then very casually used the other side of it to play hangman with Alan about a week in. This was a point of contention by week two. The two guitarists often played word games but this time their hobby had used up a vital luxury item. Apart from this achievement, the only other thing of note that Geoff had done during his time here was to try and create a band logo out of crystals. He had wondered off, as usual, when they had stopped to get petrol at a retail park on the way and bought one of those kits where you can grow your own crystals. The others had taken the piss out of him for the rest of the journey so much that he had made it his mission to use it for something really impressive. He had tried to get a ‘W’ going for four weeks but had only managed a barely recognisable ‘V’ and then gave up.

Wolf had never celebrated a kill and spent most of his time alone in and around the hut. The rest of the group had assumed that he was tuning in to nature and preparing himself for his newfound relationship with the forest dwellers. Brian had noticed that Wolf was carrying something around with him, which he had thought was some kind of hunting ephemera, such as a hook or a spearhead. When Brian

¹ Artex is a brand name for a textured coating for interior walls and ceilings, made in the UK. It was particularly popular in the 1960’s and 1970’s and is quite hard to remove. The company who make Artex now also make a product to smooth over it.

² Wolfgang are: Wolf – Lead Vocals, Alan Davies – Lead guitarist, Geoff Mason – Lead guitarist, Dave Simms – Lead guitarist, Johnny Day – Bass and backing vocals, Brian Bath – Drums. (Previous member: Chris Stevens – Rhythm guitar 1988-9)

³ They had been referred to as ‘metal woodsmen’ in an article about their 3rd album and throughout the subsequent world tour ‘Axe Attack’.

INTRO
 AXEMEN
 FIGHTING TO SURVIVE
 HEART OF THE CITY
 KEEP ON FEELIN'
 DRIVIN' ALL NIGHT (TO GET
 WANNA FEEL ALRIGHT
 YOU ARE THE ONE
 DRUM SOLO -
 CAN'T STOP MISSING YOU
 GUITAR SOLO 1 (ALAN)
 THUNDER INSIDE
 - ENCORE
 I FEEL ALIVE
 SOLO 2 (DAVE)
 WOLFGANG
 SOLO 3 (GEOFF)
 ROCK DEMON
 - WOLFGANG REPRISÉ

had caught a clear glimpse of the object one day, on returning from the river, he was quite surprised. Wolf was holding a yellow and pink Tamagotchi⁴. What's more, he wasn't just holding it; he was pressing the buttons and engaging with it. He had been nurturing it since it had hatched from an egg. No one knew where it had come from. Brian knew they were all the rage but he had never thought that Wolf would be a likely candidate for this kind of craze. He could only assume that Wolf had found it in the forest and had decided to take care of it. They had never seen another human during the entire time they had lived here though, so he couldn't be sure.

Looking at the small screen, the sad image of the dead Tamagotchi caught his eye, he had decided, for the last time. Wolf had walked out to the edge of what they had considered their compound and was standing staring at the plastic object. At times they had felt like they wanted to treat the whole forest as their back garden, partly through a misinformed sense of belonging and also as an arrogant gesture of ownership. He sat down slumped into a contorted ball, resting against a tree. He reached out his hand and let the Tamagotchi drop from his loose grip. It fell to the forest floor and nestled into the undergrowth. Wolf stared up at the canopy of the trees as the sun started to dip and the remaining rays of light played with the shadows. Tears were appearing in his eyes.

The rest of the band were relaxing in the hut, apart from Johnny, who, as all good bass players should do, was doing the dishes and singing to himself in contentment. Alan was arguing with Brian about which was better: coffee or tea. Brian firmly believed in the medicinal qualities of tea but Alan hated the stuff, looking over at Johnny whilst describing it as hot dishwasher. The hut had contained, amongst its shelves and cupboards, a few essentials when they moved in. It had a big bag of coffee and some tobacco, surprisingly, some flour in a metal tin, plates, pots and cutlery and some tins of corn and tomato. The coffee was a bit out of date but only by a month and they had drunk much worse in their early days. Dave missed his microwave the most. He used to make himself a coffee but then forget about it and reheat it on a low power. He had learnt to like the baked milk that clustered on the mug during this process so much that this had become an integral component for his recipe for the perfect coffee.

Out of the corner of his eye Wolf had spotted a movement that alerted him enough to move his head but he was in a slightly groggy trance from watching the view above him. The animal moved far too quickly and violently for him to react as quickly as he would have liked. He jumped for the Tamagotchi, desperate to protect it. He felt several points of pain across his body as he was knocked backwards against the same tree he had been resting on. The thud winded him badly and as he loosened his grip on his dead pet, once again it fell to the ground. He scrambled to his knees and grabbed it, swiping the animal with his other fist aggressively. He tucked the item into his pocket to keep it secure before being pounded in the side by the animal. This time it had manoeuvred itself on top of him and was in a good position to bite. As the teeth pierced through the denim waistcoat and the leather jacket he winced as it entered his flesh. He could feel it rip as the teeth attempted to join together and bite out some meat.

⁴ Tamagotchi is a brand name for a digital pet, made by Bandai in Japan. The fact that Wolf's Tamagotchi was pink and yellow suggest it was a version 2 model. There is no 'l' in the Japanese version of the name, a bit like 'team'.

Johnny was nearing the end of his washing up session and the song he was singing had degenerated into a strange remix between the Jean Michel Jarre⁵ tracks Equinoxe 5 and Oxygene 4. I think Brian was impressed as he had stopped talking and was just listening to the song as if it was being played live, imagining the visuals that Jarre would normally deliver to dramatise his concerts. Dave was being far less imaginative and was picturing the digital countdown of the microwave before it delivered his heated up coffee. The tone of the hummed tune suited both sets of images equally well.

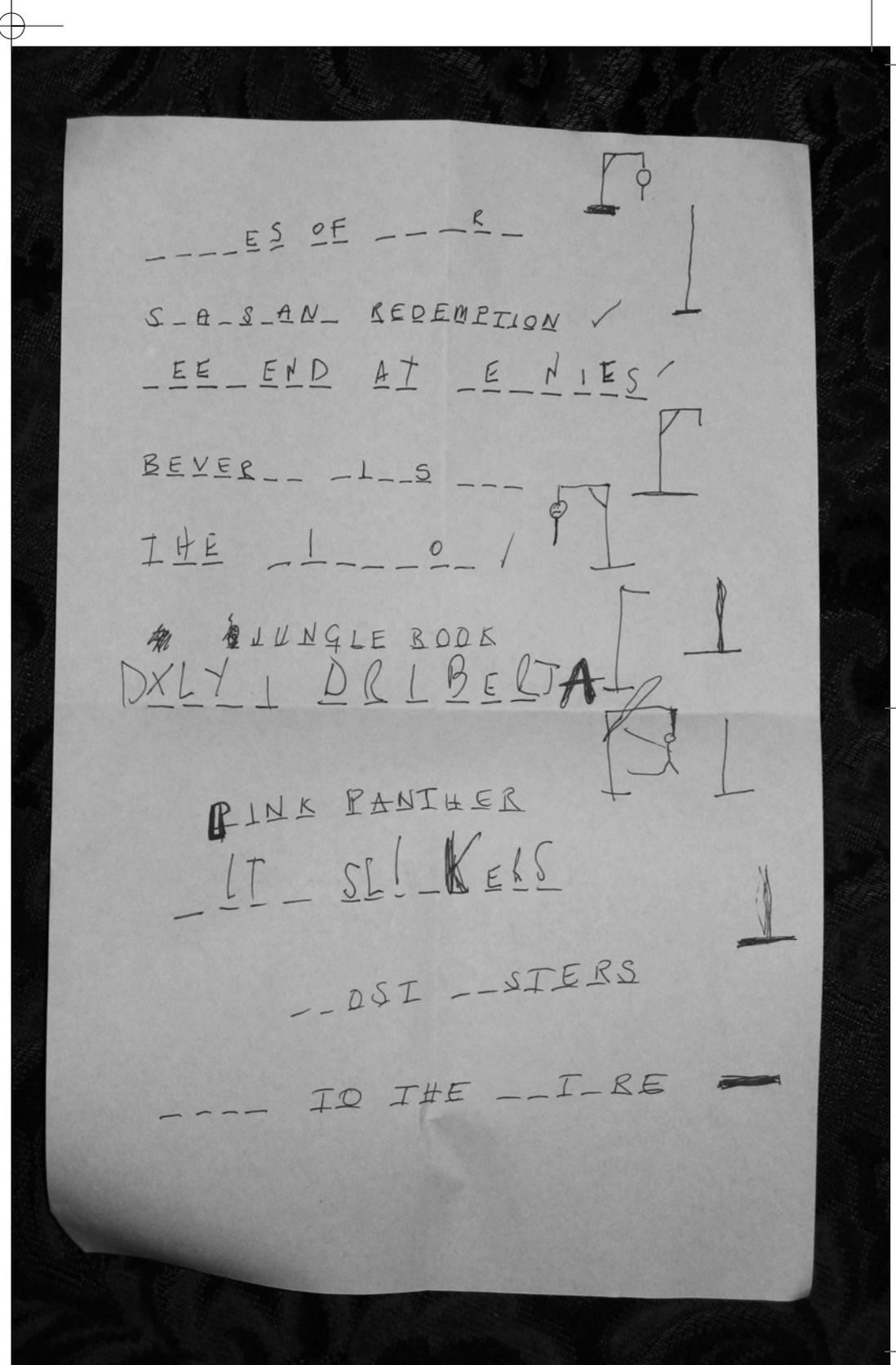
The double layer of clothing prevented the teeth meeting just enough so that Wolf could prepare and deliver a defensive strike to its head. He scrambled to his feet and ran back towards the hut. He could hear the sound of breathing and roaring following him and then closing in. He could see Alan's guitar resting against the side of the tree nearest to the hut, just up ahead. It was a Les Paul⁶ and even under this kind of intense stress Wolf knew it would be a very weighty and useful weapon. He had to get it. He sidestepped a tree with a swift move, buying himself some time and causing the animal to crash headlong into it. Wolf raced for the Les Paul, and as he came into the clearing he spotted Dave's Charvel⁷ at a similar distance, this didn't offer a better option so he kept on running, straight for his original choice. He got there just in time and grabbed it by the neck swinging it with all of his energy and pivoting so that it swung right round, crunching into the side of the animal's ribs. It fell back wounded and in pain but raised itself for a further attack. Wolf had been watching the animal clearly and had adjusted his grip from the neck to the strap in order that he could swing with even greater velocity. As the animal leapt forward, Wolf swung the guitar round furiously, the strap pulling hard against the strap locks as it landed a stomach-churning blow to the animal's skull.

