

Fishing, Art and Gentrification

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I was just reading I swear #2
-- a reading group on air --

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Fishing, Art and Gentrification

Marc Garrett

When the founders of the Limassol-based NGO, NeMe, invited me to contribute to the *A Sea Change* project, *Living with Others* and involving a two-week research residency and visits to the Liopetri fishing area in the spring of 2023, memories of my trawler fishing experiences as a young boy flooded back. I was 10 years old when I went trawler fishing with my stepfather Ken on the coast at Southend-On-Sea, UK. I never enjoyed it. We would wake up very early, about 3 am and sometimes remain on the boat for several days. I still remember the wintery cold of the North Sea. So cold I could not feel my fingers, and my teeth would chatter. It was all part of his simple strategy of trying to make a man out of me. I was unsure why I did not fit into his version of a proper son. My short stint as a fisherboy ended abruptly when a large wave bumped the trawler upwards and swept me off the deck into the sea. It was all very quick. As soon as I was in the water, my stepfather's arms reached into the waves, pulled me up and threw me back onto the boat deck. He shouted and swore at me. I was not sure whether he was angry with me or worried for me. I think it was both. There were various areas along the South Coast region where my stepfather used to fish. His main fishing crew resided in Old Leigh, an old fishing village in Essex, an area of Leigh-on-Sea, 30 miles east of London, down the River Thames.

The area has now been gentrified, and only small parts of its historic identity remain as a fishing village. Of course, when living in London, I lived through various forms of gentrification daily. We experienced gentrification at Furtherfield's warehouse space (HTTP Gallery) in Haringey, London. The neighbouring clusters of warehouses had all been taken over by artists, designers, and students from the creative industries once full of rag trade workers.

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GARRETT

While we were there, it was a thriving local community. We used the warehouse for exhibitions, events, and projects from 2002 to 2011. Unfortunately, the rent was raised by 25%. It coincided with a 2% reduction in our regular funding as part of Arts Council England funding cuts to all National Portfolio Organisations (NPO). This was because of the austerity cuts imposed by the Conservative and Liberal coalition in response to the financial crash 2008. David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu published their groundbreaking book, *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills*, in 2013.¹ Meticulous research found that since the financial crash, suicides had risen by 10,000 across the USA and Europe. And millions of people across both continents had lost access to basic healthcare. Even though austerity programmes gave the impression that everyday people needed to pay the consequences for the crash, it was not them (us) who caused it. It was caused by “subprime mortgage lending, hedge funding, toxic asset trading, the uncontrolled boom in financial derivatives trading, and the part that the slashing of ‘red tape’ played in allowing these activities to take place under the radar...”². Although hundreds of art organisations lost their funding in the UK, we thankfully managed to receive ours, and due to our strong relationship with the Haringey council, we were offered two spaces in Finsbury Park. However, being in the park brought us directly to a diverse community dealing with poverty. So many of our exhibitions and projects reflected social contexts relating to local people. Some themes include austerity, ecology, class, racism, ecology, neoliberalism, colonisation, surveillance, and the patriarch. Like austerity and neoliberalism, gentrification haunts the lives of contemporary artists (and those who live around them). Especially when they seek independent studio space. The worst examples of gentrification prioritise the economic interests of distant property developers (often

1. David Stuckler and Medicine Sanjay Basu. *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills Hardcover*. Basic Books, 2013, 2.

2. Vickie Cooper and David Whyte. *The Violence of Austerity*. Pluto Press, 2017, 5.

in league with cash-strapped and ideologically ambiguous Local Authorities) with scant regard for existing residents. The process colonises poor urban areas, and communities are displaced and replaced by wealthier people, improving housing for those who can afford it and attracting new business that caters to the incomes of those who have out-priced the locals. The documentation of sustained resistance to the Heygate Estate developments, particularly the critique of Art Angel's failed Heygate Pyramid project, provides an excellent case study of artists affected by or researching the politics of gentrification. Chris Morris, a local resident who chronicles regeneration efforts in a blog, said, "it seems as if Artangel have the privilege of direct access to the council and developers, whereas local people do not."³

Writing for *A_N* magazine, Newcastle-based artist Kathryn Hodgkinson discussed the pitfalls of arts and gentrification. Referring to the artist Grayson Perry described the issue as a "social pattern" and characterises artists as the "shock troops of gentrification" who take advantage of cheap housing and studios and has suggested that artists add so much value to an area that developers should pay them to live there. A highly logical, if unlikely, fantasy.⁴ These conditions reveal a dismal double bind for socially engaged artists as they find themselves complicit in processes that can negatively affect the lives of long-standing residents in places regarded as ripe for development. I strongly disagree with Perry's final comment on this matter. It is opportunistic to ignore the plights of those living nearby, suffering the conditions imposed by gentrification. Blaming artists who rent cheap studios for gentrification misses the point. Gentrification is not a decision

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3. Peter Walker. "Heygate pyramid: London estate's evicted residents damn art plan." *The Guardian*, 12 December 2013.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/dec/12/heygate-pyramid-london-estate-evicted-condemn-artwork>

4. Kathryn Hodgkinson. "Resisting gentrification: why we should fight hard to protect affordable creative spaces." *A_N*, 25 November 2016.

<https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/resisting-gentrification-why-we-should-fight-hard-to-protect-affordable-creative-spaces/>

by artists but by councils and corporations. The world we grudgingly inhabit is a place that is ruled by people who do not care for those struggling under the effects of climate collapse, poverty, and inhumane neoliberal frameworks. It is a regime that reduces human relations to profit, naturalises competition and pushes responsibility onto the individual.⁵ Mark Fisher explained it well when he referred to the phrase attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, that “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism.”⁶

Compared to anywhere in Cyprus, the UK has a much cooler climate. However, like everywhere now, climate change is making our country warmer. Liopetri, as a place, is much more picturesque, and the companies developing the area for tourism have promised the local fishermen new state-of-the-art fishing sheds if they agree to move further up the river. Will these sheds be free or rented to the fishermen at an affordable rate? Only time will tell. However, tourism can do strange things to a place. Changing its ethical, ecological and social contexts. As Hakim Bey astutely put it in his essay *Overcoming Tourism*, “The real place of the tourist is not the site of the exotic, but rather the no-place place (literally the ‘utopia’) of median space, liminal space, in-between space [...]”⁷ Bey was mainly discussing travelling liminal spaces such as airports and buses. Yet, I feel it is also appropriate to extend his observation to tourist sites. For me, they declare spatial oddness, as if they are shadowlands, ghost areas of their former selves, where indigenous culture offers itself as a spectacle, a parody of what it really is. And that’s the deal. To experience the reality of a place is to be a part of its lived

5. Jorge Garza. *Gentrification, Neoliberalism and Place, Displacement and Resistance in Flagstaff*. Northern Arizona University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2018, 2.

6. Mark Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*. Zero Books, 2012, 2.

7. Hakim Bey. “Overcoming Tourism.” *Urbigenous*, 1994, 2. https://urbigenous.net/library/overcoming_tourism.html

histories, dialogues, and struggles.

In recent news about the Cornwall coast is that 16 of its local beaches were declared a pollution risk, and the “main contributing factor to polluted beaches is [...] fertilisers, pesticides, oil, and untreated human and animal waste all entering waterways, such as rivers.”⁸ The disturbing legacy of the UK privatised water industry has been in the news for a while, but it has recently become an even bigger national topic. “Swimming in contaminated water can lead to gastroenteritis, hepatitis, giardiasis, skin rashes, amoebic dysentery, nose, ear, and throat problems, pink eye, and other respiratory illnesses.”⁹ In addition, there have been various sightings of masses of fish dying due to the sea and rivers losing oxygen due to hot weather,¹⁰ as well as regular sewage being dumped into the sea around the coasts of the UK.¹¹

Through the years, tourism and the population have grown in Cyprus. The Kyrenia District, one of the six districts in Cyprus, is a very popular harbour but also has a crumbling sewage system. There are spills into the sea from pipes leading directly to the town’s coastline every day. The town was originally planned for 25,000 residents and is now home to more than 100,000 people. Locals have mentioned a “stench of waste being spilt onto roads outside their homes.” Tourists have also complained about what they suspected was “sewage

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8. Elliot Ball. “Sixteen Cornwall beaches hit with raw sewage warning after heavy rainfall.” *Cornwall-News*, 5 July 2023.

<https://www.cornwalllive.com/news/cornwall-news/sixteen-cornwall-beaches-hit-pollution-8575804>

9. Ibid.

10. Ethan Davies “Thousands’ of dead animals spotted in Salford Quays after ‘huge fish kill.’” *Greater-Manchester-News*, 12 June 2023.

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/thousands-fish-dead-spotted-salford-27113172>

11. Helen Wilson-Beevers. “People warned to avoid 83 UK beaches because of raw sewage dumped nearby.” *The Independent*, 16 March 2023.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/uk-beaches-raw-sewage-warning-b2301186.html>

from the nearby hotels.”¹² The UK was once labelled the “dirty man of Europe”,¹³ thanks to its out-of-control pollution when it joined the EU in 1973. However, the EU made successive UK governments cohere to environmental standards. Since Brexit, there are serious concerns that the UK is going backwards and is becoming the “dirty man of Europe” again, with terrible impacts on our soil, air, water, health, and wildlife. In the late 90s, in our home town, Southend-On-Sea, councillors asked locals to swim in the water to prove they had rid the sea of pollution. My brother was among a few locals brave enough to test it out. For their bravery, they each were paid ten pounds by the local Conservative council. Thankfully, he survived.

Under the stranglehold of extractive capitalism, humans and nature are endlessly exploited and only seen as relevant within the narrow confines of being products for money-making ventures. There is a massive struggle ahead of us, and fighting against unethical business practices and governments that allow or even instigate ecological disasters for profit will not be easy. However, there is no hierarchy of who is more important to critique and challenge regarding these disastrous conditions. Climate collapse is a class issue because it mostly impacts the poor worldwide. We must challenge our engagement with the world as artists, curators, techies, academics, and humans. Our relationship with modernity needs an immediate reassessment. Our addiction to technology, alongside capitalism and its constant acceleration, has impoverished us environmentally. We need an urgent reconfiguring of our relationship with the world that is effective and beyond lip service. “The psychic and social structures in which we live have become

12. “CYPRUS: Sewage spills, sea pollution the norm for historic harbour town.” *Financial Mirror*, 22 September 2019.

<https://www.financialmirror.com/2019/09/22/cyprus-sewage-spills-sea-pollution-the-norm-for-historic-harbour-town/>

13. “Dirty Man of Europe: The importance of European Directives in Protecting our Green and Blue Spaces.” *Surfers Against Sewage*, 16 June 2016. <https://www.sas.org.uk/updates/dirty-man-of-europe/>

profoundly anti-ecological, unhealthy, and destructive.”¹⁴ One way to reconfigure ourselves is to stop chasing the illusion of feeling relevant through whatever practice we are part of. Be local whenever we can. It means reconsidering what our art looks like, whom it is meant to talk to, and why it exists in the first place. Individual freedom and expression is a capitalist throwback. The luxury of believing one’s specialness, originality, and supposed genius is a diversion. We must no longer play the game that serves the agenda of the privileged, who prefer to hedge our futures for personal gain and against nature. It is high time we refused to feed a vampiric culture dependent on extraction and acceleration.

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14. Suzi Gablik. *The Reenchantment of Art*. Thames & Hudson Ltd; New Edition, 1994, 6.

Embodying Water: Feminist Phenomenology for Posthuman Worlds

A posthuman politics of location

I have no means of knowing the human body other than that of living it.

–Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962: 108)

*The human body is the first and the most immediate cultural location
of water.*

–Margaret Somerville (2013: 78)

We are the watery world – metonymically, temporarily, partially, and particularly. Water irrigates us, sustains us, comprises the bulk of our soupy flesh. Yet it isn't easy to begin with a 'we'. Granted, its inclusions are intentionally abundant; counted here are not only humans and other animals, plants, fungi, protoctists, but also geological and meteorological bodies such as oceans, rivers, aquifers, subterranean streams, clouds, storms, swamps, and soils – all dripping or tidal or damp. With this list, the idea of *what a body is* becomes productively, posthumanly, torqued. But in literal terms, this 'we' is too (erroneously) encompassing; there are bodies that it does not admit. Hydrophobic substances such as bitumen, for example, come to mind. In our current age of fossil fuel addiction and concomitant climate change, this antipathy speaks volumes.