Wolfgang could only really describe the things they saw in terms that they new and felt familiar with. Due to an upbringing in heavy metal, these, even as thoughts, offered up a variety of clichés that seemed to just about allow them to feel connected to the world around them. "Satisfaction guaranteed", Geoff thought, not quite knowing why. 'We are a rock band without electricity' Alan announced during the gap in conversation, 'What is that?' he asked. The constant self-defence of being 'an acoustic session' or simply 'unplugged' become tiresome and unnatural. They had brought all of their instruments with them and all of their amplifiers. The only equipment they didn't bring was their drums, as nearly all venues had a house kit they had stopped taking their own. Despite knowing where they were heading, they had automatically packed for a gig and so came tooled up for something that wasn't going to happen. It was as if they just needed to be prepared, even if it meant being prepared for the wrong thing. At least they were prepared. So automatic was their way of life, the band had become quite socially inept on most levels. Brian casually remarked as he sat down 'She smelt hot'. The others just looked at each other, trying to think of something to say but clearly being confounded by an inability to find words to express their feelings. I'm not even sure they knew what their

⁵ Jean Michel Jarre had/had a 'lightharp'

⁶ The Gibson Les Paul was developed in the early 1950's and named after a Jazz guitarist. The average weight of a Les Paul is said to be 9 lbs but they did go up to as much as 11lbs in the 1980's

⁷ Charvel guitars, founded by Wayne Charvel and sold to Grover Jackson in the late 70's, vary in weight but we can assume that this guitar may have been around the 7lb mark.



feelings about this were. 'Who did?' Geoff responded. 'I don't know, some girl' came the reply.

The struggle went on, frenzied and manic, with screams from both parties echoing amongst the trees. Initially the birds scattered and other wildlife, alarmed by the movement and sounds, also fled. Spurred on by instinct and survival the two could not be separated, lashing out at each other with fist, claw, guitar and teeth. For the beast, the human was predator and prey, a dangerous combination if there was to be an attempt to stop it. This was not the same for Wolf, his drive seemed to be fuelled by survival and frustration. The animal had come to stand for everything that was not human. He kept slamming, gauging and ripping until there was no movement, nothing at all, just limpness in his hands.

Wolf sits there, covered in blood, breathing heavily and taking in the air that clings to everything with a chilly haze. The birds arrive again and line up along the fallen tree. This was the first tree Wolfgang had managed to fell; they had decided to leave it as a horizontal statue. In truth they had got so excited about the whole thing they had got very drunk and fallen asleep. When they woke up they couldn't do much and so it stayed there all day until it became a resting place for the birds. So he sat here at one with a line of creatures. Wolf begins to sing.

'You look at me and I look at you
and we share a special moment

Sitting here thinking about you
I turn away and then look back around
To see you smiling.'

Johnny comes to the door and pushes it open to see what is happening outside, tea towel slung over his shoulder, almost blending in to the form and pattern of his cut-off t-shirt. He surveys the scene and reaches for his bass. Slowly, and with a subdued emotional expression, he moves away from the hut and stands behind Wolf. He waits now, steadying himself and closing his eyes in order to connect with the atmosphere, not even considering the possible distraction and difficulty of playing in Marigolds⁸.

Wolf continues

'No one can stop this love
We have between us
We're from different worlds
But we don't care'

Johnny dramatically strikes a single note to background the singing with some extra presence before engaging in a slow sequence of supporting notes from a minor chord progression.

The song goes on

'I miss you
I can't live without you
I've never felt this way before
But now I know I'm sure'

I need to feel your touch
I need to hear your sounds
I need to feel you near to me

I don't want to be without you
I don't want to live without you
I'm in love with electric things and you⁹

The last bass note lingers until it slowly disappears swallowed up and absorbed by the sounds of the forest.



⁸ Marigold is a brand name for yellow rubber gloves popular for washing dishes with. Sometimes they are tricky to get off.

⁹ This song would later be released under the title 'I'm in Love with Electric Things (and you)' on the band's final album 'Wolfgang and the birds' that came out in 1998.

ALEX PEARL

Devices

A sentimental list of technological objects I own

A Toshiba TS10 mobile phone.

This was a birthday present from my parents. I had seen a photograph of it and pointed it out quite clearly. It looks a bit like a Star Trek communicator with buttons that light up pleasingly when flipped open. Sadly it doesn't make that great chirruping noise. To be honest my phone is rubbish; the speaker is crackly and the menu awkward to navigate, but I like it. This is fairly academic as I am inexplicably phone phobic and don't use it much. I often let it run out of battery and credit deliberately or pretend it is broken. In fact, until recently it had been tucked in a drawer because I had left the charger in a hotel in Berlin and been unable to find a replacement. The holiday had been a good one but marred by the usual confusions with public transport and ordering food.

My wife is a text-maniac; her thumb is constantly twitching across the buttons. She jumps with excitement when it calls to her and any text is instantly answered. I've come to believe that the necessity of response creates a sort of tyranny. In order to avoid personal affront texts must be answered in a downward spiral of banality, like teenage lovers on the phone.

2. An iPod video (black).

This is my second iPod, bought off a student who felt he didn't need it. I found my first in the road near Liverpool Street Station. I was desperate to own one but had so far been unable to justify the expense. It was just lying on the pavement and, without thinking; I swooped quickly and popped it in my pocket. Later I spent a while debating reasons why I shouldn't hand it in to the police, but as it didn't have any identification on or in it, I kept it for myself. I did feel (small) pangs of guilt about this until I passed it on to its new owner. The new iPod still contains some of that original owner's songs: YMCA, Jump and a song about a monkey. I listen to it mostly while I'm doing the washing up. Personal music and mundane tasks seem to go together, although the earphones always get caught on a drawer knob and cause me to swear too loudly.

3. A MacBook Pro Laptop.

Like many artists I have one of these Arts Council provided pieces of aluminium loveliness packed with useful software. Probably also like most artists, apart from the video editing and writing, I use it mostly for communicating with others. I answer emails with unnerving speed and spend hours tweaking my online face on blogs, websites and social networking environments. I prefer my online self; I imagine it is more confident, relaxed and amusing than my real one. The good thing is that online feedback is so mediated that this confidence isn't often knocked. However, my wife recently left me because I was talking too much (or with too much quality) to a friend who lives in America. It is true that having the laptop allowed me to communicate with someone 3000 miles away with more feeling and honesty than I have ever been able to display face to face.

4. A G-Shock watch.

I've had many watches and they've always ended up broken or so abraded that they became unreadable. My granddad bought me my first one it was a gold wind-up with numbers on revolving barrels. I wish I still had it. He got me this quasi-digital watch because of my hopelessness at telling the time with an ordinary one. Nothing has

changed, if asked I will stare uncomprehendingly at a dial slowly translating to digital. The G-Shock is an ugly lump, heavy and far too big for my spindly wrist. It does keep time incredibly well.

Alex
I'm thinking about my watch at the moment - I hate it but it is indestructible and a present from my dad.

Jane
Nothing is really indestructible.

Alex
Trust me I've tried, it is titanium, solar powered, has a nuclear battery and gets its time by satellite from Reading!

or Rugby I can't remember

and my dad gave it to me so I cant lose it

Jane
What's wrong with it?

Alex
it weighs about 3 kilos

Jane
hahaha

you must have a HUGE left arm

Alex
no it just hangs limply by my side

(Excerpt from a Facebook conversation, 2008)

5. A Philips flat screen television (+ satellite).

This over-large but very smart telly was bought in a huge hurry for an exhibition in a London museum. Despite looking quite small in the show, it now dominates my living room standing on a table my mum made in woodwork when she was 16. The television reception in my house used to be awful, mainly because the aerial was broken, but also because I seem to live in the technological doldrums. A mobile signal can only be obtained while standing on a chair with the phone pressed to my forehead, our broadband isn't, there is no Freeview and many of my neighbours are yet to enjoy Channel 5. Now that I have satellite, I spend a lot of time watching science fiction serials in high definition widescreen. Strangely my love of science fiction is something I share with my mother. I grew up watching shows like: Dr Who, Space 1999, UFO, Star Trek and Blake's 7. The image that I enjoy most is the starview. It is usually presented 'onscreen' on the bridge of a spaceship, a show within a show. The stars stream past or twinkle or explode as the narrative demands.

Occasionally the satellite signal still freezes, or cuts out totally, presenting me with distorted faces, huge colourful pixels, or a rather peaceful blue screen.

Trains

excerpts from 'Alex Pearl is not in the Antarctic'

15 [5 July 2008]

I'm just back from London. I had to go to the Foundling Museum to retrieve some equipment that I thought had been lost.

I dutifully dug out my granny trolley and went to pick up the projector stand, blankets, speakers and projector screen that, until a few weeks ago, had remained hidden in a cellar. The train journey there was spent wedged into the none-too salubrious armpit of a rather enthusiastic Maiden fan. He was off to see his heroes play and spent his time posing for pictures taken by his girlfriend.

It's quite hard to handle a trolley and a two metre projector screen on the underground.

25 [2 August 2008]

I'm travelling back from Leicester where I've just set up a show in the Phoenix Arts Centre. The journey up was characterised by the first break in the weather. Rain clouds were gathering. As usual I managed to seat myself next to the toilet so my thoughts were constantly interrupted by the fumbings of incontinent passengers. At least this was an old fashioned toilet with a mechanical lock. I'm frequently an unwilling audience to the difficulties people have with the electronic versions whose sliding door threatens to sweep open leaving its occupant in flagrante. Seeing the problems this system causes have made me think of becoming a sort of convenience bell-hop (in cap) pressing the "open", "close" and "lock" buttons in the right order.

Despite the time these trips allow me to think, I am getting bored with the views from trains. I am always seeing the backs of things as if the world is facing the other way. The journey is punctuated by the same experience of back-yards and back gardens which I glimpse unsatisfactorily like a peeping tom in hell. I seem like I'm in a bad mood, I'm not and my city break has gone well.

We've just gone through Melton Mowbray a place with almost mythic status for me. A few years ago I decided to cycle from my home near Ipswich up to my parent's home near Manchester. I decided to do it in a day and on the hottest day of the year. Melton Mowbray was the place I nearly gave up suffering from dehydration/heat stroke. But after a little rest in the park and several litres of water I made what then felt like one of the most important decisions of my life, got back on my bike and carried on. I made it, but did have to soak my shorts off in the bath and had nasty sunburn on my eyelids.

26 [5 August 2008]

On the platform in Leicester I was sat next to a young woman. We were both watching a wasp about to fly up her skirt. I was seized by a

sudden urge to slap at it with my notebook. An act which would surely have lead to a sting and my arrest.

Conversation with a toddler before he was told to face forward by his mum:

Hiya
Hiya
Hiya
...
Hiya
...
Hiya
...
Hiya

27 [7 August 2008]

I am journeying again tomorrow. I'm going to the private view at Studio Voltaire and on the way I will try to make a protest film in Stratford. Yet again I managed to find a cheap hotel in Clapham and yet again I didn't think to check the reviews until I had booked it online. Every time I look a new complaint has gone up, and I keep going back. It's like the lure of a grisly corpse. The latest reads

Stay away, stay away, stay away!!!!!!

I got a single room and it was disgusting. I might as well of slept outside on a park bench or in nearby Tesco's car park. The duvet was dirty and had holes in it. The bathroom (I am not sure I would call it a bathroom, and the washbasin (what washbasin?!) were pretty vile. The woodwork was rotten and in desperate need of replacing. The TV did not work as the aerial was broken.

I can't cancel it now but you never know it could be ok and if I drink enough at the private view I probably won't notice.

32 [2 September 2008]

Alex!! felt so slow in the head today that I forgot to ask if you were still up to Nottingham? If so, then I think I am going for it, stay the night in that hotel you mentioned and head back on the saturday....do you want to come along? and yes I can be your escort.....Hx

So hotel and escort booked I headed north on Friday. Hayley was driving using her newly borrowed satnav. I loved it, or her, a slightly condescending lady of indeterminate age (the satnav, not Hayley) who kept us almost entertained for the whole journey. She beeped repeatedly if we went too fast and was extremely calm when we appeared to leave the road entirely.

I'd sworn blind that I had stayed at the Nottingham Ibis before but I clearly hadn't, it wasn't where I remembered and it looked completely different. Still once we had staggered down the inexplicably swaying

corridors and I had prised our twin beds the regulation six inches apart the room seemed very nice indeed.

We found the gallery easily and spent the first few minutes eavesdropping conversations about untimely evictions and vol au vents while manoeuvring ourselves in front of the fan. There was drink; lager, cava and wine, much drink, too much drink.

After a while we introduced ourselves (well Hayley did) chatted, got directions to a show at the Fame Factory, drank more drink and took Hayley's drawings off the wall before beating a hasty retreat into the night.

Later we finished off a bottle of wine while watching a serial killer film. We never found the Fame Factory, probably because Hayley insisted on calling it the foam factory.

I'm not going to write about the next day, as I'd prefer to forget all about it.

35 [28 September 2008]

Yesterday I went to 'From the Picturesque to the Demolished' an evening of video and performance organised by Jon Purnell and Julika Gittner. On the way down I found myself suffering from ticket anxiety. It often happens on the Lowestoft line. I join it from a one-track abandoned station and often the guard fails to get round the train before he/she abandons us at Ipswich. I then sit surrounded by threatening signs until we arrive in London. I know I deserve a ticket and will probably not be forced to pay a huge fine for defrauding National Express but it doesn't stop my fear as I explain myself at the ticket office.

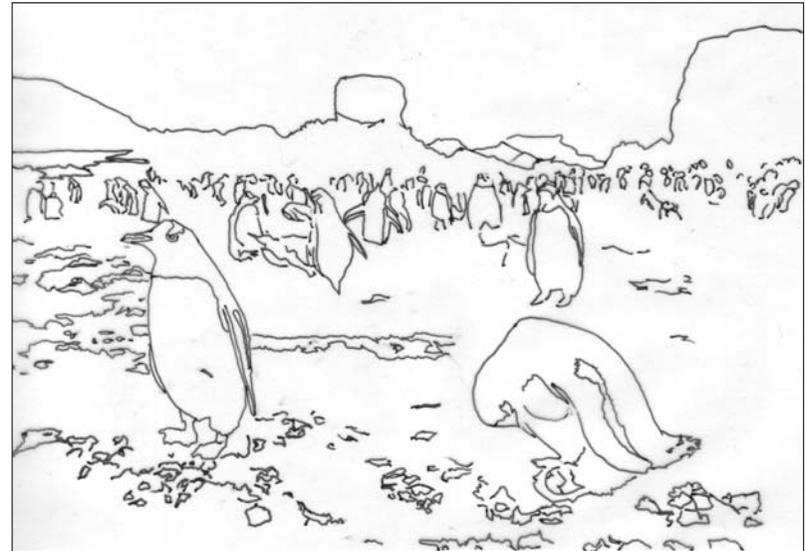
I arrived at the Railway Tavern on time after a refreshing meal at Burger King (it was that or Subway). These were the only places to eat at the entrance to the 2012 athletes' village. The event start had been postponed because Arsenal was playing Hull on the big screen. Passions were running high. One vocal drinker had a huge accumulator finishing on Hull beating Arsenal so I sat where I could watch that and a show-reel of videos. The art mostly lost out to the colour, noise and spectacle of the football.