But 'we' is not only a question of constitutional accuracy. In feminist political terms, this 'we' goes against much feminist labour to insist on difference and disaggregation. As Adrienne Rich (1986: 225) argued in her (still highly relevant) 1985 essay on the politics of location, 'we' are many, and 'we' do not

want to be the same. Rich learns these insights from Audre Lorde, and other black feminists and feminists on the margins of a largely white, largely middle-class, largely straight feminist movement that was claiming the 'we' of women too readily. In Audre Lorde's (1984: 112) words, the idea that our differences did not exist, or that they could be shed, was nothing more than a 'pathetic pretense'. Claiming a 'we' too hastily risks misrepresentation. Thus, to write 'the body' is too abstract a gesture, notes Rich. Her choice is instead to claim the body as *my body* – as specifically hers, with its own politics of location: 'To write "my body" plunges me into lived experience, particularity'; it 'reduces the temptation to grandiose assertions' (215). 'Begin with the material' (213), invites Rich.

Consider, for example, the materiality of the waters that you are. We could refer to these as intracellular fluid (all of the waters that buoy your trillions of cells) and extracellular fluid (plasma, interstitial fluids, lymphatic fluids, transcellular fluids), or we could name them more specifically: cerumen, chyle, sebum, sputum.... In a different register, we might speak of your humours (black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood), or simply of things like spit, and joint lubrication, and pee. At one level, such lists can be Rich's 'grandiose assertions' in another guise, but if you pay attention, these waters also situate you very specifically. *Begin with the material*. Are your synovia too septic? Is an accumulation of angiogenic growth factors in your pericardial fluid causing you heartache? Does your blood clot too easily, or too obstinately? (Or: Does it contain that monumental 'one drop' of racialization that will situate you in sometimes incomprehensible ways? Is your blood spilled too readily?) And also: do your tears flow too freely? Did your eyes water upon finding that old letter folded in the pages of a book, long forgotten? The saliva that floods your mouth when your teeth pop the peel of a juicy kumquat; the sweat slowly dampening the fabric in your armpit, or at the small of your back as you sit on this bus, on this day, in this too-hot town.... All of these waters are about a specifically situated you.

Rich's (1986) own account of her location is similarly grounded in an embodied materiality, inflected with an affective and political subjectivity. Her white skin is not just an idea that grants her privilege but also a surface that has been stretched and disfigured, and which becomes the sac of progressively arthritic joints; she has bones that have been 'well nourished

from the placenta' and the decent 'teeth of a middle-class person' (215). But significantly, the waters that situate Rich in her specificity do so because of their interpermeation with waters and matters beyond her 'own' body: Jewish blood and white skin passed on from other watery bodies; healthy amniotic waters that bred those strong bones. And while the waters that may have spilled down her cheeks, or moistened her sex, may be of 'her' body, they are also symbiotic condensations of bodies beyond hers: a homophobic culture, a long-sought lover. Rich avers that 'the problem was that we did not know whom we meant when we said "we"' (217). Here she underlines the bad feminist habit of including too many bodies in a cosy togetherness – but her descriptions of her own body also suggest that the 'we' *may not extend far enough*. While the 'we' is insufficient, it is also in many ways inalienable.

In other words, claiming 'I am a body of water' as an alternative to the 'we' personalises and individualizes the claim in a way that is equally inadequate. Bodies of water puddle and pool. They seek confluence. They flow into one another in life-giving ways, but also in unwelcome, or unstoppable, incursions. Even in an obstinate stagnancy they slowly seep and leak. We owe our own bodies of water to others, in both dribbles and deluges. These bodies are different – in their physical properties and hybridizations, as well as in political, cultural, and historical terms – but their differing from one another, their differentiation, is a collective worlding.

An adequate understanding of embodiment, then, is not given by simply asking what 'a body' is. Instead, we need to be more curious about our politics of location: Where is my body? When is it? Why is it – that is, thanks to what, and whom? What are the membranes that separate it or differentiate it from others? Where and how do those membranes break down? Where and when does that body cease to be? And then: in what ways does it repeat? Rich already demonstrates that an understanding of one's body – even a rigorously situated one – is multiscalar and mutigenerational; porous and palimpsestic. It is a congeries of the personal and the political; of the material and the semiotic. It is biological and cultural, and it is never only one thing, in only one place, or only 'itself'. While Adrienne Rich wrote these notes over three decades ago, in many ways they model a feminist posthuman understanding of embodiment, and a feminist subjectivity that

is thoroughly materialist. Rich's body thus also suggests the possibility of a posthuman politics of location, watered.

My first objective in this chapter is to suggest how embodiment, and bodies of water in particular, can be understood from the perspective of a feminist posthumanism. This clarifies some key conceptual scaffolds for this book, but also traces a certain trajectory through body-thought. While terms like feminist posthumanism or new materialism may sound very avant-garde, they amplify and orient particular currents in feminism that pre-exist these terms (in a refrain that I come back to more deliberately in Chapter 2, this is difference and repetition; these new trajectories of feminist thought repeat older ones, but differently). Tracing this genealogy is on the one hand a feminist politics of citation: an acknowledgement of theoretical debts as an ethical practice. On the other hand, I want to make a specific argument: that thinking about difference and subjectivity – a key question in contemporary feminist thought – is productively developed when the materiality of the body, and its various porosities, flows, points of stagnancy, and scalar complexities are brought into focus. Furthermore, this attention to bodily materiality connects questions of feminism more directly to environmental concerns – not only as something we deal with, but also as something we embody, intimately and diffusely. The meaning of water as a particular kind of embodied and environmental materiality – with its unique properties and audacious promiscuity, with its spiritual significance and utter banality, as a specific planetary habitat and a species-specific boundary – unfolds in this book's ensuing chapters.

My second objective in this chapter is to insist that posthuman bodies are *lived*. The body that Rich describes is not just an idea but the material substrate that allows that idea to be. Even as intimacy does not confer mastery or transparent access to a body, Rich knows her body (partially and through different kinds of sensory apparatuses and amplifiers) because she *is* that body. Watery embodiment, as I offer it up, is neither speculative fiction nor thought experiment, but a complex description of the ways in which we live as bodies, and specifically as wet and spongy ones. The feminist posthuman figure of 'bodies of water' surfaces from a deep attentiveness to the ways in which I am embodied, and to how this corporeality matters in/as the world. I fill out this figure in the chapters to come by drawing on a variety

of resources – philosophical, scientific, storied, artistic – but parse these all through the sensory apparatus that is our watery, never-quite-contained, flesh. What results is a thick, saturated description of lived embodiment unfolding over the course of this book. Like the bodies it describes, this story emerges from multiple directions. My aim in drawing on these sources is to discern how ‘bodies of water’ as a political-ethical feminist figuration can be activated as a way of living these bodies.

These descriptions are grounded, moreover, in the conviction that all theory is material. Concepts only make sense to us because we can experience them, bodily, even when these experiences are too distant, too small, too large, or too intensive to readily grasp at the surface, where we take up what phenomenologists would call ‘the natural attitude.’¹ Our bodies as sensory apparatuses must sometimes stretch and contract in order to access the lived materiality that a concept or a theory proposes, yet we live these concepts nonetheless. To describe the world as it is lived is the work of phenomenology, but in order to account for the ways in which an aqueous perspective torques our understanding of embodiment, we need a different kind of phenomenology – one that can divest itself from some of its implied and explicit humanist commitments. What I propose is a feminist posthuman phenomenology. Elaborating this – as a theory, as a method – takes up the latter parts of this chapter, where I also draw on the conceptual resources of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze. Before turning there, let us return to feminist posthumanism, and bodies of water.

Milky ways: Tracing posthuman feminisms

In 1985 Adrienne Rich’s body is lesbian, Jewish, white, feminist, aging, healthy – in different orders, all at the same time, in both more and less metastable becomings. In terms of identity, Rich (1986: 215) acknowledges that ‘even to begin with my body I have to say from the outset that body had more than one identity’. She notes how her race and her gender are materialized in concrete ways; she acknowledges where her white skin has taken her, and places it did not let her go (216). She acknowledges her age, her sexuality. She notes the geopolitics that situate her, and the historical flows of global power that

THE EDUCATION CONTINUES ALONG

Don't leave the house before
noon there's a reason
You'll find it later it will
be revealed to you
Preserve ritual purity
The Unworthy must be
left in that Ignorance
which is a Divine
Punishment Amen.

rutile
ore from which titanium
Queen of the Night
(Queen of the Fucking May)

SAGENTIE?

an independent study of
non-Euclidean pleasures
non-canonical hours
watch and pray. "Watch"
means "to sit up all night
without sleeping"
Watch means look at me:
See my bellybutton.

I hope you didn't think I
meant anything personal
by it. You don't have to
if you don't want to.
What happened to your
hair. I left it on the
bureau. The pleasure

of exact location lies in
a certain feeling. Let me
feel yours. Feel mine?

LIMIT

defined by change of state
as the bed is just so wide
beyond the edge of it we
fall on the floor

MEASURE

That which contains a num-
ber of beats. Two pints
one quart; eight quarts a
peck. Aristotle a dead
professor? "Container for

"O, ABOLITION!

the thing contained ”
Hart Crane says ,
“FOR JOY RIDES IN
STUPENDOUS
COVERINGS ”

THE PRIMARY

are you in love ?

are you hungry ?

do you have a tooth-ache ?

WHERE YOU AT ?

Who's got all the money ?

How much does it cost
to find out what you want
to know ?

THANK YOU COME AGAIN

^
O,
A
B
S
O
L
U
T
E
L
Y

!
v
v

★

We DO
all of us
Depend on one another.
Do it some more.

★

$\geq$ peh! $\leq$ this was a
 π meson
moving at some
kind of unbelievable
speed. The speed
identifies it.

★

The song says,
"Please give me something

"To remember you by
"When you are far away
from me, Dear—
"Some little something, &c. &c."

A

> meh! <

viz., a μ meson,
moving some kind
incredible speed,
"Incroyable," they
used to say, refusing
to use that "R"
which would remind
them of that unfor-
tunate Citoyen Louis
Capet, whilom LE ROY

★

≥ bah! ≤

much slower, the loss
of a β -particle out of
the middle, this only
penetrates 4 inches of
lead or 12 of concrete

Mr. Yeats warned us, "Things
fall apart, the centre cannot
hold"

Quite as if we were able to
learn anything, as if we've
listened to W^m Yeats—
or to Plato, Jesus, Moses
& Co.

Nothing has soaked
into our heads except some

fake superstitions about
sex and a few jokes and
Limericks concerned with
the same subject.

{ I exaggerate. I
remember a few lines about
the weather, "red sky at
night, sailors delight, &c." }

★

Yet I hope that curiosity
isn't dead ... contrariwise,
I despair about the high
price of second-hand books,
even second-hand paper-
back books

★

Do I know what it is
I am doing, &c.



How badly do I need to
read one more book,
whatever its price, con-
sidering that I'm already
half blind from too much
reading anyway and one
more book has as many
lies in it as all the rest,
why don't I go look at the
world instead, or sit and
think for a few years, or
even try to write "seriously"



We got to the top of Windy

Ridge, then climbed
Peak 12524

We saw where we'd been
last year, whole days
of travel in one glance:

Pinchot Pass, the Palisades,
the heights towards Muir
Pass

Where will the next trip be?

✱

Why don't you quit while
you're still ahead?

✱

Why not. But a few hours
later, or the next day, or
whenever, there it is again,

Straight, hard & throbbing,
no knowledge of civilization,
fatigue, the Law, the usages
of Polite Society &c. Osiris,
Adonis, Dionysius, Attis,
Jesus, Heracles, Odysseus,
Aeneas, Gilgamesh, return.
All return. A wheel.



"... ABSOLUTELY FINAL FAREWELL
PERFORMANCE..." Liszt made
eight or ten of them, Eleanora
Duse did a dozen or so,
Anna Pavlova — the Marx
Brothers built it into an
independent art form,
"... FOR THE LAST TIME

ON ANY STAGE ! ”



or drawing room or Turkey
Bath ... “It turns out,”
as Helen used to say — The
Beautiful Poet is really this
middle-aged type wants to
fuck me in the ass.

ABSOLUTE
REALITY, namely, how
much can I do right now
about life in this place?
I am it, all of this living
and this place and what
I'm doing is called
TRANSFORMATION

IRRADIATION
BASE METAL BECOMES
GOLD
!

"just dancing" Lenny
Bruce explains, "no
kissing."

XY says, "The Beautiful
Poet wants to lick me all
over, suck my dick, etc.
I can't think why. The
first thing you know, there
we were and there wasn't
any yes or no to it, we
had a ball. Wouldn't you?
Magic, he calls it. Absolu-
tely indefensible, of

course, un-natural, a
symptom of profound
psychological disturbance,
we did it every chance we
got & will probably do it
again."

★

"ABSOLUTELY—

O,

ABSOLUTELY.

WHERE YOU'RE

AT,

WHAT'S HAPPENING."