I had intended to introduce myself to Jon but I wasn't sure who he was and by the time I'd worked it out the event was about to start and he was busy, and I had been conspicuously sitting around for so long that I felt a bit of a tit so I went to the bar for another pint.

The bar filled with a new clientele of arty types, a woman fainted and an ambulance was called.

I missed the second half as my last train left at nine.

On the way home a woman sitting opposite me was trying to learn Hebrew and reading Psalms. One line read: "My zeal wears me out"



RICHARD T. WALKER

(the achingly separate)

(the achingly separate)

1. You expressed your vulnerability clearly, but your words were trained not to ask for such a thing. I interrupted you and awkwardly reached out and held on. I listened and I communicated in every way that I thought relative to the situation. It must have been morning, but you had kept the morning to yourself as there wasn't enough melancholy for the both of us. The curtains kept the details hidden but the ripple of light that found its way between each fabric was sure to give you the morningness you craved. You took it without offering any. I didn't mind, I understood. My left hand was holding one of your leaves, slowly stroking your dew with my thumb. My hand repeated the stroke until all water had been forcefully absorbed. I was enjoying our intimacy, wondering about its worth, wondering if we would be ok by lunchtime. Annoyingly I suddenly felt an itch near my wrist on my lower left arm. The itch wasn't unusually persistent, but it was certainly making itself known. Or rather, I was making itself known, as I made it - I developed its language and now it was talking to me. We were in conversation, and the conversation was flowing. But I soon found the distraction hostile as I became angry at my inability to wilfully focus on the things I choose. Although talkative, the itch didn't have an awful lot to say. It communicated using a simple repetitive tone, an insistent nag that I didn't take to kindly. It was asking me to acknowledge its completeness and kept telling me to believe. But I did! How could I not? I had a red mark from scratching. I tried to ignore it, but as you know it was hard. I saw you looking at me; your gaze was brief but powerful. It was a look of presumed betrayal - a slight overreaction perhaps, but I felt that it was just as the sympathy I had promised you was being compromised. I was now regretfully consumed. I am not sure if an accidental scratch arrived before the itch, and that the itch had then taken advantage of the situation, or whether the itch instigated the whole event merely to distract you and I from whatever might have been. I don't suppose this really matters. But now the situation was such that the scratch was also an itch and that the itch was indeed a scratch and their sense of togetherness was so apparent that the resounding energy was carving a statue of guilt so tall from a sensation so apparent that my lower right arm began to tremble and loose sight of the hand to which it was attached. The hand to which the dew-stroking thumb belonged - the thumb that was playing a major role in our shared sense of affection. As I looked at you again I now noticed that I had somehow unwillingly instructed my right hand to hold another of your leaves. This of course left me scratchless. By engaging my other hand in this activity I could see that my unconscious had decided to try and separate the itch from the scratch. This was symbolic; an attempt to re-establish the fact that you were at the centre of my attention and that I hadn't lost sight of what we had. Although this gesture was well intended, it was futile. You were fully aware that the itch without its scratch would create an intensity that could only take me further away from you. Acknowledging my mistake, I felt anxious - I was concerned, the red mark on my arm was looking needy and I was having trouble holding onto you. But as the blur surrounding the situation started to come into focus it soon became apparent that the red mark in question was in fact another red mark in the same place on my *other* arm! For a brief second, possibly a brief set of seconds, the mirroring of the image overwhelmed me. My left thumb, still managing to caress your leaf, began to return some of the moisture it had previously rubbed away.

...much for poetic situations, as I believe them to be crucial to acknowledge this set of circumstances as anything other than a casual stumble outside the wardrobe of the mundane; an enjoyable temporary sweetening of perception that didn't dwell on any change in state as desperate not to give the occurrence any validity beyond what it held, beyond the facts. As to do so, to acknowledge it as 'poetic' or 'beautiful' would be to allow it to slip into the brutal hierarchy of memory. It would take it outside the usual democracy of circumstance and consider it an aloof partner to other moments otherwise equal, moments too humble to be obvious. I would then feel that I had ownership over it, as if it were mine to become critical of, to sculpt, to develop. As if it owed me something more than it was willing to give. I would attempt again and again to pick through the fibres of its fabric, weaving together a fraudulent affinity made up of a million possibilities, each one flippantly juggling with promise and failure. I tried and tried to tell myself that I had no concern for its significance, that the second itch was an occurrence not worthy of acknowledgement, and that the itching of two scratches was nothing special. Its significance was our protection. I didn't want the situation to unfold in a way that would jeopardise what we had shared prior. But I couldn't help it - if the two hands were to engage in a simultaneous scratch the significance of the situation would be very hard to ignore. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath and thought of all the tiny tubes in my chest. I opened my eyes and slowly exhaled. I then gave you a look that said you could trust me, but that sometimes I will unwillingly let you down. I then gazed at my two hands gripping your two leaves. They were in harmony and they were increasing in volume. I knew that I could hold you for much longer. You looked away, let down but thankful to be distracted from our sadness. I could feel the slow warmth of my lower right arm as it began to numb, quietly reminding me of its presence. My left was soon to follow. The weaty palm of each hand loosened its grip and your leaves slid shyly away, each finger quietly letting go. It felt strange to be alone. But before I had had time to really think about this, my fingers had assumed their positions and it looked as if the inevitable was about to take place. What had occurred thus far was indeed unusual, but I was hopeful that it was not yet memorable. Were each hand to itch in unison then the event would excel into the upper echelons of circumstance and thus be propelled to the higher ranks of memory. Then in a moment more sudden than anything I could describe, at a speed faster than my eyes could entertain, my hands were there. Their movements were bold and unabashed. They embraced the autonomy of the moment and together they wilfully scratched each other's lower arm.

...looked away. I felt sad, and I was sorry.

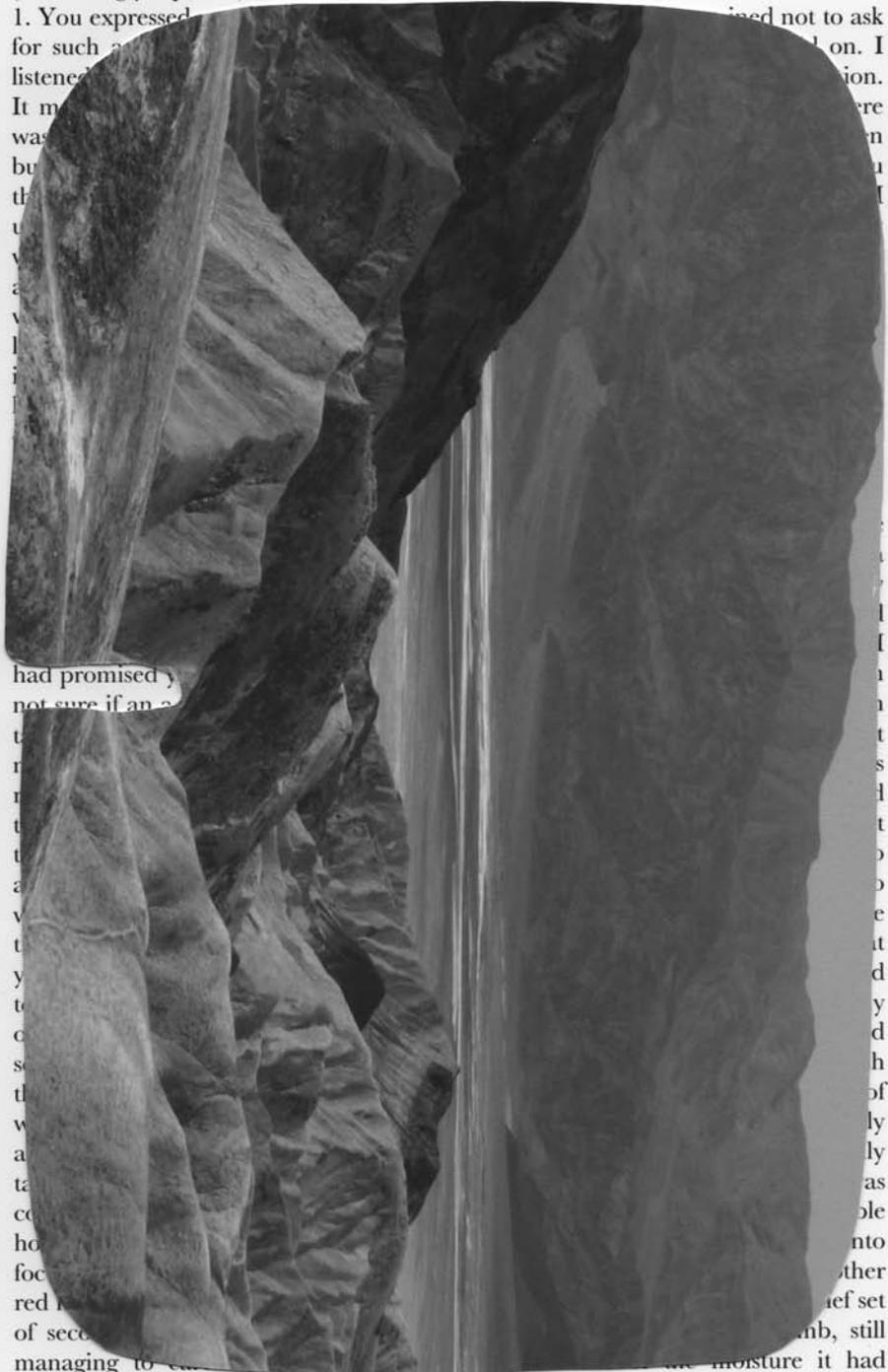
(the achingly separate)

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2. I don't care much for poetic situations, as I believe them to be cruel. So I was reluctant to acknowledge this set of circumstances as anything other than an appealing stumble outside the wardrobe of the mundane; an enjoyable but temporary sweetening of perception that didn't dwell on any change in status. I was desperate not to give the occurrence any validity beyond what it held, beyond the facts. As to do so, to acknowledge it as 'poetic' or 'beautiful' would be to allow it to slip into the brutal hierarchy of memory. It would take it outside the usual democracy of circumstance and consider it an aloof partner to other moments, moments otherwise equal, moments too humble to be obvious. I would then feel as if I had ownership over it, as if it were mine to become critical of, to sculpt, to develop. As if it owed me something more than it was willing to give. I would attempt again and again to pick through the fibres of its fabric, weaving together a fraudulent affinity made up of a million possibilities, each one flippantly juggling with promise and failure. I tried and tried to tell myself that I had no concern for its significance, that the second itch was an occurrence not worthy of acknowledgement, and that the itching of two scratches was nothing special. Insignificance was our protection. I didn't want the situation to unfold in a way that would jeopardise what we had shared prior. But I couldn't help it - if the two hands were to engage in a simultaneous scratch the significance of the situation would be very hard to ignore. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath and thought of all the tiny tubes in my chest. I opened my eyes and slowly exhaled. I then gave you a look that said you could trust me, but that sometimes I will unwillingly let you down. I then gazed at my two hands gripping your two leaves. The itches were in harmony and they were increasing in volume. I knew that I couldn't hold on to you for much longer. You looked away, let down but thankful to be distracted from your sadness. I could feel the slow warmth of my lower right arm as it began to energise, quietly reminding me of its presence. My left was soon to follow. The sweaty palm of each hand loosened its grip and your leaves slid shyly away, each finger quietly letting go. It felt strange to be alone. But before I had had time to really think about this, my fingers had assumed their positions and it looked as if the inevitable was about to take place. What had occurred thus far was indeed unusual, but I was hopeful that it was not yet memorable. Were each hand to itch in unison then the event would excel into the upper echelons of circumstance and thus be propelled to the higher ranks of memory. Then in a moment more sudden than anything I could describe, at a speed faster than my eyes could entertain, my hands were there. Their movements were bold and unabashed. They embraced the autonomy of the moment and together they wilfully scratched each other's lower arm.

I looked away. I felt sad, and I was sorry.

HEATHER AND IVAN MORISON

FIRST AVENUE

It all began whilst I was sitting at a table, working on the computer, one morning in the upstairs office of the house of the married friends I was staying with. It must have been mid morning and the married friends were long gone to work. He, off to the psychiatry ward of the nearby hospital, and her, off to the university where she lectured. I could look straight out of the window of this small office, slash fourth bedroom, slash potential nursery, onto the their back garden and the back gardens of some of the houses around. A small alleyway ran along where the gardens from one avenue joined with another avenue's gardens, and squirrels used the fences to jump along.

I was working on some research for a show my husband and I were shortly having. We were making a vinyl record of some of the recordings and interviews we had made whilst we had been abroad, and the administration of this was proving rather tricky. I had already been on the telephone several times to record executives and people who cut records asking some very simple and, what they thought, stupid questions. I kept pausing whilst I typed another email and staring at the goings on outside the window. It was early spring and, although there were a few daffodils around, most of the gardens were bare and brown. A strong wind was whipping up the leftover autumn leaves and spinning them up into the air, and the two poplar trees to my right were bending in the gusts. A cat appeared on the back fence and climbed into the garden, pausing at the threshold it appeared to look up at me. I looked back at my email and when I raised my head again it was perched next to my friends pond, drinking the water. A stronger gust sent a top-heavy rhododendron pot over and the cat ran off the way it had come, and disappeared over the fence. The top branches of the two poplar trees to my right were now bending considerably in the strengthening wind. They could have been mistaken for dead, as their branches were completely bare against the blue sky. Their trunks weren't moving. They were huge, maybe two or three metres round, certainly very old. It occurred to me that if they fell they would probably crash into my friend's garden. I wondered how tall they were, whether they could even hit their house. I got up to make coffee.

On my return I unplugged the phone line and connected it to the computer. Listening to the familiar sound of the dial-up Internet connection, I got up and stretched my hamstrings. I had been running the day before and they felt sore. Soon I went out.

When I got back the trees had fallen down. They had crashed into the neighbour's garden, smashing the shed. We all find it very exciting. Many children visit the back alley to stare and clamber all over the tree. That same night the neighbours come round to get a petition together to get all the other trees cut down. They chastise us because we ponder whether to sign it or not, after all it has added a frisson to the evening. They say that if their children had been in the garden it would have killed them. We sign.

The tree does not know it is dead and begins to sprout leaves. Later I am at the computer again and a man arrives to chop it down, and chop it up.



JOURNÉE DES BARRICADES

14 December, 2008, Stout Street, Wellington

Bus, cars, vans, truck, oil drums, tyres, compressed paper bundles, all-sorted everyday objects and materials

6 x 21 x 7 metres

CALIFORNIA

The hotel Ibis is the cheapest place to stay in Heathrow as far as I know, and, believe me, economy is a major theme in my life at the moment. It has artex walls, so don't get too close, ouch, and fake windows. You know, a drawn curtain and then no window behind. The hotel is fucking hot, 26 degrees at the moment according to the baby monitor, and it's January. I am lying in my knickers, blankets off, legs wide apart as if I was trying to sleep on holiday in Tenerife. The journey here was rather arduous as usual, I wish I didn't live so far away, the baby was a little tetchy towards the end, and we met lots of people as one does with a little one in toe. I hadn't been on the little request stop train for five minutes before this man in the seat opposite piped up.

"Going far?"

"Yes," I replied. I hadn't yet decided what to say to people about why and where and how long and all that. I hadn't decided yet whether it was exciting, or madness or a big secret, what I was doing. So I kept it short.

"Do you live here? We've been coming here for years."

"Oh yes." I hesitated; I didn't want him to clock who I was. Since everything that had happened he may have heard or read about me. "I live on the Crescent."

"Which one?"

I knew that I had given too much away, oh well fuck it. "The blue house with the white door."

"I don't know it. We've been staying in the railway cottages. I used to stay in the caravan round the back but now I've got my wife we stay in the cottage." His wife leaned over so I could get a look at her.

"It's got no heating you know, and no hot water, you never feel like you get dry."

"Ah, but it is idyllic here isn't it, love? You know the first time I slept in that little caravan and woke up the next morning and heard the birds singing and the gentle hum of the sea I thought, wow this is heaven. I've been coming here ever since."

"We have to boil lots of kettles." The conductor had arrived.

"Return to Heathrow, please. How long does that return last?"

"One calendar month"

That would be long enough I remember thinking, but now I am not sure when I'll be coming back. But you can get a lot done in a month, and you can also get fed up in a month too, and want to go home. But I can't imagine that now, wanting to go home, not ever.

We changed at Birmingham and were sucked into the hideousness and darkness of New Street station. I managed to balance the pushchair and massive day bag plus my luggage up the escalator. The baby was asleep at last, after much jiggling and bouncing on my knee for the past 3 hours. I had already been through my meagre supply of toys; handing her one, she orally examined it and then threw it on the floor. I give her another one, and again.

Behind me I heard a baby cry out and craned my strained neck around. Just joining the escalator was a woman with twin girls, they must have been 18 months at the most. The first had appeared to have just stepped onto the escalator and begun to rise, finding this a somewhat strange experience she had attempted to rejoin her mother and sister who were still trying to jump on. Her back to me, she leaned towards her family and fell onto the next metal step, yelled and then rolled sideways onto the next.