I suppose he's interested
in the quality some
times

★



G. Stein: "History is
what happens from time
to time."



Where I sit in "my" room
with the windows open, a
joss-stick fumes before
bronze Tara

{ Gary & Joanne
hunted it out from
great junkpile at
Katmandhu, bronze
images... arms, legs,
axes, elephant-heads,
reclining, sitting,
standing, IN COITŪ,
sprouting more heads
and arms, animal

features, wings, &
haloes which recall
the great battle of
Ahura Mazda
light against the
darkness again, a
Persian overlay on
Budda sculpture }

- 1) am I hungry. Not right
now, & there's food in the
refrigerator.
- 2) I am in love with so & so,
& would like to make it with
S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z, &c.
- 3) Did Nikola Tesla REALLY
make a machine that could
extract electric voltage out

of the very ground on
which he stood. { Clark
Coolidge asked me. } I
can't remember what are
the characteristics of or
the use for the electrical
coil which bears his name.
Tesla.

4.) History is probably
shorter than we like to
think. What is history
REALLY. What's a new &
active use for it?

5.) I've got to stop writing
and start thinking. So
what else is new.

★

SHE says, "You must know

what's really yours; you
must know
'it's really you doing it.'

I wouldn't have it any other
way.

SHE says, "You really like
that.

Why don't you have that?"

There are a number of reasons
why not.

I suppose that light
still flashes high above
Miner's { MINOR'S ? } Ledge

"1-4-3, I Love you. I

hear you . 1-4-3 ,
Miner's Ledge Light ;
1-4-3 , I Love you -
what better way to remember ?



"so & so" { some historical
figure , some artist }
"grabbed up all these"
{ musical notes , words ,
whatever } "and made
not another { whatever
it was } but ... a
STAR !"

Where'd I read that ?



I wasted an hour trying
to locate the story, riffling
through half a dozen books,
and I MUST let go the
search isn't the one I want
to go on today.



Come in! Come in! You're
just in time to hear me
recite the History of the
Invisible City of Kitezh!

The Sacred City of Great
Kitezh

{ large and lurid colored
lithograph, slightly
off-register }

Hear the bells. Birds
of Paradise that sing.

The entire CITY

yarded off to Heaven
in a goldy cloud
nothing left but a
blazing Cross to
mark the spot &
terrify the Mon-
gol Horde

(KKK?)

the bells of the Sacred
City chime deep in the
woods, audible from
the stars

The wicked repent, the soprano
ascends with her prince

They all sing—
eternal delight
invisible to earth
We hear it all
hope for the best

{ KLANG ! }

but what we get

Next week,
CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA



the XIX C. was black and
white

Kurt Schwitters tore it all
into COLOR

"primatiti" &c."

"primatiti=ti,"

"primatiti=ta,"

&c.

Moreover, there are
blue horses now
and a FISH GARDEN
by Paul Klee

We're willing
to have other creatures
share the world.

*

I must make a correction.
Charles Darwin was black
and white in the XIX c. ?

Charley Bandelaire?

Sir Leslie Stephen black
and white, was he
a lesser man?

Walter Whitman said
the animals don't com-
plain.

★

N.B. PLEASE REVISE
YOUR DIX-NEUVIEME

★

Later (after lunch)
I couldn't leave it -

I find, so far, that it
was Edith Sitwell quoting
J. Livingston Lowes who
was quoting what author
?

"Give Coleridge one vivid
word from an old narrative
let him mix it with two in
his thought; and then
(translating terms of music
into terms of words) "out
of three sounds he (will)
frame, not a fourth sound
but a star." "

— THE ROAD TO XAWADU,
P. 303

The point is, I RE-
MEMBERED, at last,
that I'd been looking at
the Sitwell book { A POET'S
NOTEBOOK } a couple days
ago — now I'm free to
go to the postoffice and
the Library.



"The glory is departed
from the coconut and a
prosaic world has relin-
quished one delight."

— THE ROAD TO XANADU
p. 288

★

"That out of three sounds
he frame, not a
fourth sound, but a
star."

- Robert Browning,
"ABT VOGELER"

★

I was assisted to this
via Bartlet's FAMILIAR
QUOTATIONS. A trip
to the main library is
next ... the Tesla coil
either is or is not a real
recollection.

{ Are TEKTITES
really from outer space? }

★

S.N.E.D. (1937):

"TESLA (te'sla). 1902.

The name of NIKOLA TESLA
(born 1857), American
electrician, used attrib.

to denote certain apparatus
and phenomena."

★

WEBSTER'S NEW COLLEGIATE
DICTIONARY: single entry
in Biographical Names section.

★

ENCYCLOPEDIA DICTIONARY OF
ELECTRONICS and NUCLEAR
ENGINEERING, Robert I.
Sarbacher, Sc.D. editor,

Prentice-Hall Inc.,
Englewood Cliffs, New
Jersey. 1959. : p.1281 :

"TESLA. A unit of magnetic induction, equal to 1 Weber per square meter, in the mksa electromagnetic systems.

TESLA COIL. An induction coil used to develop a high-voltage discharge at a very high frequency. As shown in Fig. 2 a high-voltage transformer (T) is used to promote a discharge across the primary gap (G₁) and to charge a condenser (C₁) in parallel with the transformer primary.

High-amperage low-frequency currents oscillate in the few-turn winding P, and induce high-voltage high-frequency oscillations in the Secondary many-turn winding S. If S is tuned to resonance with the primary, very intense oscillations produce discharges across the gap G₂. Also called a Tesla transformer.

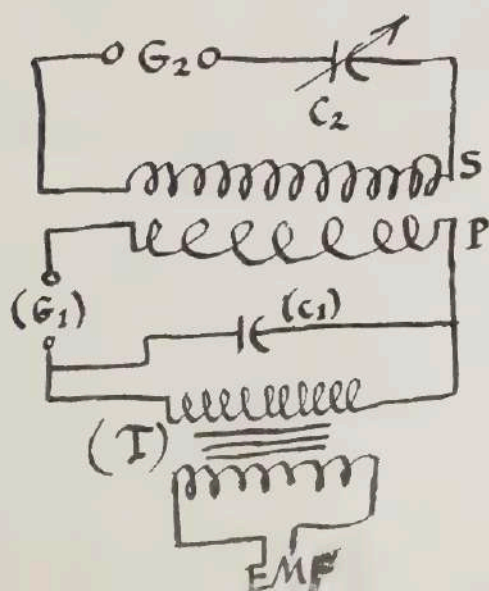


Fig. 2

In order to get the
point of much of this
part, go read {right
now} pages 181-182
in HISTORY AND
THE HOMERIC ILLAD,
by Denys Page. Uni-
versity of California Press,
Berkeley and Los Angeles.
1963.

{ a paperback edition
exists }

This table stands on
fidgety feet.

FIDGETY FEET is also the
name of a song or piano
solo, CIRCA 1920.



Assertions about
history assertions of an
unstable
insecure personality?

Lemon rind orange flower
lime tree.



Personality: how you
customarily place
your feet

Lemon flower orange tree lime juice
Grapefruit kumquat citron
tangerine

flowers at riverside
at Lemon Cove

★

O California sub-tropical freeze!

Lemon tree lime flower
juice of several oranges
the leaves are shiny green

"shrubs of the rue family",
A. Merriam-Webster says.

Assertions of personality
and authority who will
control the dictionary?

THE HARPER ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF SCIENCE, Edited by
James R. Newman { and a
large staff } . Harper & Row,
Publishers. New York and
Evanston. Sigma, Inc.
Washington, D.C. 1963.
(4 vols.). Vol. IV, p. 1178:

"TESLA COIL: ... The
coil is suitable for exciting
X-ray and Crookes (vacuum)
tubes."



I found a biography,
PRODIGAL GENIUS, The
Life of Nikola Tesla by
John J. O'Neill. Ives

Washburn, Inc., New
York (n.d.) { the copy-
right notice is dated
1944. }

It appears that
Tesla was a genius of
the highest order. He had
an eidetic memory and ima-
gination. He saw a vision
of whirling magnetic fields
while watching a sunset;
his ideas for the construction
of alternating current gener-
ators, dynamos, transmission
lines, controls and insulation,
as well as the mathematical
theory which would describe
the operation of these things

came to him that evening.
He went to America and
met George Westinghouse.
They harnessed the power
of Niagara Falls.

Tesla was a nut.
He had a germ phobia,
gynophobia, and if we can
believe his biographer, the
only creature he loved in
his adult life was a pigeon.

But observe: He
lighted the Chicago World's
Fair of 1893. He also
"let 1,000,000 volts of
high-frequency high-vol-
tage alternating current

pass through his body
for many minutes”
while he held a globe in
his hand which gave forth
a brilliant light.

Thomas Edison had
told everybody it couldn't
be done, that alternating
current was lethal. Tho-
mas Edison and the Edison
Company owned the street
lighting system in New York
in those days. It operated
from a direct-current dynamo.
— Quite inefficiently...

✱

This one loves blue
That one dotes on glass

"None of it came to nothing,
in the end

None of it amounted to a
hill of beans."

That's what my grandmother
used to say.

"That's all that there,"
she said.

{cf. ALCAEUS, fr. 173

καὶ κ' οὐδὲν ἐκ δένος
γεύοιτο.

"and nothing will come of
anything" }

Gertrude Stein:

"Let me recite what
history teaches. History
teaches.

A

{ Not quite a month
later, 15: ~~IV~~: 65 }

N.B., that History,
being a writing, can be
destroyed or changed to
suit whatever purpose the
writer, the printer, the
State, may determine.

History is a cat
which can be altered to
suit the owner. Nikola

Tesla was a handsome
man. He died all alone
in a hotel room. A
friend paid the bill —
Tesla was broke.

San Francisco

27: VII: 65

Kyoto

8: VII: 66

Handwritten by the
Author,
at Kyoto, 7-8 July,
1966

PHILIP
WHALEN

Theory of the Dérive

by Guy Debord

Published in **Internationale Situationniste**
#2, 1958

One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive* [literally: “drifting”], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. Dérives involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. Chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.

But the *dérive* includes both this letting-go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities. In this latter regard, ecological science — despite the narrow social space to which it limits itself — provides psychogeography with abundant data.

The ecological analysis of the absolute or relative character of fissures in the urban network, of the role of microclimates, of distinct neighborhoods with no relation to administrative boundaries, and above all of the dominating action of centers of attraction, must be utilized and completed by psychogeographical methods. The objective passionless terrain of the *dérive* must be defined in accordance both with its

own logic and with its relations with social morphology.

In his study *Paris et l'agglomération parisienne* (Bibliothèque de Sociologie Contemporaine, P.U.F., 1952) Chombart de Lauwe notes that “an urban neighborhood is determined not only by geographical and economic factors, but also by the image that its inhabitants and those of other neighborhoods have of it.” In the same work, in order to illustrate “the narrowness of the real Paris in which each individual lives . . . within a geographical area whose radius is extremely small,” he diagrams all the movements made in the space of one year by a student living in the 16th Arrondissement. Her itinerary forms a small triangle with no significant deviations, the three apexes of which are the School of Political Sciences, her residence and that of her piano teacher.

Such data — examples of a modern poetry capable of provoking sharp emotional reactions (in this particular case, outrage at the fact that anyone’s life can be so pathetically limited) — or even Burgess’s theory of Chicago’s social activities as being distributed in distinct concentric zones, will undoubtedly prove useful in developing *dérives*.

If chance plays an important role in *dérives* this is because the methodology of psychogeographical observation is still in its infancy. But the action of chance is naturally conservative and in a new setting tends to reduce everything to habit or to an alternation between a limited number of variants. Progress means breaking through fields where chance holds sway by creating new conditions more favorable to our purposes. We can say, then, that the randomness of a *dérive* is fundamentally different from that of the stroll, but also that the first psychogeographical attractions discovered by *dérivers* may tend to fixate

them around new habitual axes, to which they will constantly be drawn back.

An insufficient awareness of the limitations of chance, and of its inevitably reactionary effects, condemned to a dismal failure the famous aimless wandering attempted in 1923 by four surrealists, beginning from a town chosen by lot: Wandering in open country is naturally depressing, and the interventions of chance are poorer there than anywhere else. But this mindlessness is pushed much further by a certain Pierre Vendryes (in *Médium*, May 1954), who thinks he can relate this anecdote to various probability experiments, on the ground that they all supposedly involve the same sort of antideterminist liberation. He gives as an example the random distribution of tadpoles in a circular aquarium, adding, significantly, "It is necessary, of course, that such a population be subject to no external guiding influence." From that perspective, the tadpoles could be considered more spontaneously liberated than the surrealists, since they have the advantage of being "as stripped as possible of intelligence, sociability and sexuality," and are thus "truly independent from one another."

At the opposite pole from such imbecilities, the primarily urban character of the *dérive*, in its element in the great industrially transformed cities — those centers of possibilities and meanings — could be expressed in Marx's phrase: "Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive."

One can *dérive* alone, but all indications are that the most fruitful numerical arrangement consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same level of awareness, since cross-checking these different groups' impressions makes it possible to arrive at more objective conclusions. It is preferable

for the composition of these groups to change from one *dérive* to another. With more than four or five participants, the specifically *dérive* character rapidly diminishes, and in any case it is impossible for there to be more than ten or twelve people without the *dérive* fragmenting into several simultaneous *dérives*. The practice of such subdivision is in fact of great interest, but the difficulties it entails have so far prevented it from being organized on a sufficient scale.

The average duration of a *dérive* is one day, considered as the time between two periods of sleep. The starting and ending times have no necessary relation to the solar day, but it should be noted that the last hours of the night are generally unsuitable for *dérives*.

But this duration is merely a statistical average. For one thing, a *dérive* rarely occurs in its pure form: it is difficult for the participants to avoid setting aside an hour or two at the beginning or end of the day for taking care of banal tasks; and toward the end of the day fatigue tends to encourage such an abandonment. But more importantly, a *dérive* often takes place within a deliberately limited period of a few hours, or even fortuitously during fairly brief moments; or it may last for several days without interruption. In spite of the cessations imposed by the need for sleep, certain *dérives* of a sufficient intensity have been sustained for three or four days, or even longer. It is true that in the case of a series of *dérives* over a rather long period of time it is almost impossible to determine precisely when the state of mind peculiar to one *dérive* gives way to that of another. One sequence of *dérives* was pursued without notable interruption for around two months. Such an experience gives rise to new objective conditions of behavior that bring about the disappearance of a good number of the old ones.^[1]

The influence of weather on *dérives*, although real, is a significant factor only in the case of prolonged rains, which make them virtually impossible. But storms or other types of precipitation are rather favorable for *dérives*.

The spatial field of a *dérive* may be precisely delimited or vague, depending on whether the goal is to study a terrain or to emotionally disorient oneself. It should not be forgotten that these two aspects of *dérives* overlap in so many ways that it is impossible to isolate one of them in a pure state. But the use of taxis, for example, can provide a clear enough dividing line: If in the course of a *dérive* one takes a taxi, either to get to a specific destination or simply to move, say, twenty minutes to the west, one is concerned primarily with a personal trip outside one's usual surroundings. If, on the other hand, one sticks to the direct exploration of a particular terrain, one is concentrating primarily on research for a psychogeographical urbanism.

In every case the spatial field depends first of all on the point of departure — the residence of the solo *dériveur* or the meeting place selected by a group. The maximum area of this spatial field does not extend beyond the entirety of a large city and its suburbs. At its minimum it can be limited to a small self-contained ambience: a single neighborhood or even a single block of houses if it's interesting enough (the extreme case being a static-*dérive* of an entire day within the Saint-Lazare train station).

The exploration of a fixed spatial field entails establishing bases and calculating directions of penetration. It is here that the study of maps comes in — ordinary ones as well as ecological and psychogeographical ones — along with their correction and improvement. It should go without saying that we are not at all interested in any mere

exoticism that may arise from the fact that one is exploring a neighborhood for the first time. Besides its unimportance, this aspect of the problem is completely subjective and soon fades away.

In the "possible rendezvous," on the other hand, the element of exploration is minimal in comparison with that of behavioral disorientation. The subject is invited to come alone to a certain place at a specified time. He is freed from the bothersome obligations of the ordinary rendezvous since there is no one to wait for. But since this "possible rendezvous" has brought him without warning to a place he may or may not know, he observes the surroundings. It may be that the same spot has been specified for a "possible rendezvous" for someone else whose identity he has no way of knowing. Since he may never even have seen the other person before, he will be encouraged to start up conversations with various passersby. He may meet no one, or he may even by chance meet the person who has arranged the "possible rendezvous." In any case, particularly if the time and place have been well chosen, his use of time will take an unexpected turn. He may even telephone someone else who doesn't know where the first "possible rendezvous" has taken him, in order to ask for another one to be specified. One can see the virtually unlimited resources of this pastime.

Our loose lifestyle and even certain amusements considered dubious that have always been enjoyed among our entourage — slipping by night into houses undergoing demolition, hitchhiking nonstop and without destination through Paris during a transportation strike in the name of adding to the confusion, wandering in subterranean catacombs forbidden to the public, etc. — are expressions of a more general sensibility which is no different from that of the

dérive. Written descriptions can be no more than passwords to this great game.

The lessons drawn from dérives enable us to draw up the first surveys of the psychogeographical articulations of a modern city. Beyond the discovery of unities of ambiance, of their main components and their spatial localization, one comes to perceive their principal axes of passage, their exits and their defenses. One arrives at the central hypothesis of the existence of psychogeographical pivotal points. One measures the distances that actually separate two regions of a city, distances that may have little relation with the physical distance between them. With the aid of old maps, aerial photographs and experimental dérives, one can draw up hitherto lacking maps of influences, maps whose inevitable imprecision at this early stage is no worse than that of the first navigational charts. The only difference is that it is no longer a matter of precisely delineating stable continents, but of changing architecture and urbanism.

Today the different unities of atmosphere and of dwellings are not precisely marked off, but are surrounded by more or less extended and indistinct bordering regions. The most general change that dérive experience leads to proposing is the constant diminution of these border regions, up to the point of their complete suppression.

Within architecture itself, the taste for dériver tends to promote all sorts of new forms of labyrinths made possible by modern techniques of construction. Thus in March 1955 the press reported the construction in New York of a building in which one can see the first signs of an opportunity to dérive inside an apartment:

"The apartments of the helicoidal building will be shaped like slices of cake. One will be able to enlarge or reduce them by

shifting movable partitions. The half-floor gradations avoid limiting the number of rooms, since the tenant can request the use of the adjacent section on either upper or lower levels. With this setup three four-room apartments can be transformed into one twelve-room apartment in less than six hours."

(To be continued.)

Footnotes

[1] The *dérive* (with its flow of acts, its gestures, its strolls, its encounters) was to the *totality* exactly what psychoanalysis (in the best sense) is to language. Let yourself go with the flow of words, says the psychoanalyst. He listens, until the moment when he rejects or modifies (one could say *detourns*) a word, an expression or a definition. The dérive is certainly a technique, almost a therapeutic one. But just as analysis unaccompanied with anything else is almost always *contraindicated*, so continual dériver is dangerous to the extent that the individual, having gone too far (not without bases, but...) without defenses, is threatened with explosion, dissolution, dissociation, disintegration. And thence the relapse into what is termed 'ordinary life,' that is to say, in reality, into 'petrified life.' In this regard I now repudiate the Formulary's propaganda for a *continuous dérive*. It could be continual like the poker game in Las Vegas, but only for a certain period, limited to a weekend for some people, to a week as a good average; a month is really pushing it. In 1953-1954 we dérivered for three or four months straight. That's the extreme limit. It's a miracle it didn't kill us." (Ivan Chtcheglov, "Letter from Afar," *Internationale Situationniste* #9, p. 38.)

FUCKING PANSIES:

*Queer Poetics,
Plant Reproduction,
Plant Poetics,
Queer Reproduction*

~

Caspar Heinemann

'Waking, I was certain my room was host to a demon; terrified, I watched the remorseless eyes in the half light, till dawn gave me the courage to bolt shivering with fear to my parents' bed. My father laughed: 'Don't be such a pansy, Derek.'" - Derek Jarman, *Modern Nature*

Don't be such a pansy, Viola tricolor, violet, heart's-ease, love-in-idleness; Pansy goes by many names, and many names fit into and fall under 'Don't be such a pansy, _____. ' Don't be such a pansy, even if there's a remorseless demon in your room, crouching in the dark, ready to tear you apart. Even if there's a whole remorseless world out there, even in your parents' bedroom, ready and waiting to tear you apart.

The pansy has remained a staple in anti-queer lexicon since the last century, the humble violet symbolising weakness, effeminacy, all things effete, wimpy, and generally *flowery*. Propagating alongside its siblings sissy, fairy, and faggot, the pansy is a resilient flower. However, its roots as an insult are not strictly horticultural. The etymology of pansy (flower) is the French *pensée*, the past tense of 'to think', and a feminine reflexive. This occurred when, in a dubious feat of anthropomorphising, the pansy was seen to resemble a person leant over in intense contemplation, which in turn led to it becoming a symbol of remembrance. As an insult, it was applied to the ineffectual intellectual, implying an emasculating failure to embody a forceful, active, masculine ideal. The quality of thoughtfulness was already both feminized and feminizing, but the first known use of the word to describe gay men was not until 1925 (Partridge, 1984)¹. At some point along the way, the studious *pensée* became the flamboyant pansy, the femininity of the insult taking precedence over any other qualities. With 'pansy' having no non-floral meaning in English, in popular usage any association with remembrance is forgotten. The intellectual intellectual basis of the insult becomes obscured through time and translation and all that we are left with is the ontological relation of a human subject to the Viola tricolor itself, and the vague sense that there is something not right in the boy who thinks too much, looks too closely.

When the insult 'pansy' is thrown, there exists the obvious implication that the victim is themselves, physically, a pansy. But alongside this, to be a pansy is most likely to also be someone with an affinity for pansies, someone who would rather draw flowers in the garden than kick a ball around, a boy who would rather have a bunch of arum lilies than a brace of pistols (Jarman, 1992, p28). Being a pansy is seen as both a cause and an effect of an underlying affection for the delicate,

¹ From Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang & Unconventional English*, 8th edition (1984):

pansy, n. A very effeminate youth; a homosexual: from ca. 1925. Cf. Nancy (boy). Also pansy-boy: from ca. 1930; New Statesman and Nation, 15 Sep. 1934, concerning the fascist meeting in Hyde Park on 9 Sep., notes that there were, from the crowd, 'shouts about 'pansy-boys'".

the pretty, and the decorative. Pansies love pansies because they are pansies, which is why they are pansies. The love of pansies is a red flag on the slippery slope to becoming a pansy, and the pansy is a pansy because pansy is the word for people who love pansies. This is not an intentional morphing, but rather, after all those hours in the garden someone turns and says 'Don't be such a pansy', and then there is a demon in your room, and it is clear a pansy is a bad thing to be, which is strange to consider for someone who loves pansies, but lots of things are going to be strange from now on.

The homophobia of the insult pansy is not just the implication of effeminacy from association with the flower itself, but the homophobic condemnation of perceived sameness. The pansies love of pansies is taboo in part because they are a pansy, there is no heterosexual difference in pansy desire. However, the pansy-pansy identification is not the same as Narcissus falling in love with his own image, not the egocentric self-adoration of the daffodil leaning into the pond. The pansy is intensely relational and curious, and loves other pansies (and daffodils and geraniums and buttercups and snowdrops). Remember, the pansy becomes a pansy through perceived similarity and/or attachment to other pansies. The initial recognition was with something they were yet to become. In this way, pansy is inherently a collective identity, inhabiting a multiple temporality. To clarify, this is not an essentialist argument that all pansies like pansies, as in, 'all people perceived as queer men like *Viola tricolor*.' But rather, that its formulation as a generalised homophobic insult, potentially applied to any queer man, or any person read as such, means that 'queer men like queer men' (uncontroversial) can be read as 'pansies like pansies'. The collision of this meaning, with the horticultural association, begins to create a framework for a positive understanding of queerness, reproduction, survival and the natural.

As with many anti-queer insults, an underlying assumption in pansy is that there is an unnaturalness to effeminacy, that it signifies something gone astray that would never thrive or even survive in the state of nature, a rupture in the normatively gendered Arcadian ideal. The pansy clearly cannot be a real man, because he is a flower, and flowers are not men, and men are not flowers. But even the most ardent homophobe would find it hard to argue that flowers are not 'natural', even in all their selectively bred garden centre glory. Whilst not wanting to perpetuate the myth of queer sex as inherently unproductive, it is important to not deny that queerness still exists with a turbulent relationship to reproduction, in the biological sense. At the heart of this is the existence of queerness in relation to a medicalised discourse that understands the queer subject in terms of biology, in a way that is inherently naturalised, assuming queerness as something to be located in genes and hormones, glands and chromosomes.