"Get up, get up," I could hear her mother saying, and then she pushed her sister onto the escalator. Everyone was now rising, including a large pink suitcase the mother was pulling. It was a horrible site to me. All I could see were scarves dangling and mittens on strings lingering next to the moving stairwell. The babies were quiet though and then the first girl managed to pull herself up so she was tottering now on the step. I had this thought that if I just stayed still she would eventually come to me and I could pick her up, but of course I was moving too. I wanted to chuck down my bags and run to her, she looked like she was in serious danger, and I thought about some documentary I had seen about a man who was choked on an escalator in London by his plastic bag after he had fallen drunk. I finally got to the top, dumped my bags and pushed the pushchair out of the way but not enough, really. I held my arms out and, as she rose towards me, whipped her up and plonked her on the concourse. Her mother, other sister and large pink suitcase arrived then and tumbled off, dragging themselves around my mess. Then they left. I was so upset, that mother is a fool, I thought, it's amazing those little girls are alive. I watched the three of them trotting off. My baby had woken up by this point and I pushed my gear out of the way of the spill of the escalator and leaned against a grubby wall. I had been scared, my heart was thumping.

NORWAY

One evening we walked to Geilo Kino across the valley. It was snowing when we set out and our footprints from only a couple of hours before had been covered up. On the track down to the road the snow lay in drifts so that in some parts the brown ice underneath was exposed and in others the drifts were thigh-high. There was a full moon so we cast moon shadows as we walked. We walked along the side of the lake, I covered my mouth with my scarf as the wind howled around us. When we changed direction to cross the lake the wind blew directly into my face and threw tiny pieces of ice into my eyes. The edge of my scarf was frozen and stuck to my cheek. I pulled my scarf up and over my eyes so that it reached my hat and I let Ivan lead me.

“Ask me a question,” I said. “Anything at all, I know the answers to everything.” We are fond of making up and playing games and I needed something to take my mind off the weather.

We were the only people in the cinema and we watched a British movie starring Brenda Blethyn. We had bought sweets and diet coke from the nearby Esso Garage. The sweets in Norway weren't as brightly coloured as they are in the UK, I remembered reading somewhere that this is because certain E numbers were banned. My sister had always had to avoid E123 as it made her hyperactive and I think this was the number that made bright orange.

The film was forgettable. It was the second time in my life that I had been the only person in the cinema. The first time was in Newquay with an ex surfer boyfriend, when the projectionist had run the reels for Cocktail in the wrong order. So I had known that he married his girlfriend before they had even got together.

As I walked back I stared into the windows of the other huts. All the interiors were orange like ours, and Norwegians sat inside with fires roaring and TV's blaring, tired from a day's skiing. Tomorrow night they would be gone, back to Oslo and Bergen, and the slopes would be quiet and all the huts around us dark again.

On the road we stopped and stared at the sky. The full moon shone down on us and a lone cloud shrank as it moved away from us. We stood and stared until it disappeared. The track back to the hut had changed again. Our footsteps had gone and the snow dunes lay in different places, some with stiff overhangs. The bare silver birches cast shadows across the road and it was quiet apart from the roaring wind, which after a while I didn't hear.

We lit a large fire in our orange hut and pulled our chairs up to the stone hearth. I placed my feet on the mantelpiece above my head. It wasn't as uncomfortable as it sounds and I fell asleep. At some point I woke briefly and crawled into bed. I felt tired, but a different tired to home, my insides were tired, my head was tired, as if I just had to put some things to bed and just leave them there.

Today we went cross-country skiing. We started out at some time after 4pm so the sun had nearly set. Cross-country skis are thin and light and the heel of the boot is unattached from the ski. The routes around Geilo and Vestlia are marked and grooves are cut into the snow making it easier to ski. We carried head torches. It was difficult to see the contours of the track because the light was flat. We headed around the lake away from Vestlia and soon, silver birch trees were all around us covered in thick snow. The landscape reminded me of Narnia, from The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe. It was very quiet, no birds. There was nothing around apart from trees, yet occasionally a lone skier would appear in front and hurry past us. We'd stop and watch as they quickly disappeared.

After about an hour we stopped and ate some dates. The light was very pale now and the landscape appeared to be in black and white. If the cloud had cleared we would have been able to carry on by moonlight but thick fog hung in the valley, so we turned around back to Vestlia. I turned my head torch on.

On the way back the red run was illuminated for night skiers and the orange glow filled the sky as if a huge fire were blazing. I could hear faint music, pumped from out door speakers at the ski lifts, but there was no one around.

I turned off the track towards the Vestlia Hotel and then along the track to the hut. Our footprints from two hours before had gone and the huts, that were yesterday full of Norwegians, were now silent and dark.

We were back in our orange hut with orange curtains and rag rugs. We listened to a Nordic country and western station on the radio, as I couldn't find the World Service, and drank tea.

RYAN GANDER
(WITH RASMUS SPANGAARD TROELSEN)

the new new
alphabet

www.thenewnewalphabet.info/

the new new
alphabet

FRANCIS MCKEE



LIVE EVIL

Kodwo touched one of the throbbing blisters and it burst over his shirt. A thick red syrup spread like a slow blossom across his chest. From the corner of his eye, he could see shadows flicker and advance. Blood bubbled across his body and the shadows hissed his name, 'Kodwo!' Kodwo!

The sun hit his eyes and he finally woke up. Madj was jabbing him in the side with his elbow and a soldier was standing impatiently at the window of the minibus holding out his hand expectantly.

'Show him your ID,' said Majd.

Kodwo dug into the bag at his feet, retrieved his passport, and handed it to the soldier. They were at a checkpoint, a gray concrete tower looming in front of them. Burn marks scorched the huge wall and the road itself. Now he was awake he could see all of the soldiers properly. They were tense and restless, milling around the stationary cars. And still at the corner of eyes the shadows flickered. What was it, some optical trick of the light? Reflections, maybe, of the corrugated roof that spanned the giant holding shed they'd built for pedestrians. His passport was returned. Still the car sat in the queue.

Rima turned in her seat and passed something back to Majd. 'What is it?' asked Kodwo.

'Ouija board', replied Rima. 'Can't use mobiles here. See if you can get through.'

Majd grinned and placed the board between them. Kodwo shrugged. It was worth a go to pass the time. Maybe he could contact Sun Ra. He placed his hand on the board and Majd gently guided it around the board. Probably because he was sitting at the wrong angle in the cramped seat of the bus, Kodwo found it hard to reach the letters he hoped for on the matrix. 'What's it spell, then?' he asked Majd.

'Harry,' he replied, mystified. 'Who's Harry?'

'God knows. Wrong number I expect,' sighed Kodwo. 'Could have at least found Miles – he must be somewhere in the underworld.'

There was nothing more to keep him awake and so he dozed uneasily for another half an hour before the queue started to move.

By the time Kodwo was dropped off at the hotel it was beginning to rain. Having picked up his key, he stopped to check the small set of bookshelves near the lifts, a library for guests made up almost entirely of books on the conflict in the west bank. Said's *On Late Style* looked tempting and Kodwo was about to take it off the shelf when a strange guest tramped across the foyer to the reception desk. He was soaked and bedraggled, wearing an old blue pinstripe suit. His bony face was severe but outdone by an electric shock of hair, stiffened with dried mud. He stood at the desk, unable to do more than utter inarticulate grunts and cries, his bony hands rapping the desktop urgently, as if in some version of morse code rather than any attempt to gain attention from the frightened receptionist. Then, just as quickly, he walked out of the hotel.

From his bedroom window high above, Kodwo watched the man tramp back down the street, oblivious to the rain, apparently oblivious to everything around him.

It was still raining when Kodwo next emerged from the hotel. He wanted to photograph Arafat's tomb. The last time he'd tried, a Norwegian diplomatic mission had descended on

the scene and it became impossible to get a clear shot. Late afternoon on a rainy day should have ensured a solitary experience but when he reached the Muqata he saw something had changed. The tomb glowed in the fading light. The rain was turning to sleet, even snow. But the normally low-key military guard had been reinforced. Inside the marble vault, there was still just one soldier in dress uniform. Outside, however, there were armed men stationed at every possible vantage point.

Kodwo took a few desultory snaps, feeling pressured by the soldiers to move on as quickly as possible. He walked away, heading back towards the high tower block that loomed over the Muqata. They said the building was where the Israeli army was based during the siege. A long, desolate wasteland separated it from the compound. The rubble of demolished buildings, littered with rubbish, was dotted with crows scavenging in the rain. To one side stood a tiny, makeshift stall made from white canvas, decorated with graffiti and telephone numbers. Inside one old man sat beside a table of books and photographs covered in plastic – everything was in Arabic but Kodwo guessed it was a kind of witnessing, remembering the siege of the compound. The man gestured for him to sit and offered him coffee, pointing grimly to the snow-dark sky. They sat in silence, inhaling the aroma, looking out across the wasteland.