This is not a form of acceptance or understanding, but rather a naturalisation that implies a failure, a departure from the script of healthy, normative heterosexuality and gender. When the queer body is accepted as a natural form, it is always a defective natural body, an abnormality that reinforces the norm. Homophobic and transphobic discourse has adopted this position in recent years, in reaction to the realisation that an understanding of the queer body as unnatural has the unintended consequence of devaluing any biologically based understanding of gender and sexuality, rendering the cisgender heterosexual body equally unnatural.² In reference to the earlier (and still present) form of anti-queer rhetoric Greta Gaard (1997) points out the irony that when homophobes use the argument that to be queer is to be against nature, they are insinuating that they care about 'nature', which is rarely the case. This is especially true for people coming from a fundamentalist Christian theological perspective in which man's dominion over nature is central. She writes that 'in effect, the "nature" queers are urged to comply with is none other than the dominant paradigm of heterosexuality.' Nature becomes a weaponised synonym for reproduction, and everything that does not directly contribute to the survival of a the species becomes an affront.

As much as the queer is being called a flower, the flower is being called a queer. As much as the pansy lends its prettiness to the queer subject, the queer subject lends their effeminacy to the pansy. Although this could be read as a reductive anthropomorphising, there is also the potential for something else if the relationship is not read as one-way mapping of human characteristics onto flowers, but also flower characteristics onto humans, with implications for the agency of both. Gaard asks us to think not only in terms of the dualisms traditionally associated with conversations around gender, race, and nature, but the 'vertical' associations, 'between reason and heterosexuality, for example, or between reason and whiteness as defined in opposition to emotions and nonwhite persons [...] the ways queers are feminized, animalized, eroticized, and naturalized in a culture that devalues women, animals, nature, and sexuality [...] how persons of color are feminized, animalized, eroticized, and naturalized. Finally, we can explore how nature is feminized, eroticized, even queered' (1997). Taking this as a call to arms, there is the potential for a queer identification with what is termed 'nature' to have positive political implications not just for queerness, but for a wider ecological and social struggles.

When read against a binary understanding of human reproduction, flowers are inherently queer. This is not a modish application of the term 'queer' to anything remotely 'strange', divorced from its roots as a slur or any analysis of human sexuality and gender, but rather a comparative

² The term 'cisgender' is used to describe someone who is not transgender, i.e. someone whose gender identity is broadly aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth.

statement about human understanding of gendered bodies across species.³ While the term 'queer' is referring to a very specifically human (and mostly white, Western) subjects navigation of a social world, it is also inaccurate to think of plants (and other species) as exempt from and untouched by this discourse. Given the prevalence of anthropocentrism, the reading of gender in plants inevitably reverberates and affects human understanding of human gender, and the reverse. As well as not wanting to make an anthropocentric imposition onto plants, I also want to avoid essentialising queerness in humans. To borrow from Nicole Seymour, I do not want to 'claim that queer individuals necessarily have a particular kind of relationship to the non-human; [but focus] primarily on the queer relationships that humans might develop with the non-human, and how environmental ethics might emerge from queer practices and perspectives' (2013, p29). I would add to this an investment in thinking through how queer ethics might emerge from environmental practices and perspectives. The queer anarchist collective Baedan define queer as 'the inherent decomposition which afflicts gender [...]; not this or that historically constituted subject category, but all the divergent bodily and spiritual expressions which escape their roles' (2014). Rather than a positive, universalising usage of queer, queer is a contingency. I hope the clumsiness of attempting to talk about how plants fuck spills over, somehow, into somewhere productive (or unproductive).

The number of scientifically validated genders for plants far exceeds those commonly understood and accepted for humans. At the most basic level, single flowers are either male, female, or bisexual (also referred to as 'perfect', hermaphroditic or androgynous). However, categories proliferate due to the fact that different plants grow different combinations of male, female, or bisexual flowers. This does not mean that all species have male, female, and bisexual flowers - it is possible for plants to only have either bisexual or female flowers, for example. This is complicated further by the fact that in some species, the flowers will change gender. It is important to clarify here that when we are talking about plant gender, we are potentially discussing at three different scales - the gender of an individual flower, the gender of an individual plant, and the morphology of the species as a whole, all of which determine each other. Although obviously not directly translatable, these multiple scales of plant gender provide a nuanced and useful framework for thinking through human gender, in that we are always referring to a complicated enmeshment of biological sex, individual identity, collective identity and socially enforced role, none of which can be considered independently of one another.⁴

³ See: *The Molecularisation of Sexuality* by Jordana Rosenburg for a fuller critique of the problems of infinitely abstracting 'queerness'.

⁴ Luciana Parisi's *Abstract Sex* thinks through these questions of scale and transferability, for example: 'The biophysical organisation of sex questions the accounts of a human-centred evolution that assimilates sex to sexual reproduction and sexual organs determining the progressive evolution of the body - from bacteria to humans - and sex - from unicellular to multicellular sex' (p22).

To avoid reducing the link between the flower body and the queer body to being purely to do with reproduction in a mechanical and biological sense, it is important to think through the specificity of the situation. For one thing, many species have reproductive practices entirely contrary to the ideals of human monogamous heterosexuality.⁵ For another, the conceptual reduction of reproduction to a process of sexual reproduction and the continuation of a species is profoundly anti-queer, both in a literal and abstract sense. There is clearly a specificity to flowers that has led to the association with queerness, beyond 'flowers are not straight and have multiple genders'. Whether or not explicitly acknowledged, research and discoveries into non-human lifeforms are always embroiled in human social questions, both in process in terms of methodology, and in their consequences and applications. In their essay *Involuntary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters*, Carla Hustak and Natasha Myers begin to explore this tension between botany and ideology. They write of Charles Darwin's flower experiments, and his downplaying of the evolutionary role of self-pollination (reproduction by an individual plant possessing male and female reproductive organs) in favour of cross-fertilisation (reproduction by two plants, via insects) which was seen to be necessary for the survival of 'higher organic beings'. Hustak and Myers write, 'Orchids, it turns out, were caught in a queer interspecies assemblage that disrupted normative Victorian sexualities and species boundaries' (2012, p82). Flowers must be kept at arms length to prevent them from contaminating human sexual norms, but the mapping of those norms onto the flowers becomes necessary to attempt to rationalise what is found when those flowers are not kept at arms length.⁶ The flower is constantly indexed onto human sexuality and yet remains impossible to entirely understand within or assimilate into a human heterosexual framework.

CAC Conrad is a queer poet who for several years has been working with what he refers to as 'soma(tic) rituals', ritualised bodily practices which he completes and then writes from his experiences of. One of these is called *Security Cameras and Flowers Dreaming the Elevation Allegiance (For Susie Timmons)*. CA describes his frustration at the prevalence of security cameras in his home city of Philadelphia ('FUCK YOU WATCHING US ALWAYS!!'). The ritual resistance he describes involves taking a basket of edible flowers to the scene ('I eat pansies, I LOVE pansies, they're delicious buttery purple lettuce!!'). He then looks directly into the camera and proceeds to

⁵ See: *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People* by Joan Roughgarden (2009) for wide-ranging accounts of gender and sexual diversity in non-human species.

⁶ This issue is explored by Eva Hayward with reference to marine life: 'With the aquarium, the unnerving sexual variation of marine life moved from ocean depths—which was a gothic scene for Victorians—into the inner sanctum of social order and bodily regulation, the aristocratic home. Efforts to know, classify, and conquer the oceanic, and otherwise capture nature for visual pleasure, resulted in a counterconquest of the home by monsters and sexual deviants (2012, p166)

place his tongue in the flower 'in and out, flicking, licking, suckling blossoms.' When confronted by a security guard he responds 'I'M A POLLINATOR, I'M A POLLINATOR!!' As soon as it is declared, it becomes obvious that of course he is, undeniably, a pollinator. Despite not being able to facilitate the actual reproduction of the plants, due to species constraints, the small act of resistance towards the security cameras becomes an act of potential pollination, a pollination of politics and ideas and poetry and joy, both a self-pollination and a cross-pollination.⁷ The security cameras that CA is resisting are a part of an ecosystem, and he uses his agency as a being within that ecosystem to make a somatic and semiotic intervention against a mode of biopolitical control.

In CA engaging in a sexualised public ritual with flowers, there is also an implied parody of straight anxieties around queer sexuality, such as the argument that legalising gay marriage is a slippery slope towards people being allowed to marry their dogs. Apart from the obvious association of queerness with animality and the non-human, these anxieties are often explicitly or implicitly predicated on the notion that all unproductive sexual practices are on some level unethical, prioritising pleasure over the continuation of the species. CA's pollinator intervention gains another dimension when understood in terms of certain species of orchids that have the ability to attract pollinators without a material prize (nectar), but purely on the basis of their imitation of insect sex pheromones, attracting insects on the basis of desire, rather than physical sustenance.

In *Animacies*, Mel Y. Chen discusses linguistic animacy hierarchies, the way in which language is used to assign different levels of agency to matter, both living and non-living. In English, firmly at the top is the white male subject, everything else placed on a scale somewhere between him and a rock, or other perceived as wholly inactive matter. The argument is that to be compared to anything lower down inherently operates as an insult, in that it implies loss of agency, which is then linked to intelligence, ability, value, and social standing. Chen asks us, 'If language normally and habitually distinguishes human and inhuman, live and dead, but then in certain circumstances wholly fails to do so, what might this tell us about the porosity of biopolitical logics themselves?' (Chen, 2012, p7). What are the implications when a being higher up the animacy hierarchy (a human) chooses to align themselves with a 'lower' being (for example an insect pollinator)? The act of solidarity both implies a rejection of the value system which places life forms on such a hierarchy, attempting to level the playing field, and recognising how in certain

⁷ This has echoes of Deleuze and Guattari's writing on the contagion: 'We oppose epidemic to filiation, contagion to heredity, peopling by contagion to sexual reproduction, sexual production. Bands, human or animal, proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields, and catastrophes. Like hybrids, which are themselves sterile, born of a sexual union that will not reproduce itself, but which begins over again every time, gaining that much ground' (1987, p241).

situations it can be desirable to disassociate from the expectations associated with being 'human'. The situating of 'homo sapiens' as something that can be disidentified with and opted out of, rather than a taxonomical fact, finds affinity with Giorgio Agamben's assertion that 'Homo sapiens, then, is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human' (2003, p26). In addition to active verbal identification with other non-human agents, *In The Greenhouse* by Veronica Forrest-Thomson highlights how simply the experience of embodied encounter with the non-human can render taxonomies feeling arbitrary and redundant:

The silent rhythm of pulsating pores
filling my lungs with filtered earth
is all I feel or know of alien shapes
that once were flowers.
I breathe their breath
until all definitions are dissolved,
and homo sapiens is nothing more to me.

Perhaps less aligned with Agamben's definition, these lines find more affinity with Karen Barad's position that "'Humans" are neither pure cause or pure effect but part of the world in its open-ended becoming' (2003, 821). *Acts of Youth* by the late queer poet John Wieners provides another instance of flower-consumption as symbolic of freedom from oppressive power structures.⁸ He writes:

The fear of travelling, of the future without hope
or buoy. I must get away from this place and see
that there is no fear without me: that it is within
unless it be some sudden act or calamity

to land me in the hospital, a total wreck, without
memory again; or worse still, behind bars. If
I could just get out of the country. Some place
where one can eat the lotus in peace.

Give me the strength
to bear it, to enter those places where the
great animals are caged. And we can live

⁸ The flower-eating theme is potentially non-coincidental, as CA has cited Wieners as an influence, and recently edited a collection of his work, *Supplication*, in which the above poem appears.

at peace by their side.