Kodwo was tired and reckoned that was why the shadows kept bothering his eyes. Among the rubble, the crows seemed to flit into shadows as the twilight deepened. The birds were pecking at something viciously but in that light it was impossible to see what they were attacking with such fury. In fact, in that light, with the snow falling heavier now, it might not have been crows. There was no perspective. They might have been dogs, even humans, on all fours feeding crazily on some ungodly lump of meat.

Suddenly, a gaunt figure was striding swiftly across the empty waste ground towards the feeding frenzy. It was the mud man from the hotel foyer. He had a hammer in one hand and a clutch of sticks in the other. When he reached the animals, there was a painful scream as he leant down and beat a stake into the largest of the beasts. The others tried to escape but two more were caught and dispatched, squealing and howling in the darkness.

The rest flew off. The mud stranger stood up and strode across to the stall. The old man offered him coffee and he accepted, speaking fluent Arabic. Then he turned to Kodwo.

'Well, you called me...and your wish is our command. What next?'

'I called you?'

'Yes. 'Harry.' Remember?'

'Harry?'

'Houdini. Pleasure to meet you. Repeat another word though, and I'll stake you.'

'What was that about?' asked Kodwo, nodding towards the waste ground.

'Vampires.' Harry looked back at the troops circling the Muqata. 'They know, but they can't say it out loud.'

'You said your wish is 'our' command. Are there more of you?' asked Kodwo, wondering what exactly was Harry anyway?'

'Mmm. There are a few of us. We share an interest in the place. For me, it was professional.'

Harry smiled. 'The largest open prison in the world -escapology and all that. Fascinating.'

Harry raised a bony, bloodied finger to his chapped lips before Kodwo could say more. 'No time. We need to stop them breeding.'

He thanked the old man and tugged at Kodwo's jacket, pointing across the city. 'There's a quarry beyond the Kalandia refugee camp. That's where we're going.'

It was a long slog. The snow turned to heavy, freezing rain and Harry kept up a demonic pace. Kodwo trailed behind miserably in the dark. Finally Harry stopped and waited for him to catch up. 'It's here. The queen is roosting in a high crevice. I'll flush her out and you will finish her off.'

Harry handed Kodwo the longest, thinnest stake he had. 'You want the hammer?' he asked. Kodwo nodded dumbly, looking at the stake.

They passed through a broken fence and headed down a steep incline until they were at the bottom of what appeared to be a vast arena. The quarry cliffs towered above them. Kodwo thought: this must be what it was like on the sea floor in the Atlantic, in the middle of a tempest.

Harry began to scale one side of the quarry. He moved at speed, uncanny in his ability to find foothold on the sheer surface. Now he was barely visible but Kodwo thought he had stopped. Suddenly, he could see a flame ignite and watched it fly through the air into the darkness of the cliff face. There was a horrible, piercing shriek and a large dark mass - half ablaze - was falling towards him.

It hit the ground with a hard thump but within seconds had started to writhe, extinguishing the flames around it. Kodwo could make out a female face but the creature it belonged to was that of an immense, pulsing cockroach, its legs twitching furiously as it tried to gain purchase on the ground. Its large belly quivered in spasms, the young inside squealing and pushing against the stomach lining. The creature looked about it and found Kodwo. It launched itself immediately in his direction and instinctively, his heart pumping, he gripped the stake in his right hand and plunged it into the advancing beast. It collapsed but its stomach exploded immediately. Screaming young flailed across the quarry floor. Kodwo blindly beat them back with the hammer, shouting uncontrollably. Then Harry was there, slicing each one like an eel and staking them.

Kodwo was badly shaken and couldn't remember how they had reached the main road again. Two jeeps hurtled by, their headlights blinding him. He grabbed Harry's arm.

'What happened?' he shouted. 'Did I just kill a woman?'

'No,' shouted Harry in reply. 'When vampires take their prey, they can adapt their physiology. What you just encountered may have included a human several generations back but now that creature is a hybrid - insect, human, supernatural. A whole new species.' He looked Kodwo in the eyes. 'A monster,' he shouted.

They came to an apartment block and Harry led the way up the stairs, out of the rain to a red door. He rang the bell and Kodwo was shocked to see Suleiman Mansour let them in.

Suleiman laughed and held out his hand in greeting.

'Kodwo! I'd embrace you but you seem to have been swimming!'

Kodwo just shook his head and followed Harry into the apartment.

Suleiman beckoned them over to a table that was already heaped with food.

'Help yourself, Kodwo. Harry, I think, is beyond things like eating.'

Harry laughed and just then the door to what must have been the kitchen opened and a small woman appeared, carrying a pot of strong smelling coffee.

Kodwo thought she looked familiar. While she poured the hot, thick liquid he studied her face. She caught his eye and smiled, knowing he was trying to remember. There was something regal about the way she stood there. She radiated an elegant authority that defied the chaos of the present. It was only when she automatically reached to her lips with a handkerchief and dabbed her lips that it came to him.

'Om Kolthum...?'

She nodded modestly and made a little bow, before joining Harry at a small table at the far end of the room.

Kodwo looked to Suleiman for help.

'Did I call her too?'

'It appears so. Or at least Harry put together a team for this job,' replied Suleiman.

'You're saying there are more of them...?', asked Kodwo.

'One more. In the Negev. He's 'Slouching towards Dimona' you might say.'

There was a sudden clatter from across the room. Om and Harry were spilling dominoes onto their table and shuffling them for a game.

As they began to play they seemed to fall into a trance state, moving the domino tiles automatically while repeatedly nodding their heads and clucking quietly.

Kodwo and Suleiman settled down with their coffee and Kodwo recounted what had happened at the quarry.

'Harry described the creature as a monster,' he explained, 'but I still feel as if I killed something human.'

Suleiman nodded towards a stack of DVD cases in a bookcase against the wall.

'Recently I've been watching a lot of films. You know I'm working with video now and so I'm watching old movies again in a different light.' He went over and sorted through the DVDs, picking out one which he then handed to Kodwo.

'This one - The Pervert's Guide to Cinema by Slavoj Zizek - it's got some beautiful clips. He analyses the scene in Alien where the baby monster bursts out of the crewman's chest. You remember the scene.' Suleiman imitated the creature emerging from his chest with his hands.

'Anyway, Zizek says something like 'Humanity means the aliens are controlling our animal bodies. Our ego is an alien force, distorting, controlling our body.' Suleiman mimicked a lisping, heavy East European accent and stared dramatically into Kodwo's eyes, 'We ourselves are the aliens controlling our bodies.'

As if in response, Harry and Om stopped clucking and looked over, fully awake again.

'Can we watch on television?' asked Harry.

Suleiman nodded and picked up a remote from the table.

They all sat on the sofa and watched the screen warm to life. Suleiman flicked through various soap operas until they found a news bulletin. Helicopter gun-ships were swooping across a desert landscape, a scared looking reporter was pointing to a giant tower in the distance and in the background it was possible to hear the shocked gasp of the cameraman. The tower came into focus. It had enormous teeth and angry, bulbous eyes. Its skin was scaly,

dripping with slime, and it stood tall on its massive, muscular haunches.

'It's Godzilla!!' shouted Kodwo.

Harry and Om cheered and waved their arms in celebration. Suleiman laughed and patted Kodwo comfortingly on the shoulder. Kodwo watched in a daze as the monster raced across a perimeter fence into a vast industrial installation. There it promptly began to demolish everything in its path. Reaching the centre of the complex of buildings, Godzilla batted away the onrushing gun-ships, ignoring them as they spun off crazily in billows of black smoke. Finally, the monster leant into a smokestack closing its vast jaws on something out of sight. 'Eating the core,' murmured Om with some satisfaction. Harry grunted happily. Sated, the monster lifted its head, climbed onto the rubble of the surrounding buildings and roared.

Outside the apartment, there was the rattle of gunfire. Suleiman got up to look.

'Someone celebrating?' asked Harry.

'No,' replied Suleiman, peering into the darkness. 'They've set up checkpoints on every road. I think they're getting ready to search door to door.'

'Resist,' murmured Om.

Suleiman returned to table and spread out a map. Harry, Om and Kodwo gathered round him. 'Bi'lin is where we fight.' He jabbed his finger at the map. 'There is a legion of vampires buried in the fields there but we also have allies in the same place.' Shifting his finger slightly, he pointed again. Just here, on the edge of the fields there are a congregation of beehives. The insects have agreed to help us and they will attack while we prepare our weapons.'

'Is it sticks again?' asked Kodwo.

'You mean stakes,' said Harry. 'No. This time we are the weapons.'

He grabbed a sheet of drawing paper and began to sketch.

'Om will create a sonic wave – it will rouse them and they will be profoundly disturbed by its beauty.'