'Some place where one can eat the lotus in peace' is presented as the ultimate sanctuary from the fear and violence of his world, both inner and outer. Flower-eating operates as a literal form of, and metaphor for, spiritual survival precisely because of the low nutritional value of flowers, especially when compared to their high symbolic value. To eat a flower is to aesthetically nourish the body. Eating the lotus in peace is to embody a form of consumption not predicated on a violent conquest, but a gentle taking in of the other into the self, a pleasurable participation in an affective-aesthetic ecology. Wieners desire to live at peace by the side of the great animals in their cages demonstrates an identification with the feral and a siding with the non-human over the human (for who put the animals in cages?). But it is perhaps telling that even in the potentially limitless space of poetics, Wieners chooses to live with *caged* animals. Trans poet Verity Spott ends her piece *Against Trans* Manifestos* (2015) with the lines: 'Determined as it is by a start and a finish, a false double, something that contains at least five harmonic falsities on a liberal map of social reality. Perhaps this is why we have a fetish involving cages; everything impossible to communicate.' Read against this, Wieners collective desire ('we') to live with caged animals becomes a recognition of the contingency of pleasure, and of the description of pleasure as itself a form of caging, and how agency can be enacted whilst being trapped 'inside'.⁹ There is also the issue of temporality within cages, and to what extent temporality is defined by a sense of history and progress, necessarily implying movement and action. Hustak and Myers identify the stationary nature of plants as part of the reason they are placed near the bottom of 'hierarchies that identify outward motion and action as signs of agency' (80). This has resonance with the origins of pansy as an insult, as rooted in an notion of thoughtfulness and introspection as effeminate and inferior to active, assertive masculinity. In *Our Lady of The Flowers* Jean Genet describes the gender identity of the character Divine:

'Her femininity was not *only* a masquerade. But as for thinking woman completely, her organs hindered her. To think is to perform an act. In order to act, you have to discard frivolity and set your idea on a solid base. So she was aided by the idea of solidity, which she associated with the idea of virility, and it was in grammar that she found it near at hand. For if, to define a state of mind that she felt, Divine dared use the feminine, she was unable to do so in defining an action which she performed. And all the 'woman' judgments she made were, in reality, poetic conclusions.' (1988, p176)

Solidity and action are associated with the masculine, but this is complicated by the assertion that 'to think is to perform an act.' Divine dares to use feminine pronouns for her states of mind, but not in defining her actions. If thinking is an action, then 'state of mind' has to be referring to

⁹ For more on animal captivity, see Hayward (2012).

something other than thoughts. The “woman’ judgements’ she made, which are emphatically *not* thoughts, are ‘poetic conclusions’. The distinction between active masculine ‘thoughts’ and feminine ‘states of mind’ and ‘poetic conclusions’ is that in order to act, ‘you have to discard frivolity and set your idea on a solid base.’ Solidity and virility are found in grammar, and therefore poetic language is disqualified from the realm of ‘thinking’ due to its frivolity and instability. Its exclusion from thinking as a masculine exercise, outside of solidity and grammar and certainty, means that poetry is in a unique position to express possibilities and potentials outside of dominant thought.

In an essay entitled *The Queer Voice: Reparative Poetry Rituals & Glitter Perversions* CA Conrad describes the somatic rituals he performed to write poetry and attempt to heal himself from the trauma of the homophobic murder of his boyfriend, Earth. One of these rituals results in a dream, where CA finds himself in a garden with Earth, although they do not meet human face to human face. In the garden Earth communicates with CA through flowers who explain to him the difficulty of Earth’s time on earth, acting as prophets from the spirit world whilst remaining entirely grounded in earth and syntax. CA explains that the flowers did not speak with mouths, but ‘their centers mashed up and down as they told me [Earth] could not see me now because he was busy repairing.’ In German the phrase ‘Durch die Blume Gesprochen’, literally ‘spoken through a flower’, means to subtly hint at something without giving away all the details, a minor verbal obfuscation to soften blows or gently allude to an issue. In English, there is ‘flowery language’, with some similar implications and an added air of assumed affectation and pretension (remember the origins of ‘pansy’?). There is also the Latin phrase ‘sub rosa’, literally meaning ‘under the rose’ and used to indicate secrecy and confidentiality. Flowers are seen as untruthful, dishonest in their embodiment, as hiding something under their opulent exteriors. However, in CA’s prophet-flowers the exact opposite is the case, the flowers are messengers of the deepest, most vital truths.

In common parlance there is something in the overtly elaborate and ornate that becomes read as at best wasteful, and at worst deceitful. As a bridge between morphology and semiotics, Georges Bataille colludes with this perspective in *The Language of Flowers* when he writes, “Thus the interior of a rose does not at all correspond to its exterior beauty; if one tears off all of the corolla’s petals, all that remains is a rather sordid tuft.” (Bataille, 1985, p12) The flowers insides are seen as a betrayal of its exterior form, despite that exterior form existing partially for the purpose of attracting insects to the interior. Whilst admitting that some flowers (again, orchids) possess ‘elegant’ stamens, for Bataille this beauty is ‘satanic’, and ‘one is tempted to attribute to them the most troubling human perversions.’ (12) It feels redundant to say that flowers are sexualised, in the sense that they are literally reproductive organs. To be more specific, the sexualisation of

flowers is both a cause and consequence of their status as feminine. Bataille makes this misogyny explicit, going on to state that once flowers die, they do not age 'honestly' like leaves, but wither like 'old and overly made-up dowagers.' (12) Flowers are singled out for their aesthetic qualities, objectified for their external beauty, and reduced to their reproductive function, a feminised position. Simultaneously, they are seen as performing in excess of that role, of being too flamboyant and melodramatic for the task at hand, their beauty seen as a form of deception and trickery. In addition to the obvious analogy with women under patriarchy, this mistrust on the basis of perceived inauthenticity and frivolity also has resonance with a queer position.

To deal first with inauthenticity, I want to suggest that the treatment of artifice as falsification and dishonesty is a feature of straight culture, with little relevance to most queer people. Despite the limitations and dangers of this kind of essentialising, there are material issues at hand. For example, for trans people there is often the sense that an external presentation that could be perceived from the outside to be inauthentic is in fact the most honest expression of their inner selves, and many queer people must keep their desires or certain aspects of their lives internal, or at least restrict who has knowledge of them. To exist as queer in the world requires a certain amount of 'speaking through flowers', acknowledging the impossibility and possible undesirability of an entirely transparent existence. Michel Foucault in *A History of Sexuality* describes the transition from sodomy as a practice into the homosexual as a subject position, 'a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology [...] [sexuality] written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away' (1978, p43). The assumed knowability of the queer body through its naming as such, and that naming giving rise to the presumption of a specific sexual morphology, provides some context for the ambivalent relationship of many queer people to visibility and representation. Speaking through flowers could be a mode of engagement simultaneously flaunting and obscuring one's 'indiscreet anatomy', operating as a form of resistance to and avoidance of biopolitical control, a tactic of conscious illegibility and subterfuge.

A concept closely related to inauthenticity is unnaturalness, both related to the idea that there is a true form that is being betrayed. When Bataille talks of being tempted to attribute to flowers 'the most troubling human perversions' it becomes clear that despite falling under the rubric of what is commonly referred to as 'nature', the sexuality of flowers is only tenuously perceived as natural. Timothy Morton describes nature as a 'transcendental term in a material mask', and the end of a potentially infinite metonymic list: 'fish, grass, mountain air, chimpanzees, love, soda water, freedom of choice, heterosexuality, free markets...Nature' (2009, p14). When we accept that there is no actual criteria for naturalness, apart from vague essentialist subjective perception,

there is the awkward reality that if something is described as unnatural then it is unnatural, inasmuch as something becomes natural through the same process. As flowers are often read as suspiciously unnatural, they are in some sense are. The unnaturalness of flowers has to do with excess, which is to say wastefulness, which is to say *floweriness*. To be natural is to fit into a straight human logic of heterosexual reproduction, whether through direct participation or resemblance to the model, to refuse this demand is to be against nature. It is here that both queers and flowers fall through the cracks.

Historically, a large element of what we now refer to as 'homophobia' was religiously grounded in the Christian belief that any sexual practices not entirely related procreation were a sin, as they were wasteful of semen. There is an association therefore between queerness and wastefulness, as well as refusal of sexual reproduction, leading to a queer understanding of the necessity of what has been deemed trivial and non-essential, a celebration of earthly pleasures, and a respect for the temporary and fleeting. Nicole Seymour suggests there is something 'admirable' and 'thrillingly ironic' in queer environmentalism, 'that those with a foreclosed relationship to "the future" in heteronormative terms would be deeply concerned about the future in ecological terms' (2012, p63). In *In A Queer Time & Place* Jack Halberstam makes the argument for queer time as operating within a different logic from straight time, writing that 'queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death' (2005, p2). Halberstam ties this specifically to the AIDS crisis, making links with Lee Edelman's argument for queer anti-futurity (2004). Despite how it is sometimes characterised, this is not a case of 'positive' versus 'negative' models of queerness, because in theorising anti-futurity as a feature of queerness Edelman betrays a desire for some sense of 'queer' as a meaningful, and ultimately positive (by some definition), cohesion. Neel Ahuja argues 'we might thus benefit from thinking more broadly about reproduction than Edelman does, recognizing that bodies and atmospheres reproduce through complex forms of socio-ecological entanglement.' Without wanting to reinforce 'repro-centric' discourse, I would argue in parallel that what is taking place in queer culture is not a refusal of reproduction, but a cultural, which is to say *unnatural*, reproduction based on something other than the straight nuclear family unit.¹⁰

In a soma(tic) ritual entitled *Suspension Fluid Magnificence (For Samuel R. Delaney & Stephen Boyer)* CA describes approaching men on the street and requesting that they rate their semen on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being 'thin and creamy' and 5 being 'cottage cheese.' He describes this as an

¹⁰ 'Repro-centricism', i.e. the centring of reproduction as the default mode in all discussions of sexual difference, is a term borrowed from Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson in their introduction to *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (2010), p11.

attempt to think through 'how wilderness is memorised in the body', looking for men to 'step up to the quiet, feral interior.' Dealing explicitly with the materiality of biological reproduction, CA does not dismiss the power or significance of semen but rather thinks through how it retains this power and significance as an aesthetic, semiotic, and social material. He writes 'Semen is fascinating [...] The orgasm the flash of light reconnecting to the original proliferation of cells and the construction of sensate flesh, which is a very marvellous thing, being here, all of us.' In what could have easily been a glorification of straight reproduction CA manages to create an inclusive networked cosmology, a glorification of pleasure and the animistic power of sensate flesh, the wonder of being here, all of us, but no dads. #nodads was a meme originating in 2012 from ultra-left circles on Twitter. Being a meme, its meaning was variable and plural, however the central theme was rejection of the father figure in his oppressive patriarchal role, but equally in more paternalistic caring capacities. In his analysis of the meme Aaron Bady describes it as 'a rejection of the category [of dad] itself—and of the manner in which it comes to seem a higher order category than many others—it doesn't necessarily have all that much to do with actual dads, but only by the sociological matrix that makes biology into destiny' (2012). This feels like a useful model of thinking through biological reproduction, which is to say that none of this is a rejection of the continuation of the human species but rather a thinking through of how reproduction operates when enmeshed with a heterosexual culture which formulates it as the only form of reproduction and life worth celebrating. In this context CA's cum poetry gestures towards a reconciliation whereby bodily functions can be celebrated as feral and joyous outside of a normative matrix.

To reiterate, this is not to suggest that queer sex is inherently biologically unproductive, but a reminder that there is a historical context in which queer sex has been framed as wasteful due to its association with unproductive pleasure. Additionally, there is the factor that biological reproduction is not an organising principal of queer culture, as opposed to straight culture where 'community is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship; a historical relation to futurity is restricted to generational narrative and reproduction' (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p554). If a function of the straight nuclear family is to reproduce the straight nuclear family, queer family cannot rely on this means of reproducing itself, queers cannot take for granted the immortality of reproduction, but this leads to more creative forms of intimacy, kinship, survival and 'immortality'. Within this framework, it is precisely what is deemed nonessential that is the means of survival: art, poetry, music, fashion, and what Berlant and Warner refer to as 'parasitic and fugitive elaboration through gossip, dance clubs, softball leagues, and the phone-sex ads' (p561). In parallel, in flowers it is the colours and scents and delicate forms that are commonly read by human eyes as elaborate and ostentatious that are the bread and butter of survival. Hustak and Myers describe Darwin's delight in orchids as he saw them as 'a

demonstration that even beautiful forms had utilitarian, adaptive value.' (75) Although this could be read as an insinuation that forms only have worth if they have utilitarian value, it can also be an understanding that the form and function are inseparable, and the beauty is its own functionality. In a poem referencing the homophobic Black Mountain poet Ed Dorn, CA Conrad writes:

i need a soda to
wash this glitter down
it's dark in the stomach
next morning
bathroom light catches
glint of turd covered
in glitter
disco log in the bowl
fecal poetry ranges from
shocking to absurd
this is neither
this is pragmatic
it's my life as i need to live it
Ed Dorn i would kill myself if
i were you but i'm not and
get to live this spectacular
life of sparkling hygiene

CA refuses to frame his glitter consumption as anything other than a practical everyday ritual needed for survival, alongside eating or sleeping, he refuses to draw any distinction between physical, emotional and spiritual survivals. The reality that queer survival is inherently predicated on something other than the physical continuation of the species manifests in a personal sense as survival being about more than the day to day physical maintenance of a body, or more accurately, redefining what constitutes the day to day physical maintenance of a body. This is not to say that it is an abstract and disembodied survival, as what could be more embodied than eating and shitting out glitter? But rather that it treats the body as a vessel for a modest, everyday spiritual joy, no matter how temporary. Pleasure for pleasure and survival's sake, and always the twain shall meet.

Another poem in the series includes the lines 'Ed Dorn thinks faggots should drink directly from the sewer / i want to dress special for this.' There is a provocative knowing that dressing special is not unrelated to why Dorn thinks faggots should drink directly from the sewer, and that dressing

special for this punishment will add to his annoyance. In Dorn's initial comments there is also the implication of queers as wasteful, as undeserving of the privilege of clean tap water; If the ultimate goal is reproduction, queers are a waste of resources. The poem goes on to imagine Dorn asking CA, 'what camouflage will you wear to hide in the gingerbread house?' and CA replying 'none, I want the witch to find me EAT ME!' This acts as a subversion of survival narratives and demonstrates a lack of belief in the inherent goodness of physical self-preservation and security at all costs. This is not say that physical survival is not important but rather that sometimes it is important for your spiritual survival to allow yourself to be eaten by a witch rather than accept a life of homophobe-endorsed camouflage in the gingerbread house. What are we potentially missing out on when we hide in camouflage in the gingerbread house? Is being eaten by the witch the worst that could happen? In *Darwin's Plots* Gillian Beer describes the moment in which the intersection of evolutionary theory and psychological theory became important as it began to ask 'what *emotions* and what reflex actions help the individual and race to survive' (2009, p201). This instrumentalisation of affect seems to shut down the possibility of an 'affective ecology' (Hustak and Myers) based on anything other than reproduction.

When asked in interview about his reasons for becoming a writer John Wieners answers, 'Immortality, in the sense of living after one's own time has run out' (1993). Again, there is the sense of 'life' as existing beyond an individual's lifespan, attached to an individual but not necessarily to their physical form or genetics.

Dancing dandelions
and buttercups in the grass
remind me of other summer
flowers, simple blossoms

roses and tiger lilies by the wall
milk pod, sumac branches
lilacs across the road, daisies, blueberries
snaps, cut violets

three years ago still grow in my mind
as peonies or planted geraniums, bachelor buttons
in downy fields filled with clover
lover, come again and again up fern

path upheld as memory's perennial

against stern hard-faced officers of imprisonment
and cold regulation more painful than lover's arms
or flowers charming but not more lasting

No, the wild tulip shall outlast the prison wall
no matter what grows within.

In Wiener's 1969 poem *Private Estate*, reproduced in its entirety above, a flowing list of flowers ebbs seamlessly into a lover, before the scene is abruptly cut by 'stern hard-faced officers of imprisonment and cold regulation'. The ambiguous line break after clover leaves the possibility for the 'clover lover' as the lover made of clover, or the lover of clover. Years are things that continue to develop and change after their official endings, growing towards the sun, if only in the mind. The cyclical, nonlinear queer time of lover's arms or flowers is sectioned off by the harsh linear institutional time of the prison or mental hospital. Despite this, these seemingly concrete and immutable structures are presented as ultimately more precarious and fleeting, being outlasted by the wild tulip. In an essay on feminist applications of Darwin, Elizabeth Grosz describes the sense in his work 'in which the domination of species or individuals is inherently precarious and necessarily historically limited' (2008, 42). The fragility of power structures and a non-deterministic time is drawn out as a central point where social struggles and biology could find affinity. The tulip is a perennial plant, meaning simply a plant that lives longer than two years, in opposition to biannual and annual plants, which must be replanted more frequently. The taxonomical listing of the poem suggests however that it is not a single tulip that will outlast the prison, but rather wild tulips as a whole, or perhaps even just the idea of the wild tulip. When Wiener speaks of 'memory's perennial' it invites the possibility of the plants having not physically survived at all, yet continuing to grow and thrive in his mind.

This mirrors his statement of desire for immortality through writing. The lines 'lover, come again and again up fern / path upheld as memory's perennial' operate on this ambiguous perennial time, the flirtatious talk of lovers mixing with the seasonal dying back and reblooming of the plants, taking place as a specific memory but also the substance of memory itself. In *The Imagination through Time*, Wiener speaks of the hour and minute as 'false divisions of the moon'. The poem ends:

the cautious breath of a friend,
presumably, also up,

in the dark of his house,
who alike hears your thoughts,

wondering; that is a true meeting in eternity.

Not this petty worry

about days, months, proximities
to warmth. There are always fires

on earth, that burn immortally.

For Wieners, human intimacy is a form of immortality, only the ephemeral can come close to touching the eternal. The constant anxiety of looking for comfort and stability ('proximities to warmth') is quelled by the knowledge there are always fires burning immortally, somewhere on earth. In another poem about his murdered lover, *I Loved Earth Years Ago* CA explains, 'He named himself Earth when planet extinction was clearest.' The naming decision itself and CA's recalling of it operate simultaneously as morbid foreshadowing and a hymn to survival and resilience. There is the triple, triangulated meaning of Earth to refer to CA's lover, the planet Earth, and earth itself, the mud and soil of the world. There is the sense that CA used to love Earth, but there was some rupture that necessitates the use of the past tense, coexisting with the feeling that he has been loving Earth for a long, long time. The statement that he loved Earth years ago does not mean he does not love him now, but there is an acceptance of change. The temporality of the title can be read as an example of Wiener's 'perennial time', neither endless reproduction nor something constricted to a single discrete moment, but something seasonal, ebbing and flowing, perhaps not itself forever, but something, somewhere. In Julia Kristeva's essay *Women's Time*, she suggests that despite being seemingly opposed, eternal and cyclical time, both associated with women, might be closer than they first appear as they both operate outside of linear time (1981). Not wanting to replicate the essentialism of Kristeva's thought, and in reference to Halberstam (2005), I would argue that this exclusion from (or rejection of) linearity (or *straight* time) is present not only in women but all who fall outside of the timeframes of normative heterosexuality and gender.¹¹ In CA's title there is the evocation of a measurement of time outside of ruling time, a different temporal space: 'Earth Years'. Earth Years act as a counter to heteronormative timescales, of the years and milestones of straight reproduction, or possibly as a calendar more in

¹¹ For perspectives on what 'gay men's time' might look like, see: Edelman (2004) and Dean (2011).

tune with the seasons, a rejection of the arbitrary timekeeping divorced from them and enforced as a tool of (re)productivity.

In *Permission Please To Be a Stone but You Are A Clock We Say* CA writes 'no wonder clocks aspire to granite', becoming, '*don't allude to my spurt / don't look at my thighs / you pernicious clocks / make the worst stones*'. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen makes the argument that despite being seen as stable and fixed 'stone is fluid when viewed within its proper duration' (2015). Clocks can only aspire to the timekeeping abilities of stone, their constant sense of movement and progress overshadowed by the eternal. The honest breaking down of stone into sand usurps the arbitrary time of the constantly flipped hourglass. In Wieners' words: 'a true meeting in eternity. / Not this petty worry about days, months, proximities to warmth.' Tim Dean proposes that 'queer theorists of spectrality embrace asynchronous temporalities because they regard being haunted as an opportunity to produce a different future, one that the past did not generate but still might' (2011, p92). This text began with the thoughtful pansy both as a symbol of remembrance and of queer effeminacy, occupying a place of perceived fragility and permanence, its individual lifespan coming up against its collective, symbolic lifespan. Thinking through what I've termed queer reproduction, I want to suggest this intersection as politically vital from an ecological perspective for imagining what abundance and joy could mean outside of cycles of physical re/production and consumption. Eternity is not present in static monoliths but in variable, shifting networks of pleasure and affect. In speaking through flowers, which is to say *poetry*, the consequences of communication are non-linear, cross-pollinated and dispersed, the eternal and cyclical affectively and effectively meeting to produce models of life which could be described as *pragmatically opulent*. Poetry becomes the language of survival in excess and weaponised floweriness, everything that is 'too much' pushing back against false scarcity and repressive taxonomies of gender and sexuality, creating breathing space for a politics of cornucopia, possibility and, propagation outside the already-existing. Fucking pansies speaking through flowers.

'Do not think of the future; there is none.'

- John Wieners, 6th January 1934 – 1st March 2002

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Nothing to Tell

By Jakobína Sigurðardóttir

Translated by Evelyn Scherabon Firchow

They sit across from each other at the kitchen table with coffee cups steaming. Sigridur from Saebol doesn't like her coffee lukewarm.

Her visitor certainly is in no hurry. She has been here before, often, and has had coffee in this kitchen; but now it seems to her as if she had never seen it. From the corner of her eyes she examines unobtrusively the walls recently painted, the snow-white curtains, the small refrigerator standing in the corner, the electric mixer on the kitchen counter, the spotless stove. The four kitchen stools are neatly painted and clean. Everything in the little kitchen is neat and well kept. And Sigridur seems part of the small kitchen. She is an elderly woman, short and getting a little plump. Her once dark hair is now almost completely silvery gray, and her skin is remarkably fair. There is an expression of motherly calm on her face, and a twinkle of teasing mischief in the corner of her eyes every now and then.

"There's no reason to worry about our fishermen today," she comments in a friendly way. "It's been really good weather for quite a few days."

"Yes, may God grant that it's a good sign," her visitor answers absentmindedly.

"Why shouldn't it be a good sign?" The lady of the house re-

plies smilingly. "Or are you one of those people who always expect the worst—especially when everything is going well?"

Her visitor laughs. "Well, no, not really. We're just so used to these storms here in the bay that one's reluctant to believe that this nice weather is going to last long. By the way, I've got something to discuss with you, my dear Sigridur."

"Well, it can't be so serious that you'll have a hard time coming out with it," says the lady of the house. "My dear, *do* try to taste some of these, I just don't happen to have anything special to eat with the coffee today. I was going to make some doughnuts but it got so late that I had to give up the idea. So I haven't got anything but this poor stuff from the bakery."

"Well, I always do enjoy your doughnuts, my dear Sigridur, but this is good enough . . . Yes, your doughnuts, you make such wonderful doughnuts, I've often thought of getting the recipe from you!"

"Oh, well, it's not exactly a recipe," Sigridur answers as if she doesn't want to hear any more of this praise.

"I don't believe it," her visitor replies. "I've tasted your doughnuts so often, and they're always especially good, the best doughnuts I've tasted anywhere. And my dear Jon says the same!"

"Well, I don't think that *he* has ever tasted my doughnuts, my dear Elin, so I think you must be exaggerating," the lady of the house says with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. "At least I can't remember that he has."

Her visitor vigorously denies this. "Do you think that I'm making it up about Jon? He's often said that I should get the recipe for your doughnuts. And I would have done it a long time ago if I hadn't been a little bit jealous that he liked your doughnuts so much."

Both women laugh. "Well, that's something to be jealous about," the lady of the house says amused.

"You ought to know the best way to a man's heart!" her visitor quips with a mischievous twinkle coming into her eyes as well. Otherwise she's quite different from the lady of the house: younger, slim, well groomed and made up, with a fashionable haircut. Sigridur from Saebol on the other hand wears her thin braids up in an old-fashioned bun at the back of her head.

"Was this what you wanted to discuss with me? To get my recipe that isn't a recipe? Because to tell you the truth, my dear Elin, I've never weighed the ingredients for my doughnuts, I

just make them by feel. In the old days we didn't have scales and doughnuts were a holiday treat at home. That's true too of those marvelous pancakes."

Her visitor becomes serious again. "Yes, of course, you certainly didn't bake every day in those days," she says pensively. "What was it again, the name of the place where you used to live?"

"Saebol," the lady of the house answers quietly as when one mentions the name of a dead loved one. And she offers her visitor more coffee.

"Was it a big farm?"

"Big? Well, I don't think it would be called big nowadays. But life was so difficult there and it was so far away from anywhere else. That made all the difference."

"Yes, you just couldn't make a go of it there. It's completely abandoned now, isn't it? And for that matter that whole community where you used to live before you came here?"

"Oh, yes," the lady of the house replies slowly. "It's all abandoned." And after a moment's silence, "the children didn't want to stay—and so we didn't have any other choice."

"Yes, but wasn't it a miserable life?" asks her visitor and looks almost greedily at this woman whom she has known for so long. Now, all of a sudden, she has turned into a stranger, no longer part of this comfortable and well-kept kitchen, but someone else.

"No, it wasn't worth living there," Sigridur answers offhandedly, talking into her coffee cup. And she sees it in her mind's eye: a man in a boat, the surf at the landing, hands swollen from the cold, children poorly dressed, not much to eat, and that little eked out with hot tears during a hard winter.

"No, it wasn't worth living there," she repeats, looking at her visitor.

"By the way, it was about your old farming community that I wanted to talk to you about," the visitor says self-importantly. For a moment the face of the lady of the house darkens, then a mischievous glint comes into her eyes: "Well, that's something! You're not going to write about us poor devils who gave up there? One couple in a grand total of eighteen?"

Her visitor laughs "I—write about you? No, that would be the last thing I'd think of! No, it was about an evening coffee party our club is going to have. Inga Hreinsdottir had promised to tell us about her trip to Switzerland and Italy last year and—would you believe it?—she's taking another trip next Wednesday... that

is, she and her husband are. Those two sure spend a lot of money on themselves! And I'd like to know where they get all that money from!"