Harry hastily drew a series of boxes on the paper.

'Suleiman has devised a series of projections – images of daylight – and they'll be projected around the field while I - ,' here he paused and drew a circle in the centre of the field, ' – I will create a diversion, worthy of Houdini.'

'This is going to work...?' asked Kodwo hesitantly.

'It's not real daylight, I know' said Suleiman, 'but the image is real and it is made of light and Harry's skill lies in making you accept the impossible.'

'And we don't have time to debate it either,' said Harry, folding up the map. 'They're going to be here in minutes.'

They left the lights on and the food was still sitting on the table. Grabbing coats they rushed downstairs into the uneasy night.

'We'll split up – Harry and Om, you have your own ways to get there,' said Suleiman.

'Can we do this?' asked Kodwo plaintively.

'Godspeed', murmured Om as they set out.



ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

PAUL ROONEY

Artist Paul Rooney was born in Liverpool in 1967, and trained at Edinburgh College of Art. Paul's practice focused from 1997 to 2000 on the music of the 'Rooney' CD's and performances. Rooney achieved an appearance in John Peel's Festive Fifty in 1998, and a 'Peel session' in 1999. Paul now primarily works with text, sound and video, focusing on the 'voices' of semi-fictional individuals, voices that often reveal the difficulties of representing historical memory. The works use or reference narrative forms such as short stories, songs, audio guides and sermons.

Paul has had residencies at Dundee Contemporary Arts/University of Dundee VRC and Proyecto Batiscafo, Cuba, and was the Tate Liverpool MOMART Fellow for 2002-2003, the ACE Oxford-Melbourne Artist Fellow for 2004 and the United Artist's Fellow at the University of Wolverhampton for 2004-2007. Paul has shown recently at Tate Britain, London; Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid; Kunst-Werke, Berlin; and at the Shanghai Biennial, and in British Art Show 6 which toured around the UK in 2005-2006.

Other recent projects include a 12" red vinyl record broadcast on Radio Lancashire, Radio 1 and BBC 6 Music, a video for Film and Video Umbrella touring to fourteen cities around Europe, and a short story published by Serpent's Tail. Paul has had solo shows at Matts Gallery, London, and Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, in 2008.

RYAN GANDER

Born 1976 Chester, UK. Having previously completed a research residency at the Jan van Eyck Akademie in Maastricht, Gander participated in the artists' residency program of the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. Last year marked a year of research sabbatical for Gander, with no new work being exhibited until a major touring solo show 'Heralded as the new black' opening at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham in January 2008, touring to South London Gallery and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Rotterdam. 2008 also sees solo exhibitions at Kunst Halle St Gallen, Kunstverein Bonn, Store London, Annet Gelink Amsterdam and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery New York as well as inclusion in the Carnegie International, Pittsburgh and the Sydney Biennial.

Gander lives and works in London and is represented by Lisson Gallery, London, Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York and Taro Nasu Gallery, Tokyo.

ANNIKA STRÖM

Annika Ström was born in Helsingborg, Sweden in 1964 and went to the Academy of Fine arts in Copenhagen. In 1993 she moved to Berlin. She moved to the UK after 12 years in Berlin. she now lives in Hove.

Her solo shows during 2008 were at c/o Atle Gerhardsen, Berlin, Lautom Contemporary, Oslo, and Uddevalla konsthall, Sweden. Her most recent group shows have been at ACCA Melbourne, De Appel Amsterdam, Museum of Contemporary art, Belgrade, Malmö Konsthall, The 6th Mercosur Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil and Shirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt.

Ström works mainly with text works and video/films, composing her own soundtracks, which she sometimes performs. Her first major monograph "Annika Ström Live" is just out, published by Onestar press and Fäth&Hässler.

She is currently writing her first feature length film and its new soundtrack.

IAN BROWN

As a starting point, Ian Brown's practice attempts to investigate the advancements in technology and tests the progression and optimism associated with these developments against the problems of our everyday usage of them. The majority of video works produced here are associated with everyday mini-dramas that are played out with a sense of universal understanding. Recent work has expanded to consider the relationship between the invented world and the natural world.

Brown is the MA Fine Art Award Leader at Staffordshire University and has had exhibitions in Iceland, Sweden, USA and throughout the UK. Brown is also part of the collaborative artist's group, Common Culture, with David Campbell and Mark Durden. Common Culture have had recent solo shows and events at Void in Derry, the Photographers' Gallery, London and Third Space Gallery, Belfast. They have shown work at the 6th Shanghai Biennial as part of the Liverpool European City of Culture events in 'Variable Capital' at the Bluecoat Gallery. They were also selected by curator Hou Hanru to be part of EV+A, Limerick 08.

ALEX PEARL

Alex Pearl makes mini epic films, video installations, sculpture and books. Throughout his work there is a sense of an acceptance of failure or disappointment as important parts of the human condition. Using readily available materials and software the films are made from: suddenly apprehended ideas, discovered objects and impromptu processes. They are comparable with the sketch or doodle, an initial throwaway idea made visible. They make light with big issues and are in turn haunting and funny.

His sculpture is fragile, temporary and has the appearance of either being on the verge of collapse or already broken. The work displays playfulness with its own limitations and a hopeless desire for greatness.

Alex has exhibited in throughout the UK, Europe, North America and Australia. He has exhibited at Hun Gallery, New York, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin and as part of Izolenta '06, International Digital Film Festival, Museum of Cinema, St Petersburg, D>Art.06, dLux Media Arts, Sydney, Australia, Trampoline, Reactor, Nottingham, L'Alternativa 2005, 12th Independent Film Festival of Barcelona, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona. Drawing Links, The Drawing Room, London, Experimenta 2007, Bangalore & Mumbai, Cheap Like Wow, UAMO 2008, Munich and Terminus Projects, Sydney

RICHARD T WALKER

Richard T. Walker uses photography, collage, text, video installation and performance as part of an evolving investigation into the natural landscape and its use as a contextual tool to mobilise thoughts and self-reflection. With strong nods towards the European and American Romantic periods, Walker uses spoken dialogue, music and performance to facilitate engagement and analysis that is both contemplative and active. His work questions how we perceive nature as well as how we imagine nature perceiving us. This creates a continual dialogue that challenges our personal and general perceived notions of Landscape and Nature encouraging us to question our belonging within the contemporary environment and subsequently within our selves and our society.

Richard T. Walker lives and works in San Francisco, California. He earned an MA from Goldsmiths College, London in 2005. His work has been presented in numerous exhibitions in Europe, Japan, China and the U.S.A, including: Witte de With, Rotterdam; De Appel, Amsterdam; The Lewis Glucksman Gallery, Cork;

and Para/Site, Hong Kong. He received the 2007 Fellowship at the Kala Art Institute in Berkeley, California and is currently an Affiliate Artist at the Headlands Centre for the Arts in Sausalito, California.

HEATHER AND IVAN MORISON

Heather Peak was born in Desborough, UK in 1973 and Ivan Morison was born in Nottingham, UK in 1974. In 2005 the Morisons acquired a site of ancient and mature woodland in North Wales and they are developing the area of mature conifers into an arboretum. The Morisons' recent exhibitions included: The Bad Years (How To Survive) at Clint Roenisch Gallery, Toronto 2008; Passionate Collectors, New Art Gallery, Walsall(2006/07) and Thin Cities, Piccadilly Line, Platform for Art, London (2007). Tales in Space and Time was featured at Folkestone Sculpture Triennale in 2008 and I am so sorry. Goodbye. (Escape Vehicle number4) was produced for Tatton Biennial. In 2007 they represented Wales at the Venice Biennale and will be working with Milton Keynes Gallery, Barbican and The Whitechapel Gallery in 2009. They live in Arthog, North West Wales.

FRANCIS MCKEE

He is a lecturer and research fellow at Glasgow School of Art, working on the development of open source ideologies. From 2005 – 2008 he was also curator of Glasgow International, a festival of contemporary visual art. He is now the director of CCA, the Centre for Contemporary Arts. He has curated many exhibitions including This Peaceful War, The Jumex Collection for the first Glasgow International in 2005; Zenomap (together with Kay Pallister), the presentation of new work from Scotland for the Venice Biennale in 2003; Words and Things for the relaunch of CCA in 2001. For the past ten years he has written extensively on the work of artists such as Christine Borland, Willie Docherty, Ross Sinclair, Douglas Gordon, Matthew Barney, Simon Starling, Catherine Yass, Joao Penalva, Kathy Prendergast and Pipilotti Rist. Previously, Francis McKee worked as an historian of medicine for the Wellcome Trust and as Head of Programme at CCA. A recent collection of essays has been published in Lithuania.

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cover image by Ryan Gander 'A round table, a storm rages in the darkness outside, rain lashes against the window' 2009

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