"Well, I think it's good to know that someone is doing well. It seems to me they're a very nice couple," the lady of the house counters, taking the side of the globetrotters.

Her visitor is a little startled: "Do you know them?"

"No, I only say hello to them, that's all. They seem so nice, so happy and friendly, and so straightforward. And I like to see them together so much, they're just the way I think people should be, good-natured with everybody."

Her visitor is relieved. "Well, I haven't noticed anything special about them. And nobody's heard of her getting sick to her stomach if any man other than her Lalli^{*} looks at her. But—as I said, she's left us in the lurch so it occurred to us on the entertainment committee to ask you to help."

The lady of the house stares speechlessly at her visitor. "Ask me for help? What can I do?"

"Well, since you're from one of those completely abandoned places and since we've all been led to believe that that was a really special experience and . . . well, I don't know how to say it . . . that it was somehow so remarkable that people were able to live there at all—and you seemed just like ordinary folk after you got here, well, I guess I can't express myself very clearly . . . There's simply this general opinion that people living in those places can't be exactly like ordinary people."

"People everywhere are alike, my dear Elin, except perhaps in the way they dress and talk. People back home were neither better nor worse than anybody else, but the struggle for existence was tough for most of them in those years both there and in a lot of other places. No, I don't think that I have anything to tell—no more than anybody else. Everybody had the same hard struggle."

No more than anybody else, is what she thinks as she looks into her coffee cup. Most of us have a grave there which nobody looks after anymore. And most of us have a numb spot in our heart where something snapped—there's no place where you can talk about that.

"Yes, of course, in those years life was really pretty hard," the visitor admits. "But even so it must have been rather special in

^{*} Familiar form for Larus.

such a remote place—and especially under those mountains, I once saw the landscape there from aboard ship, and, ugh, those mountains were just awful!”

“Those were my mountains,” Sigridur replies slowly, talking into her cup; then she looks out the window and smiles. “But now these mountains are also mine. My relatives are all here, those who are living, and ‘Home is where your heart is!’ No, my dear Elin, I’ve nothing to tell.”

“Oh, don’t be so bashful,” her visitor chides. “Something must have happened there that would be fun to listen to. People have many experiences in places like that which are incomprehensible to us, especially to us younger people. And all those weird old men and women about whom we’ve so often heard stories...”

“Yes, I believe that a story must have been written about every strange old man and woman in Iceland,” the lady of the house interrupts, “and if someone else hasn’t written it then they’ve done it themselves. So I don’t have much to add to that. At least stories were written about all of those at home who we thought were a little strange, and those stories make them out to be much stranger than they really were. But then people want stories with a real flavor. Even so, they were all human beings—every single one of them. And perhaps we are all a little strange in each other’s eyes.” And with a rather ambiguous smile from the corners of her eyes, she adds, “At least they found us to be a little strange in the market town when we went there in the old days.”

The visitor rises a little from her seat: “Yes, I also think that people must be a little different in those places. Well, I don’t mean everybody, I’ve never found you and your husband different, but, for example, Lauga whom I have seen here with you sometimes. Or like what’s his name—the old man who lives down there on Tun Street? I once saw him here at your house... isn’t he from your area?”

“Marino?” The face of the lady of the house is filled with good-natured mischief. “Yes, I should think so, we’re brother and sister.”

Disturbed and embarrassed her visitor looks for a moment into the face of the lady of the house, but when she doesn’t notice any feeling of insult there but only honest amusement in her eyes without any malice she regains her composure and says, “My goodness—that would never have occurred to me! You must be so much younger, and you’re not at all alike. I’ve always found him to be so—so very different from you and your husband!”

"He's five years older than I am, but at home people thought that we resembled each other. Because our struggles were the same."

"Yes, that's it, you must have done many things that would be good for us to hear about—I really mean it! That hard life in a place like that—to struggle with a large number of kids—it must have been, well, just magnificent! Wasn't the poverty terrible? Well, I don't mean especially for you, but for people in general?"

"Sometimes there wasn't much to eat," Sigridur replies after a moment's silence. "But people accepted that. The thought of charity often reduced our hunger considerably, when there was little food around to be divided."

And as if talking to herself: "This was true for the adults, not for the children, of course; nothing can still their hunger but something to eat. But we never starved, we always had some animals. We were just always trying to sell much more in fall than we could possibly do without over the winter. So we didn't always have much at the end of winter. It's miserable to look at hungry children and have nothing to put in their mouths—and it doesn't matter whether they're your own or somebody else's."

Elin leans forward to look closer into Sigridur's face. "Really, was it so bad that most people had trouble finding enough food for their children and themselves?"

"Well, no, it wasn't quite as bad as that. But it was often difficult in late winter and at those times when one couldn't go to sea. And it was also bad in late summer for those who had to look after their animals on the farm. But of course one went to sea whenever possible and there was always fish to catch."

"But then the winters must have been awfully hard?"

"Sometimes," the lady of the house admits rather reluctantly, seeing in her mind's eye the white blanket of hard-frozen snow, crunching under one's shoes and glittering in the moonlight, as if one were walking on a dance floor spread with stars—just like in a fairy tale. And she remembers the endless expanse of the sea, smooth, dark blue, embracing the long shadows from the high hills and mountains. The lapping of the gentle waves sounds soothing. Everything is white, blue, clean.

"Didn't people get lost and die out there?" asked the visitor.

"Die?" Sigridur repeats as if she doesn't understand the word, but then she catches herself and focuses her attention again. "No, that didn't happen often, and not while I was there. No, the

sea was what we thought dangerous and the cliffs for those who collected the eggs, but otherwise we had no more accidents than happened anywhere else. But what can I say about all this? The sea was and always has been our road and our provider, although the land also supplied us with food. No, the sea is no worse there than here; it wants its sacrifices now and then no matter where you are, and then again it also gives its share in return."

"See, I knew that you'd have a lot to tell!" says the visitor triumphantly. "And you'll do it for me, won't you? It's my responsibility to arrange the program! You've got to do it! People enjoy hearing stories like this so much; it's so patriotic and somehow so educational to be informed about these things, once in a while at least. You can tell us about the poverty and how people lived, what they did for fun, what they thought about various matters, and then it would be a nice idea to hear a real-life tale of heroism, because such things always happen in those places. And then of course also some heart-warming story, for people enjoy that so much especially if it's sad and beautiful! I mean of course not those stories about poverty that the communists are always making up—all about lice and slovenliness and cruelty and all kinds of dirt which never existed. Because people can be clean and kind even though they're poor."

"Oh yes, they're just like the others who think that exaggerations are going to produce more impressive results! About the lice, though, I don't know that anyone is exaggerating about that—there were a lot of them everywhere. You must have read those books—I don't read much myself—but I've always been told that there are stories about poor people being good despite the lice. But it can be difficult to keep everything clean—including the heart—when there is nothing to do it with. And it's nonsense to say that all those who did well were evil human beings, they weren't, no more than now. Besides, that's very unlikely in the sparsely populated areas of the country. No, poverty made some men evil just like being rich does; it made men's hearts freeze. And first those who had something left, so they can't have thought they were leaving much behind. We who had least of all struggled the longest, therefore we must have had more to lose. No, my dear Elin, we shouldn't judge people, because we're far too short-sighted. But for me to get up there in front of the club—that's out of the question! Perhaps you can get some man to do it, they've got so much to tell—and do it so much better than we do. Besides,

it was they who endured the hardships; we waited and watched—that's a woman's lot—even though we feel that it can be an ordeal sometimes."

"You're not really going to refuse to do it for me?" her visitor asks both surprised and insulted at the same time.

The lady of the house looks past her out into the transparent twilight of the spring creeping in among the newly lit street lamps as if in search of shelter from the brightness. It is the quietness of the evening interwoven with the subdued traffic sounds, rather than the conversation with her visitor that touches this secret place in her memory like a magic wand. And surprisingly something breaks open with sudden pain. Through her mind pass memories like a fleeting and transparent veil: happy spring mornings, strange summer dreams in a remote place, the insecurity of the autumn with an ever-diminishing day, the hard, white reality of winter: Sacbol! The living room in the afternoon, all the possessions of the family having been moved aboard the mail boat to be once again transferred to another boat in the market town on the way south. She is standing there in the empty living room, an elderly woman, mother of nine children, and everything which once was has gone. And yet, somehow, it is all still here: the quiet suppressed sorrow of unhappy days, the happiness of sunny days, the joyous laughter of the children, their hopes and hardships, their fun and tears, and her own expectations when she first walked across this floor as a young girl. Her own dreams of the future as well as the young man's—now growing old—those ties have already been severed which used to connect her firmly with the habit of walking in this living room, which is so dirty now after this last upheaval. She can hear him call from the farmyard in front of the house and pretends that she is only checking to see if anything has been left behind. But nothing has been left behind. Nothing except rather vague and yet clear dreams about all those things they had once planned to do. Then all of a sudden something snaps inside of her—and everything is finished!

"Shall I really believe you?" asks her visitor again.

"Yes, my dear Elin, I can't do it for you, although I would be glad to. I have nothing to tell about back home at your club; I don't have the talent for telling stories, and I haven't anything to say. You'd be better off to talk to my brother Marino—he's occasionally written poems to relieve his mind—and I think it's rather good what he writes, some of it at least. Sometimes he's been able

to tell in a poem what others wanted to say in plain language but couldn't find the words to express."

The visitor jumps enthusiastically to her feet: "Oh no, is he a poet, your brother?" she cries and has already forgotten the insulting refusal.

"No, not a poet, I don't believe he thinks of himself as one; no, definitely not. He doesn't write poems about anything important, just occasional poems for us when we have troubles or when someone gets married or has a big birthday, or about our home as it used to be and as we remember it—because we understand his language. When we're all dead no one will write poems about it anymore, so it's just for us while we're alive. But probably this doesn't interest you much . . ."

"That's of course the reason why I've always thought that he's so strange," says the visitor proudly, and it seems that she hasn't heard Sigridur's last remarks. "Poets are never like ordinary people! Do you think he'll do it for me?"

The lady of the house thinks it over for a while. "It's quite different telling it in a poem," she answers. "But if you want me to, I'll mention it to him."

"No thanks," her visitor replies while buttoning up her coat. "That won't be necessary; it'll be fun for me to speak to him myself. Just think, you've a brother who's a poet and you've never told me about him! It's amazing, if you ask me, how you put yourself above others. I think it must be pure snobbery."

"Oh no, my dear Elin, it's not snobbery, it's just so common that men can write poems, as common as the fact that many people don't possess the gift of telling a story." And after a moment's silence: "And I really have nothing to tell."

The door opens and a young girl looks into the kitchen. She's tall and slim, her face friendly, with dark hair and very light skin. She gives the two women a radiant smile: "We're going out for awhile, Mom, the weather's so nice."

Her mother's face reflects her smile. "Well, darling, do as you like. Don't catch cold if it gets cooler in the evening."

The girl smiles again. "All right, mother! Are you going, Elin? Do you want to walk along with us?"

The visitor looks without thinking through the door over the shoulders of the girl at the young man who is waiting outside in the hallway. "I don't think you really need me!" she answers jokingly.

"Not if you're going to walk with us to the end of the world," the girl quips and laughs. "But if you're going home, we're going the same way—and we don't really scare people, do we?" She turns to her boyfriend and he smiles agreeably. They are both very young and their youthfulness brightens the dusky hallway. The visitor isn't going home but she's going in the same direction.

After they've gone out of the room, the lady of the house stands alone at the window in the living room and watches them leaving the house. She looks after her youngest daughter and her boyfriend and gives them her blessings as she has done so many times before: that they will have the strength to overcome the difficulties of life, whatever happens.

When they are out of sight, she walks back and forth in the living room and feels somewhat restless. Not because of them, God is after all everywhere, and He will find a way for them, as He does for her and those who are dead. And both of them are good and lovely young people. No—it's because of Saebol. For something would surely snap inside her a second time if she had to go through all of it again. For what is a past without a future? And what are parents without children? But it's only what could have been... As a matter of fact she's leading a good life here—and she's living here now.

But to imagine in the end being buried in a soil not one's own! She looks through the window and her face is dark. But all at once it brightens up. Down the path there comes an elderly man, walking slowly and wearily but looking as if there had been a time when he moved about very quickly. She sighs with relief.

"He must have worked quite a lot of overtime," she mumbles to herself. "He'll need some rest. I should be heating up the coffee, what am I thinking about?" She hurries into the kitchen. As if it made a difference where they slept their last night, as long as they were together!

Although it would have been best to have had their last sleep at Saebol.